

All about partnerships in DC

PRESIDENT AND CEO AT THE WALTER E. WASHINGTON CONVENTION CENTER AND EVENTS DC AND AIPC VICE-PRESIDENT **GREG O'DELL** ILLUSTRATES HOW HIS CENTRE HAS WORKED WITH ORGANISERS TO INCREASE VALUE ALL ROUND.



Greg O'Dell

Partnership between venues and organisers can produce some creative results and boost value for all

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 – using a centre's unique knowledge of what works best in its facilities combined with the organiser's in-depth understanding of what their delegates most want and need – is the best way to achieve this, but requires a commitment by both parties to co-operate and keep an open mind to a range of possibilities.

I can illustrate this via an 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.

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

The promotions particularly benefit smaller restaurants with limited budgets. RAMW also provides the Center with

enhanced client hospitality opportunities during Chef's Table food events.

The Center hosts RAMW's annual awards gala and is the gala's primary sponsor.

RAMW's promotion of the District as a significant culinary destination creates a unique value proposition for business and convention travellers and significantly expands its member restaurants' customer base at no additional marketing cost to its members through advance alerts of the convention business opportunities.

Growing the Auto Show's impact in DC

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 to early February.

Prior to the partnership, the Auto Show was perceived strictly as a gate show without 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 US

auto show dates.

The partnership resulted in the following changes to the show package:

- An enhanced pre-show programme, in co-operation with the Society of Automotive Engineers, that presents technical product development and legislative tracks for dealers, as well as for government attendees looking to meet with manufacturers.
- An expanded preview night programme featuring luxury and lifestyle vehicles.
- The Auto Show engaged a third-party housing vendor to coordinate and manage all lodging.

For its part WANADA has assisted the Center to refine its Auto Show crowd management programme to allow 100% screening of all bags brought into the facility through three main show entrances; significantly improve queue management; improve ticket sales processing through enabled card readers and scanners with the majority of ticket sales driven online rather than on-site.

These optimisations have contributed to the growth of the Auto Show, which brings thousands of regional guests downtown and generates significant revenue for the Convention Center.

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 and sustainable model for the future. ■

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