



MCI at the cutting edge of the latest trends
in the Meetings & Events Industry

CREATING CONTENT & CONTACT- THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL NEW MEETINGS

In an already crowded scientific and healthcare calendar, MCI demonstrates in a practical case story how a cocktail of innovative thinking, clever branding and meticulous planning helps create a successful new niche event.....

Meetings do not grow exponentially to fill the time available. And with today's pressures no one in their right mind wants to go to yet another meeting, however exotic the location, unless they are going to get something very concrete out of their hard earned time and money. There has to be a need for new meetings that bring value, both perceived and real.

And no longer do people talk so much about a conference destination, the hotel they stayed in or the food they ate, unless of course they were bad. In the modern global village they take all these things for granted. No, what they talk about increasingly when they get home from a meeting is the content – what they have learned which will help them in their professional lives – and the contacts they have made and what these can lead to.

A conference is no chance affair these days. It has to be carefully conceptualised and stage-managed, with more focused content and even more emphasis on pre-planned opportunities for contact. Above all it must fulfil a specific need.

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The scenario?

- thinking innovatively for new models

In addition the scientific arena is already seriously overcrowded and offers a huge challenge. Gone are the days when you could organise mega new congresses.

Here is a real case story faced by MCI back in 2005. The large and influential **International Society of Nephrology (ISN)** with its 9.000 members holds a biennial conference for 5.000-7.000 participants, with no other events in between except small research meetings for researchers.

The challenge was to create that 'something-in-between'; a new meeting model that bridged the two different worlds of science and patient care. MCI came up with a concept, untried and untested, which would not only let its client organization address a hereto unmet need of its members and raise revenue, but also ensure support from nephrologists who would recognise



all the new opportunities it afforded. At the same time, participation and funding from the pharmaceutical industry had to be secured by developing targeted packages and guaranteeing partners a maximum return on investment.

The first step was, of course, in-house research. From that it quickly became apparent that there was a need for a special forum between researchers & clinicians where laboratory research could be translated into hands-on clinical practice through a multidisciplinary approach. And also it was absolutely clear that these researchers and clinicians had limited time & budgets.

Branding for success

Out of this was born 'ISN Nexus' with a first event focussing on 'The Bone & the Kidney' (October 12-15, 2006, Copenhagen, Denmark), a ground-breaking model and a real marketing challenge to launch a new event from scratch with no content, no sponsors, no experience and no testimonials.

What's in a name?

Well, in this case a lot. The dictionary definition of Nexus is connection; a connected group; binding together, a central & most important point.

MCI created an attractive branding around the 'X' of NeXus & the connection concept. The core green & red colours of the brand were carefully controlled throughout, both in print and on the superb supporting website. And all the promotional material was written and produced at MCI, even the Speakers' Portfolio.

Everything was also linked at MCI where a multidisciplinary team worked closely with ISN from the summer of 2005. The autumn launch was extremely successful and attracted the necessary key sponsors. Then a teaser (Why Nexus? Why Now?) went out to potential participants in November, followed by the provisional programme at the end of March 2006.

There were supporting press releases to the international medical media, monthly e-updates for delegates as well as e-blasts to selected databases, related to the very separate yet interconnected 'bone' and 'kidney' communities with daring, thought-provoking messages as to why they should consider and indeed benefit from talking to each other.

It was sexy marketing, especially for the scientific community, but it worked.

The optimistic target for enrolment was 400-500 participants. **In the end registration had to be closed 2 weeks before the meeting. It was a sell-out with over 650 delegates.** And a huge number were non-members, giving ISN the added value of potential membership conversion. So the first part of the new event's success was therefore assured.

From bench-to-bedside content

And this new generation symposium? From the start the meeting was seen as an innovative concept and a hands-on educational opportunity. Knowledge and resources from two very different specialities – the bone & the kidney – were linked in Nexus, and also by top faculty & speakers who gave it a very international flavour. It was an unrivalled chance for participants to



come up with solutions which would ultimately affect the last and most important link in the chain – the patient in the hospital bed or clinic.

In total there were 37 excellent lectures from leading experts in the field, 5 comprehensive special symposia and 142 submitted abstracts, presented mostly as posters. Research and clinical sessions took place in parallel but it was the ‘**Translational sessions**’, building bridges between basic research (the bench) and translating it into clinical practice (the bedside), which were one of the outstanding features of ISN Nexus.

“I have been to so many conferences of so many sizes and have never seen a conference room for 600 so constantly full from morning to evening. People went to every lecture. They were all crowded out”, reflected MCI Conference Manager, Michael Podt.

And for the first time ever ISN organised an open-access ‘*Conference Capture*’, outsourced by MCI, with the symposium branding and available on the ISN website with photos, the presentations etc. giving the event a greater shelf-life and wider exposure as well as allowing the Society to offer unique educational content.

