# PROFESSIONALISING EVENT PRACTITIONERS: THE EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF EVENT MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of events in recent decades has resulted in a burgeoning of the event management industry. As the event management industry grows and consolidates worldwide, associations play an increasingly significant role in professional support to the industry by ensuring the continued growth and success of event management professionals. This paper reviews the literature on professional associations and specifically explores the educational role of event management associations. It concludes that professional event management associations play a significant role in providing strategic direction to the event management industry. An important component of this is providing educational direction and services that aim at professionalising event management and event management practitioners.

Key Words: Professional Associations, Event Management, Education

INTRODUCTION

Event management has emerged over the past decade as a vibrant sector of the tourism and leisure industries. The number, diversity and popularity of events has also grown throughout this period. As the number of events increase, there is a growing realization about the continuing need to develop event management professionals who are able to create, organise and manage events (Getz, 1997). Although there are many events, which are successfully crewed by volunteers, the increasing competition to secure major events is giving some impetus to the trend to create fully professionalised events (Getz, 1997). Volunteers continue to play a significant role in the management and organization of events, nevertheless, the industry is increasingly relying on well educated, experienced and professional event managers.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS LITERATURE

The literature that has been published on professional associations is scant, scattered among a variety of disciplines and consequently has little breadth (Rodenhauser, 1999:417). Promoting the industry, organising training, offering specialist advice and information, researching and publishing, and providing networking opportunities for members are primary activities of many associations (Crosetto & Salah, 1997; Kloss, 1999). Kloss (1999:71) for example, notes that:

the professional association exists to advance the standing of the members of the occupation or profession by setting educational and other standards governing the profession, advocating
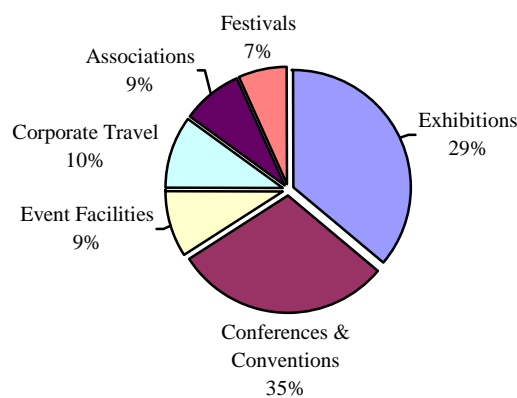
for public and private policies, aiding members in their professional development, and advancing professional practice through research and information dissemination

Specific issues that have been investigated in relation to professional associations have dealt with long term strategic planning (Ayal, 1986; Kloss, 1999), association lifecycles and administrative dynamics (Rodenhauser, 1999), the role of politicization and advocacy (Imber & Horowitz, 1999), the need for profiling and promotion (Crosetto & Salah, 1997; Montgomery & Rutherford, 1994), and relationship marketing and membership behaviour (Frank, 1999; Gruen, Summers & Acito, 2000). These have been in relation to professional associations in a number of diverse industries such as real estate (Ayal, 1986), pyschotherapy (Rodenhauser, 1999), sociology (Imber & Horowitz, 1999), environmental health (Frank, 1999) and life underwriters (Gruen, Summers & Acito, 2000). As yet, there has been very little academic research that focuses on the role and responsibilities of event management associations (Arcodia & Reid, 2002, 2003). While there are a number of studies which review the educational role of organisations in other industries, there are no studies previously conducted that specifically investigate the role of education within event management associations.

METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this study an event management association was defined as one that responds to one or more of the sectors of the event industry such as festivals, tradeshows, exhibitions, incentives and meetings. Education was defined as any activity which promotes further understanding of the event processes. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the categories of event management associations, however, it is acknowledged that these associations will overlap in some of the categories and were analysed according to the title of the association. Using a purposive approach, this study identified 152 professional associations worldwide involved with event management. While this list may not be exhaustive, it provides a very strong sample of event management associations. The associations were identified by conducting searches via the Internet, in the academic literature, and from trade journals and personal contacts. Specific associations were contacted by letter or email to inform them of the study and to seek their involvement.

