



IAEM Research Symposium: Discovering the Next Generation of Convention and Exhibition Centers

Executive Summary

On 6 October 2005, IAEM hosted a new IAEM Symposium that addressed and related questions about the critical factors that may contribute to the successful design, construction and use of exhibition halls of the future. A panel of experts assembled to explore the subject in great detail.

The symposium was convened by Cleveland's eleven-member Convention Facilities Authority (CFA), the Cleveland CVB and IAEM. Although the CFA was formed to move forward in determining the viability of a new renovated convention center in Cleveland, the symposium research was applicable for all cities considering convention center expansions or building new convention centers.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an objective analysis of the findings of this research and is to be used as a learning tool among show organizers, exhibitors and others who work closely with the exhibition industry. IAEM will offer guidance and resources for anyone seeking information about convention centers.

What will be the critical factors that may contribute to the successful design, construction and use of exhibition and convention halls of the future? An IAEM Symposium addressed that and related questions. On 6 October 2005, an expert panel assembled at the Renaissance Cleveland Hotel in Cleveland, Ohio to explore the subject in detail.

American exhibition and convention centers have evolved in the last 50 years from simple unadorned cinderblock structures to modern hubs that support all sorts of complex communications. A substantial expansion of exhibition and convention space has taken place in the United States bringing the current inventory of exhibition space to more than 85 million square feet, a 30 percent increase in five years.

While many communities now have modern exhibition and convention centers in place, others are still considering new construction. Soon those buildings that have already been constructed or renovated will be due for another round of upgrades and/or expansion. Cleveland is one city at the brink of advancing the effort for a new center.

The Program

Robert Dallmeyer, president of RD International, Los Angeles, served as moderator of the daylong event. Dallmeyer is considered by many to be one of the industry's most insightful observers, authors and facilitators.

Opening the program was Doug Ducate, President of the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR), Chicago. Ducate provided a comprehensive review of the development of the purpose built buildings that serve the exhibition and convention industry.

- CEIR reports there are more than 13,000 exhibitions a year in the United States and Canada. This breaks down to 10,000 Business-to-business markets and 3,000 Business-to-consumer markets. These 13,000 exhibitions are held in more than 2,000 venues with 1.5 million exhibiting companies and more than 75 million attendees in the year 2000.
- The following top 16 cities host ½ of the events in the industry:

Anaheim	New Orleans
Atlanta	New York
Boston	Orlando
Chicago	San Antonio
Dallas	San Diego
Denver	San Francisco
Las Vegas	Toronto
Nashville	Washington, D.C.

CEIR performed an Exhibition Industry Census in 2005 that revealed the dramatic increase in the use of convention centers by exhibitions/events from 2000.

U.S. venues in 2000	38%
U.S. venues in 2005	50%

Industry Background

Ducate said that the exhibition industry is vulnerable because there is a perceived value decline in some exhibitions. The industry has been receiving poor publicity recently due to declining attendance rates coupled with new facility growth outpacing the growth in the number of new events.

The industry is proving the value of face-to-face marketing. Exhibitions bring buyers and sellers together so they can interact face-to-face and do comparison shopping. Personal contact with others is imperative to make sure that ideas and thoughts are understood and shared. Relationships are the key to driving commerce. Online marketing, in-home offices and smaller field sales forces foster the need for exhibitions. Companies are becoming customer-centric instead of product-centric. Successful companies want conversations with their customers and potential customers and exhibitions provide that opportunity

Contemporary Architectural Design Issues

Two nationally known convention center architects, David Greusel, principal of HOK Venue, Kansas City, and Chris Eseman, AIA, partner of LMN Architects, Seattle, discussed the architectural and design challenges that have affected exhibition and convention facilities. They examined contemporary issues such as energy conservation, security, ambiance and the changing demand ratios for exhibition and conference space.

Convention centers are evolving as trends and needs in the exhibition industry are changing. One of these trends is evolving program demands.

- Studies show there is a 45 percent increase in the need for breakout sessions at exhibitions.
- There is a high need of flexible meeting space (for example, San Francisco expanded three stories of meeting space, but did not expand the show floor areas).
- 34 percent increase in fixed seat venues with state-of-the-art technology.
- 27 percent increase in large assembly spaces such as ballrooms and outdoor terraces (for example, McCormick Place in Chicago is doing a 100,000 NSF ballroom expansion).
- 20 percent increase in large banquet functions / Internet broadcasts which can take advantage of column-free space.

Convention centers are selling machines – if they cannot sell, they are worth very little. One must sell the building itself, sell the show, sell the city. Delivering a memorable experience which will make them want to come back is the key. Factors that help a convention center sell are:

- Beauty – attractive, inspirational, memorable. Efficiency and beauty do not have to be contradictory;
- Connecting to the city;
- Functionality – provide proper relationships of size of support areas and separation between public space and service areas.
- Sense of place – tells a story about the place. For example, the form of the building might look like natural settings in the area.

As demand for greater value increases so does the convertibility and flexibility of the building and its space. Demands have increased for column-free space, moveable partitions, moveable exhibit floors, brandable buildings and outdoor space. Demands have increased for comfortable spaces for relaxation and private work. Just because someone is away on business does not necessarily mean they do not have any work to do back in the office.

Exhibition & Event Organizer Needs and Preferences

A panel of exhibition and event organizers followed to discuss the issues that are most important to them as planners. In the face of sharply rising costs and the increasing demands by exhibitors and others for greater returns on their time and investment, how buildings are designed and constructed in the future can have a substantial impact on all customers' bottom line results. The panel included Darrell Denny, executive vice president, Penton Media, Laguna Hills, Calif.; Dave Lutz, CMP, Conferon Global Services, president of ExpoExchange and Conferon Inc.; and Sue Barr, exposition & future sites manager, Rubber Division/American Chemical Society, Akron.

This panel of experts indicated that show organizers are looking for certain features when considering a facility that include:

Amount and configuration of exhibit space	Floor load limits for heavy displays and equipment
Column-free space	Adequate docks and ramps with reasonable grade
Meeting room and ballroom space	Costs of services – labor, catering, etc
Storage	Marshalling yard
Ceiling of at least 30 feet	Internet / wireless capabilities

Show organizers' needs vary by event. Design mistakes are frequently made if organizers' needs are not taken into consideration when designing a facility. These mistakes include:

- Poor lighting in ballrooms Impractical design that is frequently the result of value engineering during construction.
- Electronic signs for building and meeting rooms would help cut down signage costs for every single exhibition.
- Lack of designated areas for sponsorship signs.
- Decorating treatments to public areas that limit functionality.
- Food quality, service and cost.
- A convention center hotel must be connected or near the facility. While it is important to have a hotel connected to the facility, it is also important for hotel price range options to be available in the area.

Technology is Changing How Buildings are Designed and Used

Central to the consideration of future buildings is the issue of technology, which now drives many decisions regarding what is appropriate to include in building infrastructure. Leading the discussion about this key topic were Walter Wilson, CCLD, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta; David Langford, vice president of technology for Smart City Networks, Las Vegas; Bob Leon, president, Colortone Staging and Rentals, Cleveland; and Brian Jacobs, area manager design engineering, SBC AES Engineering, Cincinnati.

Technology is the future of communications. When designing communication systems, flexibility is the key. A designer should consider the customers to determine the types of needs they will have in 5-10 years and make sure that what they are designing is flexible and adaptable to those needs. Examples include channels for floor cables, so that people do not trip, breakout panels, transformers and control of lighting in meeting rooms AND on the exhibit floor.

Security of a network is important as customers will want to link their network to yours. This requires a need for security when combining public and private networks. The network also needs to be well-managed so that when one designer leaves, the next designer will be able to work on it.

Integration of voice, data and video is also being used at exhibitions. Pedestrian and taxi and shuttle bus access is becoming more of a demand so that it is easy and convenient for attendees to get to the convention center from hotels that are farther away. Fiber optic networks that connect these hotels to the Convention Center will allow remote registration. Exhibition attendees are booking hotels based on where and how far the network reaches.

Another important point mentioned by the panel of experts was leaving room to grow. As technology changes and there are more demands being made by show organizers and exhibitors, IT specialists will have to get back into the walls and ceilings to add more wiring in order to upgrade. Also, make sure the infrastructure is well-built. One can never be sure where organizers want to place exhibits. One rule of thumb was to have access every 30 feet, but that is almost not enough anymore. As wireless technology expands designers must remember that wireless still requires cable and wiring support. The convention center needs to provide the wireless service, but also must be able to support the wireless service.

Building User Issues – General Service Contractors, Labor and Food Service

Anchoring the presentations was a panel of building users who discussed the key elements that must be considered in future building design and construction for their needs and the requirements of their customers. The panelists included David Thompson, general manager, Geo. E. Fern Company, Cincinnati; Bob McClintock, vice president SMG, Atlantic City; and Kevin Patton, business representatives, Teamsters Local #407.

Every city faces challenges when it is taking on a large project such as a convention center. Some of the challenges that Cleveland faces is competition from nearby cities such as Columbus, Cincinnati and Indianapolis and national destinations like Chicago and Las Vegas.

General Service contractors are key to meeting show managers' needs and are there to help you and them. They have often learned about flaws in the facility as they have worked there numerous times and can give good advice on how to handle issues. Things that service contractors look for in a building are:

- How far of a push it is from the dock to the farthest booth.
- Crate storage – 4,000 booths expect 4 million pounds of freight. Can the building let you store it in pits or do you have to load onto trailers that leave and return?
- Useable space. Come up with a hard example and ask the facility, "If I put this here, can you make it work right here?"
- Where does the electricity come from? Water? Natural gas?
- If multiple shows, can the city provide enough quality labor for both shows?

Summary

The IAEM Research Symposium was a Cleveland-focused symposium, but it can be applied to any meeting facility in the United States. Technology drives many decisions regarding the elements that are appropriate to include in the building infrastructure and building plans. The exhibition industry is growing and as it flourishes, needs change within the industry. Convention centers are vital in supporting each and every exhibition that comes to their facility. As the industry grows competition between cities increases so it is essential that convention centers and destinations be alert to industry trends to remain competitive.