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### Attracting events begins at home

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#### Convention bureau consultant, David Hall, on creating a successful business events destination

By David Hall 5 June 2015

Fifteen years ago, and to a certain extent still today, the perception is that anyone who comes to your destination is a tourist. It may be broken down to leisure visitors and business visitors but, too often, it isn't recognised that the strategies and tactics for attracting business events is totally different from that of the leisure market.

One of the substantial differences is that attracting events begins at home. For association events, bureaus must first approach the local then national association, because if they are not interested in hosting and supporting then the chances of winning the event are almost zero. The destination must also have the necessary facilities and services. Bureaus have been too quick to put people on a plane to association headquarters without first doing this research.

When it comes to the meetings industry you must be pragmatic and systematic. The decision as to where a meeting is held is made from the head, not from the heart. And when it comes to systematic, it's a question of qualifying and quantifying potential events. Too much time, effort and money has been spent chasing unqualified MICE business.

The foundation of a successful destination is its use of the most sophisticated and best databases they can access—like the one at ICCA. The target should be to attract conventions relevant to the destination's social and economic growth agenda, such as those related to its major industries.

I started at Adelaide Convention Bureau back in 1980 and have since worked all over. In Asia I set up the Jakarta Convention Bureau, the Istanbul Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Sarawak Convention Bureau and I am now working with Penang. Every major city with convention facilities should have a bureau.

It is astonishing that somewhere like Bali does not have a convention bureau; or, in China, for example, there are nowhere near the number needed to compete effectively. More second and third tier cities throughout Asia need their own convention bureaus—not just local tourism offices trying to cover it. And you cannot have a national bureau that allocates events, because it is the buyer who decides where the event is held.

There has been substantial growth, a lot of that can be put down to numerous infrastructure developments, particularly purpose-built convention and exhibition centres; and for existing centres, expansions. When done the right way they give flexibility in the use of the facility. The old 'build it and they will come' attitude is changing. If you want to attract international meetings, the market lead-time is a minimum of two years. So if you don't start marketing the destination before the venue opens you're going to be empty for the first two years. But this is also improving.

**David Hall is a consultant at David Hall Consulting**

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