

INDUSTRY VIEWS

Is there any certainty in an uncertain world?

The Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMIC) is an organisation that represents the combined interests of 15 international meetings industry associations. It has provided a forum for information exchange among industry groups for over 50 years and has recently become more engaged in the process of articulating and delivering industry messages to wider community and governmental audiences, as well as developing better mechanisms for documenting the value of the industry.



ROD CAMERON is the executive director of the Joint Meetings Industry Council and the faculty head of the AIPC Academy.



Business events meet politics in a new global dynamic

Rod Cameron discusses how meetings create forums for people to exchange knowledge and support the advancement of business and industry professionals.

Where meetings and conventions are held and how content is approached is affected by many different factors, including the influences of global and regional politics. In the face of significant political disruptions this past year or so – from Brexit to the US presidential election and the promise of more dislocations in a number of European countries – it is not unreasonable to wonder how this all potentially impacts our business prospects and even the future of the industry.

But already, there is reason to believe that the shifting global relations causing so much concern in many circles may well be minimal and could even be beneficial to the meetings industry.

For one thing, the impact on global markets, which generally don't respond positively to shocks or uncertainty of any kind, were much less dramatic and shorter-lived than anyone expected. Initial reactions were quickly absorbed and recovery was under way within days, if not hours. The final balance will be years in the making with a lot of bumps along the way.

INDUSTRY STABILITY

The meetings industry responds to very different forces. To begin, a very large proportion of events are in fact local or regional, and these make for a stable base of activity in any destination. At the same time, many events on rotation are driven by academic and professional needs rather than business ones, and these are unlikely to be much affected, just as association events were practically untouched by the global financial crisis.

Decision factors important to most planners and their respective organisations are unlikely to be heavily influenced by local or regional politics. The selection criteria are based on where events feel they need to go in order to respond to the distribution of markets and members, potential for new markets and members and, increasingly, linking up with institutions and programmes that respond to the priorities set

by the organisations in question. None of this is going to be particularly influenced by political changes.

Other factors such as the quality and attractiveness of the destination as a product, including meeting facilities, the complementary hotel and the availability of other amenities essential to the delivery of a great event, are once again unlikely to be impacted by political issues.

SILVER LINING

Another key site consideration – certainly since the belt-tightening that accompanied the last global recession – is cost structure, and here there actually may be benefits recognised. For some destinations, where there is a currency impact, it may actually create an advantage as organisers have the opportunity to secure desirable destinations at discount prices. And there is even further potential for more beneficial tax arrangements, depending on how this factor plays out in the future.

Finally, there may even be a silver lining effect; already, academics, researchers and associations with international connections are reacting to travel restrictions in certain countries with well-articulated arguments around the value of meetings to their respective areas and, overall, to the global advancement necessary for maintaining economic progress. This is mobilising a group that has not always been a staunch defender of the industry, and those voices may be even stronger than ours in raising the alarm and reversing some of the more drastic tendencies.

A looming catastrophe? Not likely. In the end, meetings and conventions will mostly do what they have always done: create forums for people to exchange knowledge and support the advancement of business and industry professionals. In that regard, their role may turn out to be a force for good where it's most needed by helping bridge the gaps created by changing political alignments. **M**

The active member associations who comprise JMIC today are:

- Asian Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (AACVB)
- International Association of Convention Centres (AIPC)
- American Society of Association Executives (ASAE)
- Latin American Confederation of PCO and Related Companies (Cocal)
- Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI)
- European Cities Marketing (ECM)
- European Association of Event Centres (EVVC)
- International Association of Professional Congress Organizers (IAPCO)
- International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)
- Incentive, Conference & Event Society Asia Pacific (ICESAP)
- Meeting Professionals International (MPI)
- Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA)
- Society of Incentive & Travel Excellence (SITE)
- Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI)
- Union of International Associations (UIA)

JMIC is supported by IMEX and ibtm World. For more information, contact jmic@themeetingsindustry.org or visit www.themeetingsindustry.org.

