

# Centre and association partnerships in Washington DC



The Middle East's convention centres and event planners can look to international examples of integrated working practices to benefit all

by Greg O'Dell

Both centres and event organisers have a shared stake in a successful outcome for any given event, since whatever satisfies attendees is the best guarantee for future participation. Working together, by combining a centre's unique knowledge of what works best in their facilities with the organisers' in-depth understanding of what their delegates most want and need, is the best way to achieve this. But that requires a commitment by both parties to cooperation and keeping an open mind to a range of possibilities.

I can best illustrate this via a specific example drawn from our own experiences at Events DC, which hosts hundreds of events annually in its venues, including the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. Over the years, the Center has established itself as a strong partner and resource for associations looking to increase attendance and enhance the overall event experience in Washington, DC – all while building innovative revenue opportunities.

The Center has partnered with the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington (RAMW) since 2012. RAMW uses our annual investment to enhance its local marketing spending and to develop select national promotions showcasing the District's restaurants and highlighting culinary experiences to national media, entrepreneurs and event organisers.

RAMW creates customised marketing campaigns for citywide and major Center events, and promotes these events to its member restaurants – encouraging them to offer event-related discounts, incentive and welcoming opportunities. This gives event patrons a wider selection of restaurant options. This is a benefit for RAMW members, driving thousands of new patrons

looking for memorable dining experiences to restaurants throughout the city each week. The promotions particularly benefit newer, smaller restaurants with limited promotional budgets.

RAMW also provides the Center with enhanced client hospitality opportunities during quarterly Chef's Table food showcase events. The Center hosts RAMW's annual awards gala to showcase our venue and food offerings to the restaurant community; Events DC is designated as the gala's primary sponsor.

RAMW's promotion of the District as a significant culinary destination creates a unique value proposition for leisure, business and convention travellers, as well as increasing the city's appeal to tour operators, business developers and event organisers. It also significantly expands its member restaurants' customer base at no additional marketing cost to its members, through advance alerts of the convention business opportunities, creating a significant and valuable member benefit.

With the Center growing its citywide convention and trade show business to fill hotels' mid-winter need periods, it had become increasingly challenging to host a building-wide event over consistent dates during the winter season. This was the case

until the Center repositioned the Washington Area New Car Dealer Association's (WANADA) Washington Auto Show dates for early 2012, repositioning the show dates from the December-January dates it had held since 1983 to early February.

Prior to the partnership, the Auto Show was perceived strictly as a gate show without consistent or reliable tracking of its impact on hotel room nights or restaurant visits. Additionally, the Auto Show faced challenges to grow the auto manufacturers' participation without a consistent show schedule that accommodated the transfer of major exhibits around established major United States auto show dates.

The partnership has resulted in changes to the basic Auto Show package, including an enhanced pre-show programme, an expanded preview night programme featuring luxury and lifestyle vehicles geared towards high-end buyers, and the show's use of a third-party housing vendor to coordinate and manage all show-related lodging, credibly establishing the Auto Show's value to the local hotel community.

These optimisations have contributed to the growth of the Auto Show, which brings thousands of regional guests downtown and generates significant and consistent operating revenue for the Convention Center. Simultaneously, the Auto Show demonstrates its benefits to the local hospitality community and increases its value to buyers in new markets and member dealers with the new show programmes.

With these and other event and marketing partnerships with local organisations, the Center builds revenue opportunities by enhancing the overall event experience, creating a successful model for the future. ◻

**“CENTRES AND EVENT ORGANISERS HAVE A SHARED STAKE IN A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME FOR ANY GIVEN EVENT”**

In addition to his role as AIPC Vice President, Greg O'Dell is President and CEO at Walter E. Washington Convention Center and Events DC.



AIPC represents a global network of more than 185 leading centres in 60 countries, with the active involvement of more than 900 management-level professionals worldwide. It is committed to encouraging and recognising excellence in convention centre management, based on the diverse experience and expertise of its international representation, and maintains a variety of educational, research, networking and standards programmes to achieve this. AIPC also celebrates and promotes the essential role of the international meetings industry in supporting economic, academic and professional development and enhancing global relations among highly diverse business and cultural interests.

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