

Interview with Joachim König, President, JMIC

Can you tell us briefly about the JMIC Association nowadays? How many associations do you have these days in your Council?

JMIC has existed for more than 50 years, first as simply a forum for industry exchange and subsequently to promote greater cooperation, achieve consensus on important industry issues and recognize excellence. Today, our primary focus is on expanding awareness of the industry and its values and creating the tools to support a more credible and consistent message. We currently have 19 members and partners, which together represent all the major international associations and regions active in the industry worldwide.



What are the current trends that you're seeing within the Meetings Industry worldwide?

There are many business and competitive trends that members are addressing individually, including such things as more sophisticated events, the challenges of new technology and rapidly growing competition, but for the industry overall, there are two big issues:

The first of these is a growing awareness of this industry as a key factor in most of today's top economic and community development concerns, including knowledge and innovation, economic growth and diversification, academic and professional enhancement and inward investment. These make the industry of critical importance to both overall government policy and community development, which goes far beyond the traditional tourism role that has characterized this area for so long. Such an understanding has all kinds of implications for how the industry presents itself and how governments regard its importance, and we have only begun to

address these in a serious way.

The second of these is the impact of global terrorist-inspired incidents, and the potential these have for disrupting events and the travel involved in accessing them. This is an immediate concern that we must respond to vigorously, as our sector has always been the most stable in terms of reacting to global disruptions, and we must maintain that position for the sake not only of our own future but to ensure that we do not fall victim to the perpetrators' goals in a time when the global exchange and understanding we represent is more important than ever.

What are the efforts that JMIC is doing in order to help the Meetings Industry?

Overall, JMIC provides a way for the industry to respond to the needs as outlined above in a consistent and integrated way, which is often important given that in many respects we are something of a fragmented sector with many different elements, all with slightly different objectives. To do this, we need consensus, and achieving that – through ongoing industry interactions, the staging of industry conferences and the development of consistent messages and materials for member use – has become a top priority for JMIC. In addition, we need to be able to demonstrate in measureable terms the broader economic, academic and knowledge values I referred to above, so we are increasingly engaging with both industry leaders and academic institutions to develop better and more credible measures to document these.

What is the vision you have about Meetings Industry in Latin America?

Latin America is an incredibly important component of the global industry as it is

developing rapidly and has a key opportunity to be able to adapt and learn from the experiences and mistakes of many other parts of the world as it does so. We are seeing this already, particularly in the form of new and innovative approaches to events as well as a growing recognition of how the industry can be used to address overall economic development strategies in various regions.

What does the Meetings Industry need to be recognized as a transcendental industry for governments?

Our experience has been that governments have no difficulty understanding the broader role of the industry in economic and social development once the facts are put before them. However, we have had to go through something of a transition of our own to organize these arguments and come up with the documentation to support them, and this job is far from complete. Now that we are finally getting these required resources we need to do a better job of reaching out to governments at all levels with our story, and of recruiting others in the community – business, academic and professional leaders, for example – who may have better access and credibility with government audiences.

What are the plans for JMIC in the near future?

Our future plans are all based on the directions we have identified as above. We need to enhance industry unity, ensure consistency and credibility in our messaging and seek both vehicles and allies for delivering and documenting our industry values in ways that will resonate with governments. That means making sure our arguments relate directly to their own policy issues rather than ours, and that is the next big challenge we have to overcome.

To do all this we will need a lot of support from within the industry itself, not simply as a matter of resources, but because individual industry members are best positioned to understand and access government representatives in their respective communities and, in the end, will benefit most from the results. ©