



INDUSTRY VIEWS

Renovations that reimagine spaces



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Values = design = engagement

Over half of the global AIPC community has expansion or renovation plans underway. The US is leading the way, with the brand-new Sphere in Las Vegas demonstrating the level of innovation possible. Next to enhancing the customer experience, venues are also seeking to engage with local communities via venue design. Creating that bridge is crucial for demonstrating the value of events and attracting talent, shares **Sven Bossu**.

During the 2023 AIPC Conference, the results of the yearly member survey were shared, showing that over 50% of the AIPC community has a renovation or expansion planned or underway. During a panel design on architecture, it became clear that the purpose of these investments very often goes beyond a simple increase of sellable space or a lick of paint. Two focus areas stood out: enhancing the customer experience and engaging with the local community.

PUTTING EXPERIENCES FIRST

The brand-new MGM Sphere in Las Vegas – designed by AIPC business partner Populous – shows to what level customer experience can be pushed. The 112-meter-high venue is covered with 1.2 million led lamps at the outside, pushing the notion of eye-catching to a different level. The interior is equipped with a wraparound LED-screen, measuring 15 000 m². 4D features, including wind and scent, will also be used. And of course, all 18 600 seats have high speed internet access. As The Edge of U2 puts it: “It’s a canvas of an unparalleled scale.”

But next to customer experience, venues find it increasingly important to leverage the design of their building to reflect the uniqueness of the community it’s embedded in, and indeed to engage with that community. This engagement is important for several reasons.

First, it generates support from the local community. Secondly, having the local community actively involved adds value to the events. And thirdly, it allows to demonstrate the values of the venues, which is crucial to attract talent.

DEMONSTRATING VALUE

OVG360, which manages over 300 mainly US-based venues (from arenas to convention centres and anything in between), has embraced this value driven approach. In their view, recognising diversity, fostering inclusion, and working towards common core values have become more urgent than ever. This is translated into practice in multiple ways, from creating diverse talent pipelines to commitment to ambitious sustainability objectives.

Located in the heart of Georgetown, Seattle, the Climate Pledge Arena is a great example of how a venue can engage with the local community and demonstrate its commitment to core values, such as sustainability. The building – which dates back to 1962 and is a true landmark – was completely recycled. The goals are both simple and ambitious: become zero carbon by moving 100% to renewable energy and banning the use of fossil fuels; zero-use of single use plastics; zero waste; and finally demonstrate leadership in water quality and water use wherever possible.

An example of the latter is the “Rain to Rink” system, which harvests water off the roof, collects it into a 56 m³ cistern, and turns it into green ice. It is a journey for all involved, including the NHL’s Seattle Kraken fans.

In a period where 79% of the AIPC community finds attracting staff (very) challenging and when the choice of employer becomes more and more value driven, it is of key importance that convention centres demonstrate the values they stand for. The Climate Pledge Arena is just one example, with many more to follow. ⁴