

The benefits of hosting international events

Julie Sheather



Australian associations are discovering they have much to gain from hosting international events, using them as the ideal platform to attract new members, share ideas, network with people around the globe and to plan for the future.

The core aims of all professional associations or industry bodies are to keep members informed on new developments, to raise the profile of the profession or industry and to progress the profession or industry.

Increasingly, this is occurring on the global stage. State-based associations are pooling their resources together to host national events. Meanwhile, national associations are increasingly looking to collaborate with their colleagues throughout Asia, and successful efforts by the leaders of Australian associations to host the world's major events in their fields are delivering enormous benefits to their members.

In 1999, when Professors Stephen Lincoln and Kevin Wainwright began discussing the possibility of bringing the International Conference on Coordination Chemistry to Adelaide, they saw it as an opportunity to bring the world's leading coordination chemists to Australia for "knowledge sharing, collaboration and healthy debate".

Working with the Adelaide Convention Centre and Adelaide Convention Bureau to put together a compelling bid, they hosted the event in 2010, attracting over 400 delegates from 40 different countries to hear from over 20 leading scientists from Australia and around the world.

Similarly, radiographers and radiation therapists from around Australia had an opportunity to share knowledge with their international colleagues when the Australian Institute of Radiography (AIR) hosted the International Society of Radiographers and Radiological Technologists (ISRRT) 16th World Congress on the Gold Coast in September last year.

With 1,165 delegates attending from 54 countries, Australian ISRRT Councillor Associate Professor Pamela Rowntree said the delegates represented more than 80 member societies consisting of more than 350,000 technologists.

"The Congress raised the profile of Australian research and it helped communicate the growing connection between medical imaging and radiotherapy," she said.

"As a result of the World Congress, several of the Australian presenters have been invited to take their presentations overseas."

The rewards of holding conferences in Australia are by no means confined to the duration of the event. Professor Peter Hannaford of Swinburne University in Melbourne noted that "following the 22nd International Conference on Atomic Physics in Cairns last year, we continued to be flooded by international visitors to laboratories around Australia, which gave Australian research wonderful exposure around the world".

The benefits can also lead to increased membership. Following the highly successful 7th International Melanoma Conference at Sydney in November, 2010, co-host Professor Nick Hayward said, "The conference reinvigorated interest. It was great for the societies represented, like the Society of Melanoma Research, Melanoma Pathology Working Group, and Melanoma and Skin Cancer Centres. It was a good opportunity to raise the profile of these societies and that has attracted more members into them."

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Successfully bidding for and winning the rights to host international events involves a close collaboration between the host association, industry leaders and experts, and the convention bureaus and centres in the destinations where the events will be held.

Now, in addition to the support traditionally offered by individual convention bureaux and centres, a unique collaboration between the Australian Government through Tourism Australia, and Australia's leading convention bureaux and centres, is developing new ways to help local associations host international events. This initiative offers increased international marketing and communications campaigns, delegate boosting activities designed to increase attendance, and a united whole-of-country support system for associations bidding for international events.

The opportunity for associations – and their members – to participate on the world stage has never been better.

*Julie Sheather is Project Manager of the Associations Project.
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