.....& bedside-back-to-bench contact!

The focus was very much on a two-way dialogue between physicians at one end and researchers at the other. ISN Nexus attracted many top scientists who had the chance to meet new people beyond their direct specialisations and normal circuit of contacts.

Networking is hugely important for people of different disciplines and here the networking/living ‘was easy’ and cross-discipline! The programme breaks and evening receptions were as crowded, lively and interactive as the working sessions. People were eager to exchange ideas about what they had heard, and at the same time build new connections and cooperation. Rumour even had it that some of the most thought-provoking discussions took place outside the lecture halls!

And there were no frills – no spouse programme – just content & contact, and that’s it.

A committed & enthusiastic organising team

MCI’s Amanda Wren (Marketing & Communications Manager), Michael Podt (Conference Manager) and Eralda Azizaj (Programme Manager) were all closely involved in the different stages of the project and the meticulous planning which went into it - especially when they exceeded their target and had to start catering for an extra 150 participants.

The secret of their success in one word was trust – **mutual trust** with ISN, with the scientific committee, and with the partners & sponsors.

“We had 5 main partners, but did not impose any specific packages on them. They understood the value of networking and sponsoring special hospitality areas, rather than the usual hard-selling stands at exhibitions”, commented the architect behind this campaign, Amanda Wren who has 15 years experience in healthcare marketing and very clear ideas about what is needed.



“Something which also distinguishes MCI from the average Professional Conference Organiser is that we also have a dedicated Programme Manager who guides the scientific committee and all the speakers throughout the entire process of the conference”, emphasises Michael Podt.

And all three still talk with the same passion and energy that they put into creating and organising this outstanding new event.

The destination & the venue

The destination turned out to be of less importance – purely a conference setting for 650. It was hardly even mentioned in all the pre-publicity, except as a bare place name next to the date. In fact in the 50-page final Nexus programme there was just one single page on Copenhagen. It is taken for granted today that the venue has state-of-the-art conference facilities at an affordable price plus good international access. But it is always important to have the support of a major airline and the agreement with SAS Scandinavian Airlines provided exactly just that.

It was 3½ days of lively intense interaction, indoor lectures and fun networking from Thursday to Sunday. Copenhagen, with its Indian summer in October and Friday Night of Culture, proved to be an ideal venue which did not lead the delegates too far astray from their content and certainly helped them to reinforce the contact!

The destination for this type of event needs to be easily reachable, to provide proper facilities & comforts and to have a venue which facilitates the networking and bonding.

A standing ovation for MCI

ISN Nexus received rave reviews from participants and partners alike.

From ISN President to MCI’s Michael Podt

“I want to write to you directly to let you know what a superb job you did in organizing the Nexus symposium in Copenhagen. The extraordinarily positive comments we got from registrants reflected not only the content but the organization of the event which was really flawless. Your advance planning, constant presence throughout the meeting and the effortless way you carried it out were very, very impressive. With that start, Nexus is likely to emerge as a major component of the ISN meeting strategy in the future, and you deserve a large share of the credit for that. Thank you from all of us in the ISN leadership”.

Dr. William G. Couser, MD
President, International Society of Nephrology

From a partner

“Congratulations for organising a great symposium in Copenhagen! I have only heard very positive feedback from attendees and for us as a partner it was a pleasure to be working with your organising team”.

Else Meijer, M.Sc., Sr. Manager Medical Communications
Genzyme Europe BV, Renal Business Unit



From a participant

"Thank you very much for organizing such a wonderful meeting. I think it was the best I have ever attended".

Dr Armando Luis Negri, MD, FACP

Eralda Azizaj and MCI's conference team did in fact get a spontaneous standing ovation from the faculty members, which is not at all common from scientists, and in a lift of all places! They had succeeded in creating an atmosphere of relaxation and fun in which this vital content & contact was able to thrive.

The participants themselves had benefited from the depth and focus of being able to concentrate on just one aspect of clinical need without all the distractions often found at mega meetings. And for the partners, ISN had provided a 100% target audience and they were the first to recognise this.

Looking to a bright future

"Meetings must be seen as a strategic function" says Robin Lokerman, CEO of MCI's Institutional Division. Lokerman sees MCI's role as helping Associations to think innovatively and create & develop new events which are not only profitable for them, but also by definition for all their members.

And the other lesson from this case story is that if Associations invest in serious marketing, it will bring a return on investment in terms of image, membership, prestige and even more importantly, long-term financial return.

Other potential industry partners have heard of the success of 'The Bone & The Kidney' are already approaching ISN to register an interest for when their own particular speciality in nephrology is selected.

The next ISN Nexus on 'the Kidney & Hypertension' takes place in Vienna, 29 November – 2 December 2007 - www.isn-online.org/nexus/hypertension. And MCI has already started work on site selection for two more symposia in 2008.

For more information

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