



SESSION SYNOPSIS July 6th 2021

JMIC Panel at IBTM Wired: Confidence, Collaboration, Outreach and Adaptation Identified as Critical Factors in Recovery

From a wide ranging panel discussion around the many practical issues associated with industry recovery from the impacts of COVID-19, four themes – confidence, collaboration, outreach and adaptation – emerged as being amongst the top priorities for consolidated industry action.

The panel, comprised of JMIC members:

Kai Hattendorf | Managing Director / CEO of UFI

James Rees | President, ExCeL London and President of ICCA

Sven Bossu | CEO of AIPC

Ori Lahav | VP Client & Operations, Kenes Group and President of IAPCO

The panel noted that while there were already many positive signs of industry recovery, sustained progress required a continuing effort to address the many ongoing issues and new dynamics that would shape both the pace and the course of recovery for some time to come.

Stakeholder confidence was seen as the biggest single determinant of recovery, according to the panel. “Learning that we can run events safely and convincing stakeholders and governments of this is the number one factor today” said Hattendorf. “And we need to think in terms of the total delegate experience, not just the part of it under our immediate control”. At the same time, all agreed that there is also a critical commercial component; “Anything we can do to help mitigate both safety and financial risks will support earlier re-opening decisions” said Rees.

In terms of collaboration, it was noted that new industry challenges are of such a scale and complexity that they require all sectors to work more closely than ever in order to create collective strategies that respond to everyone’s needs. According to Lahav, that in turn meant “a high degree of transparency and rebuilding relationships as trusted advisors at a time when we haven’t had an opportunity for any face to face encounters with many of our clients for over a year”.

At the same time, there was also a sense that the process was already underway, driven by practical necessity. Said Bossu “The recently released AIPC / ICCA / UFI COVID Health and Safety Guides are a specific example of what collaboration can achieve. Generated by qualified members and based on their own practical experiences, they are valuable resources available free to anyone in the industry to support our collective progress toward re-opening.”

The group noted the importance of reaching out beyond the industry itself to include both adjacent sectors such as travel and accommodation that shape the overall travel experience as well as the business, professional and academic communities who are having to re-think their own approaches

to communications and events in the wake of a vastly disruptive experience. This outreach was also seen to extend to local communities and governments, who more than ever needed to be reminded of the critical role business events play in economic and community restoration and advancement.

The panel also recognized the hugely important role of ongoing adaptation and creative innovation, particularly in terms of balancing the forces pursuing a return to live formats with other models that emerged to sustain interactions during the pandemic. They noted the result will inevitably be a wider range of variations in format than ever before, combining elements of both live and digital components in different combinations depending on what organizers are trying to achieve.

As a result they felt this is more than ever a time to develop custom solutions that meet the specific needs and expectations of individual clients – another reason that greater client / supplier collaboration is of paramount importance. Said Bossu “Matching the service offer to client needs is now the top priority – in the end it comes back to purpose; how we can best support the client’s objectives.” Lahav agreed, adding “New opportunities have continued to emerge with the lessons learned during the pandemic – we now need to apply that learning more strategically”.

The positive emphasized by panelists was that properly managed, the recovery process could lead to unprecedented new levels of event business activity, given the appetite for catch-up combined with the wider range of engagement options that will emerge. The sense was that while the COVID experience has certainly taught everyone the irreplaceable value that live events bring to the process of interaction, at the same time it has introduced many new ways of achieving interactions, and as organizers work toward achieving the right balance for their own communities, overall engagement is likely to expand significantly.

Moving forward successfully will mean staying alert and responding quickly, the panel agreed. “We’ve already seen unprecedented levels of collaboration in support of the common interest, and we need to keep those channels open” said Hattendorf. Growing confidence will drive the reopening process, said Rees “When the major decision-makers start to move, it sends a message to the rest of the world and we’ll get the momentum we need”.

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