

# Bidding For Conferences

Bringing an international congress to your country can be a crowning achievement of a professional career. It can not only raise the profile of a national industry but can also make a long-term impact in raising actual standards in that industry, help build and maintain relationships with customers and ultimately provide an economic boost to the sector.

### Understanding the Bid Process

A typical bid process might entail a national association identifying their preferred Professional Conference Organiser (PCO) to work with, either by requesting competitive quotes and proposals from a number of companies or going with a company who they've met and feel has the experience and capability to deliver. The PCO provider brings an experience of the bidding process, an understanding of the goals of the association and the means of delivering it. The chosen PCO would work with the local committee to submit the bid document and manage all elements of the competitive international bid process.

Understanding the bidding process is essential for not only winning a conference for your country, but for carrying through the operation of that business in a seamless manner. The bid process is the ground floor of conference management, the place where ideas are first formed, cemented and implemented.

Having a Conference Ambassador is increasingly important in successfully bringing international conferences to a national association's country. Ambassadors are typically members of a national association who aspire to bring the international association to their home country in order to raise the profile of their indigenous industries and national association. This personal link can greatly benefit the bid process and help bring together professionals in the field to support the bid.

### Preparing the Bid

In order to prepare a bid document that will accurately reflect your international association's needs and expectations, a great deal of research has to be carried out, meaning any bid has to be prepared well in advance of the actual bidding deadline. For example, MCI Dublin is currently working on bids for 5 congresses which will take place in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Submissions for these are due from 2010-2011, illustrating how forward thinking you need to be in order to successfully prepare a bid.

The first question you should ask is how does your international association define success? Understanding the goals of the conference will mean that you can tailor your bid to demonstrate that you understand what's important to your client and are willing to go the extra mile to deliver it. The next stage is to prepare a budget outline based on the destination, past events and the client's expectations. This outline will provide a basis on which you can add or subtract elements based on the clients needs and give you flexibility in terms of innovative options you wish to present in order to differentiate yourself from rival bidders and ultimately win the business. Different associations have different financial objectives for their conference so it's vital to ensure that this is met. A feasibility study on potential venues, destinations and accommodation requirements will help identify those potential problems that may arise so you can budget accordingly. Ascertaining the potential income your conference can generate through exhibition and sponsorship is important to consider at this point. The scope and scale of your event may largely depend on this as a source of revenue.

### Here are a few of the basic factors you need to consider before preparing your bid:

- What is the cost of the proposed venue? What rates, discounts and deals can be negotiated to maximise revenue? Having an idea of the programme outline, the number of tracks and streams is preferable when looking up venue options. (See MCI Dublin's Michelle Spain's advice on venue procurement also in this month's e-zine)
- What accommodation is available in the area? Does it suit the demographics of your potential delegates?
- How large is the national promotable audience and how many delegates will you attract from overseas?
- How many delegates can you expect to attract to your destination? Will this be more or less than previous conferences? Ireland in particular currently attracts an average 10% more visitors than any other country, in fact, this year's HTAi (Health Technology Assessment International) saw an increase of 200% on their 2009 delegate figures.
- Does the destination have venues for high-quality social events? Can you easily and safely transport your delegates from the conference venue to a social event? Is the host country easily accessible to overseas delegates?
- On-site services. Does the venue have dedicated and experienced staff for dealing with delegates, exhibitors and sponsors at the event?

Getting local support is vital to show your international association how serious your destination is about attracting their business. Work with local ambassadors to develop a strong, proactive Local Organising Committee and proposed Scientific Committee. Local tourism bodies, government agencies and private organisations can lend serious weight to the bid document by writing letters of support for use in your bid.

Recently, MCI Dublin submitted a bid for a major conference in 2013 (European Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (ESCAP)) and approached a number of Irish associations in order to gain their support to bring the conference to Ireland. As a result the bid document included letters of support from the Department of Arts, Sports & Tourism, the Lord Mayor of Dublin and many more. Dublin beat Madrid to host this conference, which will now take place in the University College Dublin (UCD) on the 6th-10th July, 2013. This will attract an estimated 1000 specialists in this industry into Ireland for the duration.

This relationship with local stakeholders gives great added-value to the conference and can be a unique selling point when it comes to the bid process. The PCO should become part of the Local Organising Committee (LOC) and schedule regular LOC meetings in order to assess the project's development, brain storm, identify challenges and set out tasks so that each committee member has a part to play in the success of the bid.

### **Presenting the Bid**

**Presenting the bid to your international association is the final stage of the process and your knowledge of how that works is key to avoiding the pitfalls that can hamper even the best prepared bids.**

Learn the structure of your international association and who the ultimate decision makers are. If it is an executive committee, how often do the committee members change? Does the General Assembly vote people to sit on the committee? If you are preparing a long-term bid then you need to know whether the people you are in contact with now will still be the key decision makers in the future. Typically selecting the next conference destination and voting for new executive committee members will happen at the Annual Meeting. So prior to these annual meetings, targeting the key decision-makers in the association is certain to increase the likelihood of your bid being successful.

Having a strong social programme element in your bid document can be decisive in emotionally connecting the committee and delegation to your host city. Exhibitors and sponsors will look to these events as opportunities to connect personally with delegates so link the social programme to networking opportunities in the committee's minds as many conferences rely on exhibition and sponsorship income to fund the event, and in turn this often funds the association itself.

At MCI Dublin we also have a dedicated events team who have years of experience in collating social programmes within budget and tailored to the needs of clients. This knowledge, experience and personal contacts with suppliers is a real advantage when putting bids together as it will save the client money by cutting costs and delivering a first-class social programme to the delegates.

Innovative presentation techniques can show the enthusiasm that your association has for bringing the conference to your country. Tailor these methods to the association that you're presenting to; if it's a statisticians meeting for example, do they want a thoroughly professional presentation or can you inject an element of fun?

### **Some elements you will certainly have to consider include the following;**

- Graphically designing the bid document takes time, effort and expense. Changes will always need to be made so have this prepared well in advance.
- Who's presenting the bid? A joint presentation between the PCO and Local Organising committee will help combine the professionalism and enthusiasm that both parties bring to the table.
- What added-value elements can you bring to the presentation? Can you design sample advertisements? Will a video of the city help persuade the committee?

The bid process is a long and arduous journey, but a hugely rewarding one when your bid succeeds. Successfully bringing an international conference to your country will bring considerable prestige to the Host Organisation and the Conference Ambassador that initiated the bid. It will provide the local economy with a substantial boost in trade, raise the profile of the host city as an international destination for future conferences and give the national industry a unique opportunity to have complete access to their international peers.

If you are interested in bidding for a conference and would like to informally chat about the bid process, ascertain viability of a bid or see examples of bid documents, please contact **Jean Evans**, Director of Conferences at MCI Dublin today!

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