

## DIGITAL EDGE

Event organisers and Mice venues embrace technology to cut costs and help clients. **B8**

## TECHNOLOGY

# Mice going digital for industry edge

Event organisers improve productivity and cost-effectiveness through e-payments, automated attendee registration and other enhancements. By **Suchat Sritama**



The International Convention Centre in Hat Yai, Songkhla is a Mice venue for the South.

**M**ice venues and event organisers are bracing for technological disruptions by creating new platforms that not only reduce operating costs but also offer personalised experiences to business travellers and stay engaged with customers.

One of the key global trends for the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (Mice) industry is the adoption of technology and responding to technological disruptions.

For example, the use of social media and social applications increases connectivity and interactions among Mice attendees at pre- and post-meeting events, allowing them to continue to stay connected year-round.

Technology can also play a role in Mice operations, improving productivity and cost-effectiveness through e-payments, automated attendee registration, business matching and meeting

scheduling, database management, security, traffic management, and real-time dissemination of conference and event content.

#### TECHNOLOGICAL DISRUPTION

Loy Joon How, general manager of Impact Exhibition Management Co, says Mice operators and event organisers are responding to these technological disruptions.

They are creating new technology platforms that not only help reduce their costs, but also offer personalised experiences, moving away from the traditional formats, staying highly engaged with customers through better delivery of content, exchanging knowledge and receiving real-time customer feedback.

"Digital, virtual reality and artificial intelligence technology will play an increasing role in the future of the Mice industry," Mr How said.

He said Thailand is an attractive destination

for events of all sorts. But Hong Kong and Singapore have adapted to become destinations that provide customers with a brand experience for their events, with unique experiential offerings.

"I think Thailand can do it too. We can reposition ourselves to be an international destination for quality business events that deliver innovations to support our diversified manufacturing and service industries. This means going beyond our traditional sun, sand, sea, value-for-money and cultural offerings."

"To achieve this, our current competencies and capabilities need to be improved through human capital developments," Mr How said.

In order to stay competitive, the industry will need to observe the ever-changing market landscape closely, both locally and regionally, renew and reinvent traditional business models and formats, adopt new technology and offer solutions that are relevant to increasing customer demand.



**VENUES GET EXPANSION FOR GROWTH**

Sakchai Pattarapreechakul, president of N.C.C. Management and Development Co (NCC), operator of Queen Sirikit National Convention Center (QSNCC), said the company has lined up a three-year investment plan for QSNCC, which is expected to start in late 2018.

NCC, a company under the business empire of billionaire Charoen Sirivadhanabhakdi has operated QSNCC since 1991 and the government early this year approved the extension of the contract to 25 more years after it expired in 2016.

Mr Sakchai said the concession renewal ensures the company will invest about 15 billion baht in QSNCC.

Under the development plan, NCC will renovate the whole centre and will enlarge the total space from over 20,000 square meters to more than 70,000 sq m as well as adding more parking space and improve Mice facilities.

The new investment plan is expected to take about three years to complete.

NCC has just extended its management deal with the Prince of Songkla University (PSU) to operate the 60th Anniversary of His Majesty the King's Accession to the Throne International Convention Center in Hat Yai (ICC Hat Yai) for another five years (2017-2022).

The deal is aimed at strengthening the Mice industry in Songkhla province and the southern region and cash in on special economic zones — specifically the border area of Padang Besar in Malaysia and Sadao district in Thailand.

Mr Sakchai says NCC Thailand has the potential to become a Mice hub in the Southeast Asia region thanks to quality facilities with cheaper prices compared to Hong Kong and Singapore. Moreover, Thailand can be centre for Mice the CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam) countries.

In order to cater more international events into Thailand, NCC has recently established NCC International Events Co to organise business events of all sizes as well as organise pre- and post-conference services.

Bhiraj Buri Group executive director Panitha Buri said an additional venue called Bhiraj Convention Centre is scheduled to be completed later this year at Bitec. The new centre is aimed at attracting more international organisers, particularly from the Middle East and Europe markets.

