

# Centre of association attention

**JULIANNE JAMMERS, MD AT SWISSTECH CONVENTION CENTER, LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND, ASKS WHETHER A CONVENTION CENTRE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO MEMBER VALUE OF ASSOCIATIONS?**

**A**t the heart of the associations value proposition is networking and professional development and the benefits of these two features are often the strength of the membership. Meetings have long been the delivery method for these interactions.

To some extent, the internet has disrupted the meeting business, providing an alternative method to accessing these features through webinars, open online courses and networking platforms. Arguably, it has also provided a solution for environmental concerns, cost and hassle of travel. But, no matter how good technology is or gets, physical meetings still matter.

So, while conferences remain a pillar of association business, the reality is that they need new and innovative ways to deliver bottom-line value in their meetings – and they have to be more creative than ever before in how they do that.

At the SwissTech Convention Center, we offer that creative approach in acting as a partner to associations' programme development – and are not just a venue.

We collaborate closely with associations to provide an educational environment, develop new contacts and deliver an overall unique member experience.

## Unique value for associations

Many would argue that the role of a convention centre is to provide excellence in facility and conference management and ensure that their destination is top of mind for the 'after hour' activities. At the university-based



SwissTech Convention Center, on the banks of Lake Geneva, we have developed our USP beyond just these arguably critical elements. We play an active role in providing access to knowledge and talent to associations in relevant fields.

With over 350 laboratories and research groups on campus, the EPFL (Ecole Polytechnique Fédéral de Lausanne) is one of the world's most innovative and productive scientific institutions. Dozens of startups and multinationals on the campus and in the area complement the university environment. The convention centre is a place for them to meet and exchange ideas.

On the one hand, we actively identify relevant associations that can benefit from a close co-operation with these experts on our campus in developing their programmes. Complementing this, our active outreach to our professors, who are members of numerous associations, allows us to help make likely matches with the aim of creating

meetings that have unique and lasting value.

Integrating students of all levels from bachelor to doctoral programmes into the meetings, both as a resource for delivery but also as participants provide associations access to their future members. We have helped to create special networking sessions – a kind of 'speed-dating' – to encourage and create those serendipitous moments where relationships can form.

The SwissTech recently became a member of the Energy Cities Alliance, with the intent to attract energy related Association meetings. While our destination is not considered an energy city, as a knowledge and research partner, it can offer associations access to the expertise in both traditional energy solutions and sustainable energy that is a strong offering on the EPFL campus.

## Value for sponsors and exhibitors

Direct access to knowledge and student talent can be a compelling incentive for association meeting partners and supporters from industry. What better place to hunt for talent than during an event of like-minded folks under a single roof. Industry spends significant time and money in recruiting and associations have an excellent opportunity to position their meeting as a credible platform for complementing this effort.

By targeting associations that match up with local, regional or national economic strengths and creating opportunities to access the knowledge in the economy, convention centres can create a win-win for all their stakeholders. ■

*Julianne Jammers is also a Board member of AIPC which represents a global network of 190 leading centres in 64 countries with the active involvement of more than 900 management-level professionals worldwide.*

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