



## *Miles Clarke Business Events Communication Award 2010*

### **WINNING ARTICLE**

#### **Conferences Driving Innovation, Knowledge and Investment**

The greatest opportunity and challenge facing the international meetings industry today is the ability to promote conferences to governments and industries as an avenue for the facilitation of innovation and sharing of knowledge, allowing collaboration on a global scale.

It was highlighted during the recent financial crisis that all countries are dependent on one another and connected economically. Governments, research professionals, universities, corporations and associations can no longer continue riding on the coat tails of others' successes; they need to build their own, through innovation, to ensure their competitive advantage. Innovation will help them overcome the short term problems created by the financial crisis, whilst also ensuring stability in future years.

It is recognised that individuals and organisations cannot innovate successfully on their own. They must network and collaborate both locally and globally. Clarke Kerr (*The Uses of the University*, 2001) wrote that "knowledge, may be the most powerful single element in our culture", and conferences facilitate this knowledge sharing, exchanging of ideas, and play an important role in fostering innovation, ensuring the long term development of a destination.

Conferencing allows delegates to be exposed to the business achievements, facilities and research capabilities of a country or city. These observations can then lead to opportunities of investment and trade for the local economy, allowing destinations to encourage growth in an industry or sector they wish to develop. Business events bring potential corporate investors to a destination through exhibitions and sponsorship, allowing governments to showcase strengths and negotiate future industry development. There are not many other ways in which the best people from an industry are in the same place, at the same time, seeing what the city has to offer through opportunities such as pre and post site inspections and meetings with key government officials.

An example of this is Melbourne recently hosting the 10th International Conference on Synchrotron Radiation Instrumentation in 2009. **Robert Lamb, the Director of the Australian Synchrotron, and Conference Chair said that the** "conference provided an opportunity for Australian researchers to be part of an international exchange of ideas as well as an opportunity to showcase our facility to the world... We look forward to building on friendships established or renewed during this conference to create stronger links with the international synchrotron community" (<http://www.sri09.org/>). This conference brought out the world's leading Synchrotron researches to Australia's new facility, creating and strengthening professional relationships between academics. The conference also included a

tour of Australia's Synchrotron, giving delegates an opportunity to explore the new technology and converse with Australia's leading scientists.

As a country, Australia is at a disadvantage because of our distance from the rest of the world. However by bringing events here, we are able to showcase Australian innovators and world firsts. For example, an Australian innovator who has been able to promote Australian research internationally through business events is Dr Graeme Clarke. Dr Clarke created the bionic ear, a form of cochlear implant which has now allowed over 100,000 people throughout the world to hear and communicate. Through his involvement in conferences including; the International Conference on Spoken Language Processing held in Sydney in 1998, the *International Congress of Audiology* held in Melbourne in 2002 and the 7th World Biomaterials Congress held in Sydney in 2004, Dr Clarke has been able to act as an Australian ambassador for innovation, spreading his story, and research to people throughout the world.

It is important that universities continue to foster innovation within Australia, and business events are one way this can be fulfilled. Currently, within Australia, universities receive a percentage of their government funding based on the number of presentations and papers presented at conferences by their academics. Therefore by bringing conferences to the university's city, more academics have an opportunity to attend and present papers, which then gives a direct monetary benefit back into the university, for future research, teaching and innovation, potentially leading to the Australian innovators that have been identified previously.

Business events have the ability to foster collaboration by bringing together industry, funding, government support, public relations opportunities, and by engaging students. Conferences provide a platform for associations to manage and foster innovation, influence the direction of discussion, and provide their members with links for future investment.

Examples of industry and government investment fostering local innovation as a direct result of Sydney hosting conferences is a AU\$17.7 million grant to the University of New South Wales from the National Health and Medical Research Council to support research into HIV, realised from the World AIDS Scientific Conference in 2007. This has led to the University of New South Wales being recognised internationally as a leader in HIV AIDS research, which was demonstrated through a recent AU\$18 million grant to the University from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support a research project into HIV drug therapy.

Secondly, after Sydney hosted the International Congress on Obesity in 2006, the University of Sydney received government funding to build the Centre for Obesity, Diabetes and Cardiovascular Disease, a AU\$385 million biomedical centre. This facility will accommodate more than 5,000 researchers and students, both from Australia and internationally, encouraging collaboration and development into the future.

Internationally there is a new emphasis on collaboration and networks to foster innovation. It is important that the events industry promote to government and the local industry that conferences not only have the ability to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and ideas across industries and countries, but also to influence the direction of discussion and provide an avenue for future local growth and investment.

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