The large-scale expansion will consist of new halls with a combined floor space of 3,574 sq m that can be designed for a wide variety of events such as live performances; corporate meetings; plenary sessions; social galas, weddings and product launches that can accommodate 500 to 3,600 attendees.

The project also includes 12 meeting rooms equipped with the latest business technology, designed for informal gatherings, seminars or breakout sessions of 30 to 170 persons.

The investment comes at a pivotal time for the Mice industry, which logged an impressive 2016 occupancy rate of 54%, and is projected for 5-8% growth this year.

Over the last few years, Impact has continued



Impact Muang Thong Thani is one of the biggest Mice venues in Southeast Asia, with 140,000 square metres of exhibition space.

to upgrade and improve facilities to offer customers modern and technologically advanced venues that provide diverse solutions and choices for customers.

With the completion of Impact's second hotel, the Ibis, and a brand new retail lifestyle mall called the Portal, future strategic developments will include projects to integrate current facilities with entertainment-related venues such as go-kart circuits, water theme parks, and more. This is hoped to distinguish them from just being a Mice venue to a key integrated Mice city within the region.

**TCEB FOCUSES ON SUSTAINABILITY**

Chiruit Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya, president of the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), said it has launched a 20-year vision looking toward leading organisations to develop the Mice industry as a mechanism for Thailand's broader economic development.

The initiative is aimed at creating stability, distributing prosperity to all sectors through the use of innovation, and creating sustainability by implementing principles from the philosophy of sufficiency economy of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Guided by this long-term vision, four key strategies have been developed to drive the country's Mice. First is growing in parallel with the country's development plans, with a focus on maintaining the current market and finding new markets.

The targeted industries under the Thailand 4.0 policy include food, agriculture, biotechnology, public health and wellness, as well as other potential industries such as energy, transport,

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LOY JOON HOW  
General manager  
Impact Exhibition Management Co

communications, and entertainment.

The second strategy is growing in a high potential market, with a focus on regions that have high growth and strong connections with the development of Thailand's economy.

Under the strategy, primary regions are Asean and Asia; secondary regions are Europe, America and Oceania; while other potential regions are Eastern Europe and Latin America. Activities outlined for targeted markets in these regions include participating in international trade shows, organising road show events, appointing representatives offices, and reinforcing promotion activities to enhance targeted sectors in these areas.

In addition, the bureau is creating the Mice Intelligence & Mice Innovation unit, which will gather information, analyse market direction, and help develop business plans for operators in the private sector to improve competi-



An additional Bitec venue called Bhiraj Convention Centre is scheduled to be completed later this year.



tive capabilities.

The third strategy is growing with equality by increasing the opportunities for the Mice industry growth as well as maximising the competence of Mice cities and high potential cities, namely Songkhla, Chiang Rai, and Udon Thani.

The development will be enhanced through activities such as Thailand Domestic Mice Mart, Luangprabang-Indochina-Mawlamyine Economic Corridor International Conference, workshops in special economic zones, and key events under the government's Super Cluster Policy that have helped establish local events such as Halal Festival in Hat Yai and the E-San Silk Festival.

The fourth strategy is strong growth by strengthening the Mice industry through development. An example of the bureau's success story is the initiative of Thailand Mice Venue Standard, which was developed into Asean Mice Venue Standard. The campaign establishes the international standard of convention and exhibition venues in the regional level.

"TCEB expects that in fiscal 2018, (Oct 1, 2017-Sept 30, 2018), there will be a total of 30.1 million Mice travellers in Thailand, generating revenue of 174 billion baht, separated into 1.19 million international Mice visitors, generating revenue of 112 billion baht, and 29 million domestic Mice travellers, generating 62 billion baht in revenue," Mr Chiruit said.

**LATEST DEVELOPMENTS AT BANGKOK'S MICE FACILITIES**



**Impact:** Completion of Ibis hotel, go-kart circuit, and a lifestyle mall called the Portal. Future developments will include an entertainment theme.



**NCC:** Planning a three-year investment and expansion plan for QSNCC, which is expected to use more than 15 billion baht.



**Bitec:** Bhiraj Convention Centre is scheduled to be completed late this year.

Source: Bangkok Post

BANGKOK POST GRAPHICS