

A forum for moving forward

By Leigh Harry, president, JMIC/chief executive, Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre.

In an industry where there sometimes seems to be as many organisations as there are different sectors, it is not unreasonable to ask why we need another one.

While the Joint Meetings Industry Council has been around for more than 50 years, we welcome this question as it goes to the heart of the challenges facing the meetings industry today.

Essentially, the fact there are so many different industry organisations indicates the challenges involved in trying to make some sense of the whole thing. Outside observers can be left wondering what to make of such a variety of perspectives.

None of this matters too much when all is going well, but with today's challenges we need to demonstrate our value in order to compete successfully against other government and community priorities. The last time we felt this urgency was just after the events of 9/11 and the economic contraction that followed, but almost 10 years later

found ourselves no better prepared.

JMIC can make a difference because it is positioned to do things that no individual industry organisation has the scope to do alone. And because it is made up of all those individual organisations, it is the kind of forum needed to enable us all to move forward together.

JMIC was created as a vehicle for industry groups to exchange information, with meetings held twice a year. In the process, the Unity Awards were developed to recognise industry leadership.

Concerns were raised in 2003 as to the need for a stronger presence for the industry. An assessment was commissioned and the Profile & Power program developed, with key messages that could be used by member organisations for advocacy initiatives. Also created was the Profile & Power Award to recognise and draw attention to initiatives having an impact on the industry's profile.

At this stage the industry was doing well, and there was little sense of urgency. Then the financial crisis hit, and with it the questioning of the value of meetings. Again we were under threat, and the same questions were being raised about how we should respond and how organisations like JMIC could play a more useful role.

A council's role will always be limited by the fact it has no independent authority, relying rather on the agreement of its members for its actions, and for resources. For this reason,

there are five roles a council like JMIC can realistically address, and these have become our program priorities...

First, it can act as a collective voice for the industry. The ability to provide a consensus opinion strengthens the industry overall as it makes it a more coherent and consistent force.

Secondly, we can encourage a greater degree of awareness and interaction among the industry's various bodies. We can create vehicles and forums to encourage the exchange not only of information and expertise, but also of things like educational experiences and research activities. Knowing, and being able to access, what everyone else is doing makes us all better informed – and it can also make us more efficient by helping do away with duplication and encouraging collaboration.

Third, we can produce and make available materials that help industry members carry out their own advocacy activities. Whatever we may do at a national or international level, the real impacts are felt in the local community where things like economic advancement, jobs and new revenues have the greatest meaning.

Fourth, we can pursue ways of demonstrating our value proposition. In this regard, we have identified the critical but elusive area of measuring the value that arises from meetings themselves via the incremental benefits created when professional, economic, business, educational research or cultural objectives are advanced.

These are the real reasons for meetings, yet we hardly ever speak of them simply because they do not lend themselves to direct and easy measurement. But in a time

when governments are weighing their investment priorities, these arguments 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.

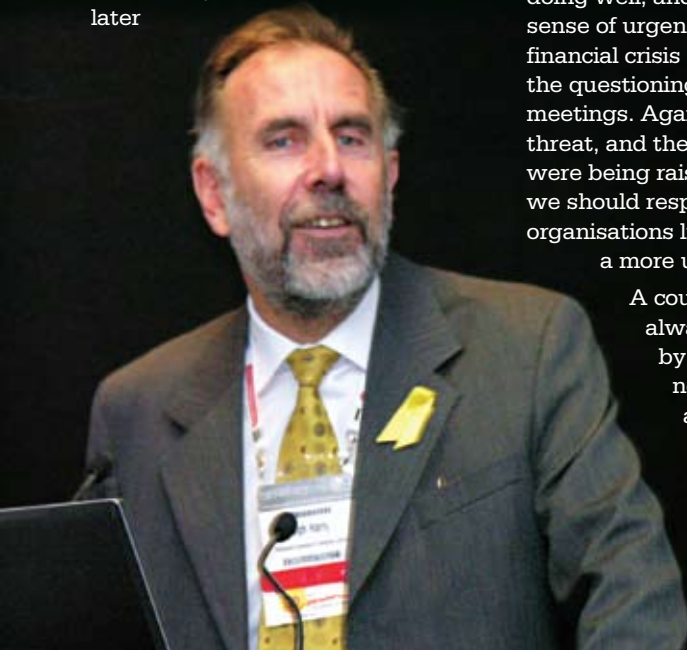
Finally, we can convene gatherings that demonstrate the integrity of the industry and its ability to work together on a key issue. In doing so, we can make a statement about what the industry stands for, how it addresses its responsibilities and the value it brings to the global economy, while showing solidarity among the various elements.

This is a big job. The key is to harness the collective energies of our industry organisations, and to document and showcase our achievements. At the same time, we also need to ensure we integrate existing activities and broaden their applicability, rather than initiating major programs that would only challenge those already established.

The ultimate test of an industry is whether or not it can set aside individual perspectives to show unity when necessary.

JMIC members include AIPC, COCAL (Latin American PCOs and related companies), DMAI (Destination Marketing Association International), ECM (European Cities Marketing), EFAPCO (European Federation of Associations of Professional Congress Organisers), EVVC (European Association of Event Centres), IAPCO, ICCA, MPI, PCMA (Professional Convention Association Management Association), SITE and UFI.

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