

CHANGE IS HAPPENING WITH OR WITHOUT YOU

ENITED Business Events Experts, Managing Directors Ivo Franschitz, Rosa B. Reyero Miguelez and Senior Consultant Henrik von Arnold share their insights about the major, future challenges faced by international associations, and consequently the way to measure their success in the long run.

HQ: Mr. Franschitz, we had the chance to talk before and you said: “The world has changed but the associations have not”. It’s quite provocative, isn’t it?

Franschitz: Yes, I am aware of that, and it is meant as a wake-up call. The truth is, there are, of course, some international associations which have recognized the change in their business environment. They have started to change their tactics by adapting their offer to the existing membership market. But the majority of them appear to be frozen in time, for many reasons, and mostly unaware of what the future will bring. They do have to understand their world is changing with or without them.

Reyero Miguelez: We are living in an information society. Information is available all around the clock and all over the world. Therefore the demands and expectations of people in their search for information have changed and still do. Years ago everybody booked a journey in a travel agency. Because the information the people were looking for was available only there. Now it is just a few clicks away on the web. Travel agencies, as the former gatekeepers of that needed information, have lost their main purpose. The same scenario also applies to print media businesses. They all were forced to develop new strategies, they had to think about their new and future clients’ needs and to modify their offerings.

HQ: But how does this affect the associations? They are information-providers by themselves.

Franschitz: That’s a good point. I believe one of the major flaws of the basic concept of associations nowadays is their “exclusive” approach by creating barriers, through

estimated, yet. But change is happening. At the latest when the digital natives are the new clientele. They are fast, flexible and used to permanent dialog. They have increasing demands on information flow. The members as known today, who pay their fees once a year and are satisfied with

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monetary, educational, occupational and geographical means. They also consider and treat their information and their platforms as exclusive goods. However, in many cases, the reality is that their information is not exclusive enough anymore. There are a lot of other sources and networks in a global digital world competing with each other. You do not have to be a member of an association or a participant at their annual meetings anymore to have access to it.

HQ: Mr. von Arnold, recently you asked the Managing Directors of six leading international associations about their opinion, experience and challenges in their daily business. What’s their point of view?

von Arnold: The effects of increasing digitization (live-streaming, hybrid meetings, etc.) in the meeting world cannot be accurately

the things they usually get, will be a thing of the past. Therefore associations will need to stop defining their markets by members and participants, and start to see and approach them as their potential clients. As business corporations, they have to have a clear purpose and vision and a clear strategy.

HQ: And what are the main challenges associations see today?

von Arnold: As a consequence of all of the above, the associations already find that financing is increasingly difficult. The acquisition of sponsors requires high levels of manpower and new solutions. The situation is also made more difficult by stricter compliance regulations and higher member demands. Moreover the potential participants have consistently less time and financial resources. They attend one top event



each year. And this means internal competitions between association meeting organisers. It will be all about offering added value to the target group.

HQ: If you were an association, what would you do in the current situation?

Reyero Miguelez: First of all, I would start by asking myself the most fundamental questions: “Why am I (the association) here?” and “What is my purpose?” Followed by: “Why should potential clients choose me or my offer?” Or in the corporate marketing language: “What is my USP (Unique selling proposition)?” “Where do I differentiate myself from my competitors in the market?”

Franschitz: By rethinking the reason for their existence, associations need to redefine their purpose, their strategies and definition of future markets and, consequently their tactics. No matter if you are a for-profit or non-profit organisation you need a clear vision. It is your soul, this is what you want to be. That enables you to develop precise strategies and objectives and create tailor-made tactics. Your action plan to reach your operational goals is the final step. This is

the basis for a sustainable development of every association.

HQ: And how do you measure success of associations in the future?

Franschitz: Following our point-of-view and arguments of the future of associations, of course, also the criteria and methods for measuring the success will have to be designed anew. To take an example, if the purpose of an association in the future is to create a community of common interest, in an inclusive way, instead of maintaining an exclusive and closed membership model, it is obvious that counting membership and meeting participation numbers becomes obsolete. New criteria could be, for instance, the variety and diversity of the “followers” of the association or the “connectivity” to other entities with similar subject matters.

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The Union of International Associations is a non-profit, independent, apolitical, and non-governmental institution in the service of international associations. Since its foundation in 1907, the UIA is a leading provider of information about international non-profit organisations and a premium networking platform between international organisations and the meeting industry worldwide.

Main activities:

- Yearbook of International Organisations - contains information on over 68,000 international organizations active in all fields of human endeavour, in all corners of the world.
- International Congress Calendar - with information on over 428,000 international meetings. Available online, in pdf, and on paper.
- Annual Associations Round Table

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