

Industry education is a lesson in itself

In convention centres, as in so many other sectors today, education is probably the most important single thing we do, and that importance just keeps growing, writes Rod Cameron, executive director AIPC and Joint Meetings Industry Council.

There are three reasons why education is so vital. First, because knowledge and the benefit of experience are perhaps the most valuable legacies we can pass on to those who will be following us into the industry – and critical to delivering a very specialised product that requires many skills that are not directly transferrable from other areas of employment. With a tight market for talent in many parts of the world today centres often have to recruit from other specialties and then provide the additional required knowledge on-site. And while “on the job” experience will eventually provide a lot of what’s required, specialised training is a way to get new recruits up to speed more quickly.

But in times when almost everything about the product is changing so quickly, education is not just an investment in the future – it’s also about right now, and being able to put the very latest information, insights and strategies into immediate action. Even those with lots of experience in the business regularly find themselves facing new challenges, as everything from client needs and business methods to new technology and delegate expectations of an event change on what seems to be a daily basis. Invariably, the best ideas for how to address these come from others in the industry who are having similar challenges, and educational programs are an effective way of facilitating an exchange of such information and insights.

Finally, it’s about reputation – not just within centres but for the industry as a whole. Why? Because we all want and need to project a high degree of professionalism, and education is all about building the kinds of competencies that will enable us to do that. If we want to be taken seriously by other disciplines –

including those represented in many of our client groups, who are themselves organisations of professionals – we need to be able to show that when it comes to our facilities and services we are the experts that can advise and deliver like no one else.

What is changing is delivery. This is a product of technology and a matter of what is possible today that might not have been a few years ago – but it’s also about changing expectations around how information can and should be communicated by those on the receiving end. Online and remote learning, for example are very attractive in that they let students set their own pace and don’t require actual attendance in a central setting. At the same time, they enable participants to access speakers and resources that would be difficult if not impossible to bring together for a smaller group.

On the other hand, in a way, the method of delivery is in itself a part of the lesson, since it reflects on what we know about how to convey information most effectively and demonstrate the additional values, such as network development, that reinforce the value of face to face encounters, which is what it is we’re selling in this industry. In the end, as with remote meetings generally, the most effective approach will likely be a combination of both, depending on the kinds of materials to be covered and the need for direct interaction as a component of the learning process.

The bottom line is industry education is critical and evolving quickly. The challenge for the industry is not just to keep pace but to demonstrate that we are the ones who can best advise and support its use, not just for ourselves but for anyone delivering content in a convention centre setting. **CIM**