Figure 1
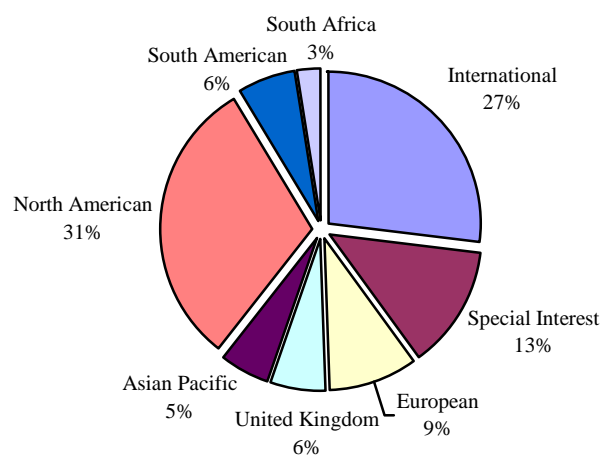Breakdown of Event Management Association by Category



Content analysis was used in this study because it is a multi-purpose method that is useful for investigating a wide range of issues in which the content of communication serves as a basis of inference (Weber, 1985). It is an appropriate methodology to achieve authenticity and validity in the type of qualitative data this study gathered. It did not use nor adapt an existing framework for analysis of the content of the educational mission, goals and objectives, services and professional standards. That is, the categories of meaning emerged by identifying

recurring themes in the data rather than being imposed by an existing typology from the literature or a preconceived framework developed specifically for the research.

The associations were classified according to location (see figure 2). The categories included international, regional and special interest associations but there were numerous sub-categories. Many of the international associations for example, have chapters worldwide, however only the mother association was included to minimise repetition. Regional associations were divided according to continents which resulted in the following six sub-categories: North American, European, United Kingdom, Asian Pacific, South American and African. Special interest associations were included as there was a number in the sample that could not be easily accommodated within the first two categories, yet they were deemed significant to the study because they dealt with event management issues within the context of a specific industry.

Figure 2
Regional Distribution of Event Management Associations by Category



The data do not allow for a productive conclusion about differences that may exist between associations that draw from organisational members in contrast to those that draw from individual membership.
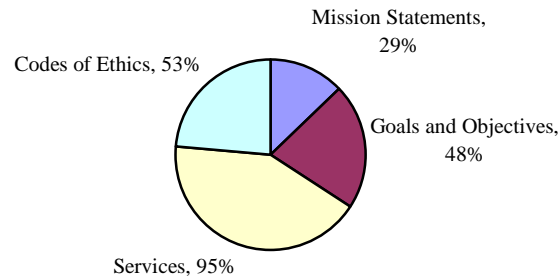
METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

A worldwide study presents some specific challenges and reference needs to be made to at least two caveats. Firstly, there is no worldwide registry of event management associations; consequently, the exact number of associations involved with the event management industry worldwide is unknown. Nevertheless, after conducting an extensive search, the 152 that were included in the study is more than likely a very strong sample population. Secondly, in addition to verifying the number of event management associations operating worldwide, there is an issue of language and cultural orientation. Associations around the world are in existence due to the need within their regions for support in the event management industry, so their primary language may be one other than English. While the working language of all associations is clearly not English, the internationalisation of English in recent years, together with the fact that many associations draw membership from more than one country, has served to minimise this problem. Nevertheless, 32% of the associations are based in North America and this provides for some cultural bias that cannot be avoided in this study.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The findings indicated that education was a consistently relevant variable of event management association's mission statements, goals and objectives, services and stated codes of ethics (see figure 3).

Figure 3
Distribution of Education as a Variable in the Categories of Analysis



Mission Statements, 29%
Codes of Ethics, 53%
Goals and Objectives, 48%
Services, 95%

Mission Statements

Education is increasingly becoming a key factor within associations as a means for members to improve their knowledge of the industry. This was supported by the most significant finding of the research indicating that education was the most commonly occurring category in the mission statements among event management associations. Of the 63% (96) of event management associations that had mission statements or other statements of purpose, 29% (28) of these placed a considerable emphasis on the importance of education to their association. This was evidenced by the following excerpt from the International Festivals and Events Association's (IFEA, 2001:3) mission statement:

IFEA's primary mission is to serve members by providing educational opportunities and programs that improve the quality of every aspect of the work of festivals and events.

With over 3,000 members, the IFEA is in a strong position to bring professionals in the event management industry in contact with each other, provide educational opportunities such as seminars and conferences, as well as the *Certified Festival Executive* program that assists in building the knowledge base of its members.

Included in this category were other factors such as improving the professionalism of the industry. This was detailed in the International Association of Conference Centres' (IACC, 2001) mission statement, which stated:

IACC encourages the sharing of ideas, knowledge and technical skills and providing education to its membership with the belief that by working together in a unified way, our industry can provide the best possible service to all customers and be distinctively successful in delivering conference services to all customers.

