



Leigh Harry

JMIC – Can It Make a Difference?

By Leigh Harry – JMIC President

In an industry where there can seem to be as many organizations as there are different sectors it's not unreasonable to ask why we need another one. Setting aside the fact that JMIC – the Joint Meetings Industry Council – has been around for over 50 years, this question goes to the heart of the challenges facing the Meetings Industry today and how they are best dealt with

JMIC was established in 1978 to provide a communications link amongst international associations engaged in the Meetings Industry and a means of collectively reviewing industry conditions and strategies. Leigh Harry, JMIC President talks to Association Management to bring us up to date with current objectives and JMIC's role in the industry.

The number of different industry organizations demonstrates perfectly the challenges faced by outsiders trying to make sense of the industry. Where can they go to find answers to the questions of what this industry is all about?

When everything is rolling along nicely it becomes less important whether this understanding is present. But when faced with the challenges we are today – when there is an imperative to demonstrate value in order to compete successfully against other government and community priorities – it becomes a necessity. The irony is that the last time this urgency was felt was in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and the resultant economic contraction, but almost ten years later, the industry was no better prepared for the latest round of challenges.

How can JMIC make a difference? In a nutshell it is positioned to achieve what no individual industry organization can on its own. It is the sum of all the individual organizations, creating a representative forum with the force to move forward as a whole.

JMIC was originally created as a vehicle for industry organizations to exchange information, and for much of its existence, that's what it did. Twice yearly meetings allowed attendees to outline what they were doing in the interests of general awareness. In the process, an award was developed to recognize industry leadership and the Unity Award, as it was known, exists to this day.

In 2003 concerns were raised over the industry's need for a stronger presence to influence decisions affecting the future. An assessment was commissioned, and a program developed – the Profile and Power program – with a common theme and key messages enabling member organizations to carry out advocacy initiatives with consistency.

A new award was also created – the Profile and Power award – to recognize initiatives impacting on the industry profile in various parts of the world.

At this time the industry was doing well and few felt any real sense of urgency around increasing industry awareness. Then the financial crisis hit, and the value of meetings as an economically useful investment was questioned. Once again, under challenge questions were raised again about how the industry should respond and how organizations like JMIC could play a more useful part.

The role of a council will always be limited in that it has no independent authority but relies instead on the members' agreement for action, as well as for the resources required.

For this reason there are five roles that a council like JMIC can realistically address, and these have become the program priorities;

First, it can act as a collective voice for the industry. Outside audiences can find it confusing when confronted by an array of choices as to who speaks for what. A consensus opinion when needed strengthens the industry as a whole by giving a more coherent and consistent force relative to other industries.

Secondly, it can encourage greater awareness and interaction amongst the organizations that make up the industry by creating vehicles and forums to encourage the exchange not only of information and expertise but also educational experiences and research. Awareness of and access to what everyone else is doing makes us all better informed – and can also make us more efficient by reducing duplication of effort and encouraging collaboration.

Third, it can produce and make available materials that assist industry members to carry out their own advocacy activities. Whatever we may do at a national or international level, the real impacts are those felt in the local community, where things like the economic advancement, jobs and new revenues that our industry creates have the greatest meaning. Few are in a position to develop the arguments, let alone the materials, required to communicate in an effective and convincing manner. By developing these materials, and by sharing those that have proven successful in other geographical areas, individuals are more likely to take the initiative to promote the value of the industry in their own communities.

Fourth, it can pursue areas that demonstrate our value proposition helping to arm us all with better and more defined arguments. In this regard, JMIC has identified the critical but elusive measure of the value arising from meetings themselves via the incremental benefits in the advance of professional, economic, business, educational research or cultural objectives.

These are the real reasons that meetings are held, yet we hardly ever speak of them simply because they don't lend themselves to direct and easy measurement. In a time when governments everywhere are weighing their investment priorities, it is these that carry the most weight because they go to the heart of what drives the development of both the economy and the community. That makes it a priority for the industry and a role for an industry voice like JMIC.

Finally, it can convene gatherings that demonstrate the integrity of the industry and its ability to work together on key issues in a way that attracts the attention of the outside world. In doing so, it makes a statement about what the industry stands for, how it addresses its responsibilities and the value it brings to the global economy as well as demonstrating solidarity amongst the various elements that comprise our sector.

This is a big job, and it's not going to happen overnight. The key is to harness the collective energies of our many industry organizations in a way that allows us to demonstrate that we are, in fact, an industry, and to document and showcase our achievements in ways that no individual organization can do alone. To achieve this, we will need the whole hearted support of those in our member organizations.

We'll also need to ensure we integrate with existing activities, and broaden their applicability, rather than initiating major new programs that would only challenge those existing organizations in areas where they are already well established.

The ultimate test of an industry is whether or not it can set aside its individual perspectives long enough to demonstrate unity when that is what is required. As the Meetings Industry, we are facing the same test now, and our success or failure will determine how we are seen by the rest of the world for a long time to come.

JMIC organizational details, awards programs, advocacy guidebook and "tools" are available (some in multiple languages) on the JMIC web site located at www.themeetingsindustry.org.

JMIC President
Leigh Harry, Chief Executive
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre



JOINT MEETING INDUSTRY COUNCIL

JMIC members include:

AIPC	(the International Association of Congress Centres);
COCAL	(the Latin American Confederation of PCO and Related Companies);
DMAI	(Destination Marketing Association International);
ECM	(European Cities Marketing);
EFAPCO	(the European Federation of Associations of Professional Congress Organizers);
EVVC	(the European Association of Event Centres);
IAPCO	(the International Association of Professional Congress Organizers);
ICCA	(the International Congress and Convention Association);
MPI	(Meeting Professionals International);
PCMA	(the Professional Convention Association Management Association);
SITE	(the Society of Incentive & Travel Executives) and
UFI	(the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry).