

Case Study: Event Bidding

Event bidding – responding to the challenge of the business tourism market

The annual British Conference Venues Survey* last year showed that the UK events market experienced a slight downturn in the period 2006-8 (in terms of direct revenue to venues) with an estimated value of £7.2 billion, compared with £8 billion in the 3-year period 2005-7. This is due mainly to a fall in the average number of events per venue (375 in 2006-8 compared with 396 in 2005-7) and fewer residential events, with a significant economic impact since residential events and conferences account for almost 60 per cent of overall venue income from events.

However, despite this inevitable downturn during the period of recession, the conferencing, events and business tourism market remains vitally important to the national, regional and local economies. To address this new challenge, Leicester Shire Promotions has developed its business tourism strategy to focus on event bidding.

Driving the business tourism strategy forward

Martin Peters, Chief Executive of Leicester Shire Promotions, explained: "Over the last year the business tourism market has changed dramatically and although we have supported our venue partners, it is becoming clear that this market will take some time to recover. Therefore our more strategic approach could not have come at a better time. By clearly identifying events and conferences that have a strategic fit with the destination as well as well placed contacts, the destination has a much stronger chance of attracting specific events instead of a more scattergun approach.

"We are capable of researching the potential events and with the support of key partners such as the universities and local authorities, our resources can be more focused. The response from destination partners has been very encouraging and potential conference organisers are already extremely keen to work with us. If successful, event bidding can have a massive and sustainable impact on the destination's business tourism economy."

Early activity makes positive gains

Activity undertaken through the Event Bidding service has included the development of a 'City Conference Hub', encompassing the Cultural Quarter – Curve, Phoenix Square and Athena – as part of a proactive pitch to associations looking for city-based locations. Lorna Savage, Events Co-ordinator at Curve theatre, added: "Curve is a relatively new building and after just over 18 months of business, we are renewing our focus on commercial hire with a view to increase sales by at least 30 per cent over the next financial year. Our exposure to national events organisers via Leicester Shire Promotions is a much-valued resource. I look forward to continuing to work with Leicester Shire Promotions in bid for prestigious and nationally recognised events. This approach will undoubtedly benefit Curve by increasing our profile and ultimately, bringing new business to Curve and the city as a whole."

Leicester Shire Promotions has also co-ordinated events at the House of Commons for the Association of British Professional Conference Organisers (ABPCO) and leading trade journalists. These dinners have resulted in enhanced profile for the destination within the membership

group, including a number of familiarisation trips to Leicester and Leicestershire, hosted and arranged by Leicester Shire Promotions.

Kay England, Chief Executive of imago, said: "There has been a fundamental shift in the nature of business tourism and Leicester Shire Promotions' process of bidding for targeted events and conferences will be key to the future of securing business for Leicester and Leicestershire. Feedback from the professional conference organisers and conference trade press journalists attending the dinner at the House of Commons, co-ordinated with Leicester Shire Promotions, confirmed that our commitment to developing the destination's business tourism strategy around event bidding is well-founded."

Global conference secured for Leicester

The School of Archaeology and Ancient History at the University of Leicester is preparing to host the prestigious and world-renowned Society for Historical Archaeology Conference after a bid to secure the event by Leicester Conferences and Leicester Shire Promotions proved too good to turn down. The Society's annual conference is expected to bring over 1,000 delegates from around the world to Leicester in 2013 and is estimated to bring in around half a million pounds to the local visitor economy.

During much of 2009, the School of Archaeology and Ancient History at Leicester University and Leicester Shire Promotions were busy putting together a bid to attract one of the most important events on the global calendar within archaeology and ancient history. The annual conference of the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) is usually held within North America. Every five years however, the SHA look to take the event further afield with the next opportunity occurring in 2013.

To assist with putting the proposal together, the School worked with Leicester Conferences and Leicester Shire Promotions. Dr Audrey Horning, Reader in Historical Archaeology, University of Leicester comments: "The service received has been great, very approachable and flexible in terms of the needs of the Society. Two visits from North America were conducted to look at the University's facilities and accommodation and to consider the financial aspects of the conference.

"Gill Brown from Leicester Shire Promotions was very helpful in spearheading visits to Leicestershire and the city of Leicester as well as obtaining letters of support which were included in the bid. Additional venues for evening entertainment were also explored with Leicester Shire Promotions and we will still be working very closely with both the University's conference services and Leicester Shire Promotions to continue with our arrangements."

* Results taken from Eventia's 2009 'UK Events Market Trends Survey' (UKEMTS)



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Imago