By providing education to members, the IACC believes that this will improve the members and the way in which they do business. This in turn contributes to those who do business with association members which leads to an increased level of satisfaction, further promoting their skills to others and thus enhancing the professional view of their industry.

When analysed further into special interest, international and regional associations, there were marked differences in the importance of education as a variable within the mission statements of event management associations, as depicted in Table 1. Special interest associations were those that were specially developed to respond to event needs within a specific industry e.g. health and medical conventions.

Table 1

Distribution of Key Variables of Mission Statements by Origin

| | International | Europe | United Kingdom | North America | Asia Pacific | Special Interest |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Education** | Promotion/ Positioning | Promotion/ Positioning | **Education** | Promotion/ Positioning | Promotion/ Positioning |
| 2 | Networking/ Sharing Experience | **Education** | Up to Date Information/ Communication | Up to Date Information/ Communication | Career Advancement/ Professional Development | Networking/ Sharing Experience |
| 3 | Up to Date Information/ Communication | Networking/ Sharing Experience | Ethics/ Standards/ Integrity | Promotion/ Positioning | Growth | **Education** |
| 4 | Ethics/ Standards/ Integrity | Services | **Education** | Networking/ Sharing Experience | Professionalism | Professionalism |
| 5 | Promotion/ Positioning | Professionalism | Professionalism | Professionalism | Networking/ Sharing Experience | Improving |

International and North American event management associations seemed to place a greater importance on education, as this was the most frequently occurring variable in both of these groups. This may be explained by the sample containing a larger number in the North American and international categories. Additionally, the two groups may be linked due to the dominance of North Americans in the event management industry and the possibility that head offices of international associations may be situated in North America. This in turn, may explain the aligning of ideals of education as an important variable within their mission statements.

Europe, special interest groups and the United Kingdom all had education as a key variable within their mission statements with it rating as second, third and fourth respectively. Europe and the United Kingdom have well established event management industries, which could explain why they are interested in education. In comparison, associations in the Asian Pacific region did not register education within their top five variables. As a relatively new entrant to the industry the Asian Pacific region has acknowledged promotion, professional advancement and growth as significant variables. Once established within the event industry, their focus may change to providing educational opportunities as do other regions.

Goals and Objectives
Of the 52% (79) of event management associations that had stated goals and objectives the education category was represented by 48% (38) of the associations. This related to the professional development and competency of associations members that was achieved through educational and training programs that associations offer. The Canadian Association of Exposition Management (CAEM, 2001) acknowledged this within their objectives stating:

To achieve this mission, CAEM has established four objectives:-…provide opportunities for the professional development and education of members.

The Canadian Association of Exposition Management that was established in the mid 1970s and has a current membership of over 330, is responsive to those serving Canada's trade and consumer show industry. The association is providing a valuable service by developing objectives that assist members in enhancing career opportunities and professional competencies. This has been acknowledged through its large membership base. The Chicago Society of Association Executives (CSAE, 2001) further noted that education and training was an important focus of their goals and objectives by stating that the:

Association Forum shall serve the nation's second largest association and non-profit business community and its suppliers by capitalizing on high customer intimacy and accessibility to: - deliver superior professional education for all levels of expertise and special interests, - enhance the careers of its members and identify qualified talent for association employers…

When analysed further into special interest, international and regional associations, there were marked differences in the importance of education as a variable within the stated goals and objectives of event management associations, as evidenced in Table 2. The North American, Special Interest and European associations all had education as a key variable within their goals and objectives with it rating as first, second and third respectively. However, the International, Asian Pacific, South American, African and United Kingdom categories only rated this variable in fifth or sixth position. This may be attributable to cultural differences about ethical business practices or the lack of recognised training or educational staff within these regions.

Table 2
Distribution of key variables of Goals & Objectives by Region of Origin

|   | International | Europe | United Kingdom | North America | Asia Pacific | Special Interest | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Standards & Ethics | Identity & Recognition | Premier Representative Association | **Education/ Training** | Identity & Recognition | Information Exchange | Standards & Ethics |
| 2 | Identity & Recognition | Information Exchange | Business Management | Information Exchange | Networks & Collegiality | **Education/ Training** | Information Exchange |
| 3 | Networks & Collegiality | **Education/ Training** | Networks & Collegiality | Premier Representative Association | Standards & Ethics | Identity & Recognition | Identity & Recognition |
| 4 | Information Exchange | Premier Representative Association | Membership | Identity & Recognition | Membership | Networks & Collegiality | Networks & Collegiality |
| 5 | **Education/ Training** | Networks & Collegiality | Information Exchange | Networks & Collegiality | **Education/ Training** | Business Management | **Education/ Training** |

Services

Services that event management associations provided their members was then analysed with 62% (94) associations responding to requests for information about the services they provided. The provision of education was a key service offered by event management associations with 94.7% (89) providing some form of educational services and products. This category consisted of a wide array of themes including annual conferences, tradeshows, seminars, workshops, training programs, education and certification, online educational services, research, consultation, library facilities and access, publications for sale, regular meetings and the production and delivery of social programs. These themes were grouped together either due to their direct educational objectives, ie. through training and certification, or indirectly through the networking of members at social occasions. A majority of the associations 62.8% (59) organised and produced an annual educational conference and/or a tradeshow. This provides members with the opportunity to network, learn about the latest issues affecting their profession and to experience some of the new products that are in the marketplace. The British Association of Conference Destinations (BACD, 2000:1) states that:

'CONFER' is an annual exhibition held in Kensington Town Hall, which gives conference organisers a unique opportunity to obtain the latest information on conference, meeting,

exhibition and incentive travel facilities in the top conference destinations across the British Isles…

The Convention Industry Council (CIC, 2001) further supports the educational opportunity that the conference presents by stating that by "…producing the CIC Forum, an educational seminar where industry professionals exchange ideas and information and learn about important issues affecting the business community…". The knowledge that can be gleaned from networking and conversation with others at these conferences and tradeshows is another priority for many of the participants.

Seminars and workshops was another theme important to 45.7% (43) of event management associations. These bring members and industry professionals together to share ideas and research in a smaller setting than at the annual conferences. The World Council for Venue Management (WCVM, 2002) notes that these seminars and workshops were essential to support the objectives its association had outlined in the strategic management process (Arcodia & Reid, 2002). They stated that the:

WCVM shall perform the following functions in order to achieve the objectives stated in the proceeding article: …2. Provide a forum for the exchange of information, papers, articles and research related to the practice of public assembly facility management…

The direct relevance of training programs, education and certification was another factor of importance to 63.8% (60) of event management associations. Education and certification are seen as ways in which the associations can assist the industry in professionalising and improving the quality of service. Education is also a way of supporting the professional development of members in their current positions or to enhance their skills for future positions within the industry. The provision of these training and education programs is in no way limited to the traditional teaching delivery methods. The Canadian Society of Association Executives (CSAE, 2001) includes a variety of methods from face to face contact through workshops, to online distance education programs at different levels. It states that:

CSAE's professional development programs provide additional worth to its members…*Online Education Program* – The Association Management Education (AME) distance learning program addresses the key competencies of association management via the Internet.

This allows flexibility for members who have a professional practice to operate as well as family commitments. The use of the Internet has opened up a wide range of facilities for members of associations. Linking members' professional pages to an association's website ensures that members are able to be accessed more efficiently than by finding a certain type of event management company or individual through traditional means. By including online directories on association's websites this can be achieved. The use of chatrooms and online learning programs further enhances the Internet as an educational tool for event management associations. Chatrooms enable members to discuss issues that are affecting them or their businesses with colleagues who may be able to offer suggestions or advice. The Internet is a valuable research tool as it offers very quick access to such information.

Access to an association owned and managed library collection and access to otherwise confidential publications is another educational service that 25.5% (24) of event management associations provide to their members. The Association of German Trade Fair Industry (AUMA, 2001), for example, states that it provides "…access to extensive literature on the theme of trade fair figures, collects and publishes extensive data on over 5,000 events, up-to-date information on the website." This further supports the fact that information access in all different forms, either hardcopy versions or electronic, are important sources to members. The International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA, 2001) further supports the access

of information by providing "…the IFEA library [which] provides valuables resources, books and award-winning videos and sales kits for members."

When analysed further the results indicated that there was no significant differences between the regions regarding the importance of education, indicated in Table 3 International, Special Interest, North American and European associations all regarded educational services as the most commonly occurring category within the services that they provide their members. Asian Pacific and United Kingdom associations however considered this category the second most commonly occurring category with business services rating as more common in both regions. This may be due to the emerging event industries and businesses within the Asian Pacific context demanding a more business development and support orientated services from their associations.

Table 3
Distribution of key variables of Services by Region of Origin

|   | International | Europe | United Kingdom | North America | Asia Pacific | South America |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Education** | **Education** | Business | **Education** | Business | Communication |
| 2 | Communication | Communication | **Education** | Communication | **Education** | |
| 3 | Business | Business | Communication | Community | Communication | |
| 4 | Community | Community | Advocacy | Buying Power | Community | |
| 5 | Buying Power | Advocacy | Community | Business | Advocacy | |

Professional Standards

Forty-nine percent (74) event management association had stated codes of ethics or professional standards. Quality of service and competence of individuals was recognised by 53% (32) of these associations. This incorporated themes such as credibility, competence and quality of service, skill and knowledge, education, professional development and attending scheduled seminars and functions. Ensuring quality and competence standards of members strengthens the professional standards and image of the events industry. Skill and knowledge was considered by 40% (24) of event management associations and related specifically to education and professional development. This incorporates attending scheduled seminars and functions to develop skills and knowledge. The International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA, 2002) recognises that:

Over the last half of the 20$^{th}$ Century, the act and requirements of production of festival and civic events of the highest caliber have required the development and establishment of professional standards. As such, Members should aggressively seek to acquire for themselves and their colleagues professional development and training, and support the like development of others within the industry. Professional development of every professional working in the festival and events industry is essential to the future development, growth and maintenance of a healthy industry.

Therefore, they require their members to engage in education and professional training and development that improves and empowers the professional abilities and performance of employees. The International Meeting Professionals Association of Canada (IMPAC, 2002) further acknowledged that they "are dedicated to sharing their expertise and knowledge with others, thereby expanding their value to themselves, their clients their suppliers, and those who come in contact with other IMPAC members". The networks and experiences of others is an advantage that associations have in abundance, therefore utilising these tools for the transfer of knowledge and skills should be a key role of associations.

Education is fundamental in developing professionalism as it promotes alternate or improved ways of conducting business and oneself. The European Society of Association Executives (ESAE, 2001) note it is a members prerogative:

To pursue and promote personal development and corporate and professional growth through continuing review of current practices, training and the sharing of knowledge, expertise and skills with fellow professionals in a spirit of open, professional cooperation.

The Association of Collegiate Conference and Event Directors – International (ACCED-I, 2002) supported this stance by confirming that competence is more than an "adequate knowledge of practice and procedures". They state "competence goes beyond formal qualification to the sufficiency of the professional's knowledge (theory and process) and skill capability and to effectively represent the interests of the client and institution". Competence and a commitment to service, as discussed below, leads to credibility both within the industry and to the general public.

Formal education is important as it is able to teach the theory that underpins business or the process of event management, however competence is more than knowing it is the ability to carry out. Therefore, education is essential in providing that background and it is the individual that then goes on to achieve competence and skills from being involved in the events business. One point to note is that no individual ever knows everything about the events industry due to the dynamic nature of the industry and the constantly changing and unique focus of events.

When analysed by region of origin the results surprisingly identified that education although important to North American, International, Special Interest and United Kingdom associations was not as important as other categories within professional standards of conduct (see table 4). This may be due to the fact that education is an expected prerequisite for professionals in these areas, whereas the other regions, such as Asia Pacific, South Africa, South America and Europe might be focusing more on education to lift the professional standards of conduct.

Table 4
Distribution of key variables of Codes of Ethics by Region of Origin

| | International | Europe | United Kingdom | North America | Asia Pacific | Special Interest | South Africa | South America |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Effective Business Practices | Promote industry | Effective Business Practices | Effective Business Practices | Effective Business Practices | Communication | Reputation, Respect & Personal Conduct | Professionalism |
| 2 | Reputation, Respect & Personal Conduct | Reputation, Respect & Personal Conduct | Fair Play | Reputation, Respect & Personal Conduct | Reputation, Respect & Personal Conduct | Effective Business Practices | Effective Business Practices | Promote industry |
| 3 | Communication | Fair Play | Reputation, Respect & Personal Conduct | Communication | Communication | Professionalism | Professionalism | Reputation, Respect & Personal Conduct |
| 4 | Professionalism | Communication | Communication | Promote industry | Quality & Competence | Reputation, Respect & Personal Conduct | Promote industry | Communication |
| 5 | Quality & Competence | Effective Business | Quality & Competence | Satisfaction of clients | Security & Safety | Fair Play | Fair Play | Effective Business |

| | | Practices | | | | | Practices |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that education is a significant component of event management associations. The analysed mission statements, goals and objectives, services they provide their members and their professional codes of conduct acknowledge that professionals within the event management industry have a strategic direction that is strongly supported by furthering education. The professional associations have highlighted that education plays an important role in updating skills of members and leading to the professionalisation of event practioners. As discussed earlier, the need for professional well educated staff within the event management industry has been driven by the need to develop the industry in a more strategic direction. Event management associations are clearly providing a variety of educational opportunities to their members.

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