



Around the table:

- Angelique Lombarts, AloA Consultancy and day chair
- Nicolette van Erven, Congress by design
- Jeanette van Namen, Congress by design
- Daan van de Kamp, Congress by design
- Eric Bakerman, NBTC
- Marc Winters, Martiniplaza Groningen
- Yvonne Nassar, Amsterdam RAI
- Monique André de la Porte, Utrecht Convention Bureau
- Michiel Middendorff, World Forum Den Haag
- Bart Klaver, Den Haag Marketing
- Stephen van Es, Rotterdam Marketing
- Martijn Bulthuis, Leiden Marketing
- Marc Horsmans, I Amsterdam

Statement 1: Without some sort of partnership it is impossible to sell a destination (city, region, country).

Eric Bakermans: "Sure you can sell it, but the results will be disappointing. We from the NBTC always do business jointly with other parties. So I concur with the statement."
 Stephen van Es: "I think our collective trade fair is a good example. There, we present ourselves as Holland and people first look at a country, then to a city and next what the city has on offer. That is the sequence you have to consider. People first look at the big picture and then focus on the various elements."
 Angelique Lombarts: "Regarding the Olympic Games, it is always a city that is promoted. In our case, the brand of Amsterdam is better known than the brand of Holland. Does that mean that we will also be selling The Hague, for instance, under the Amsterdam brand?"
 Michiel Middendorff: "We would be fools not to!"
 Bakermans: "This discussion has already been decided. Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Eindhoven and Utrecht all have a top sports culture and are very eager to participate in this. And in spite that at the moment it is not very realistic to consider bringing the Olympic Games to this country, it is very commendable that the big cities have been looking beyond their city walls. But not so long ago it was unthinkable that we all would be hitching a ride with just one city."

PCOs are simply important

A discussion between the best of the best from the MICE sector

Thursday 9 October Congress by design, a Dutch based PCO, in collaboration with Meeting Magazine.nl, organised a round table discussion on the topic: the added value of partnerships. Purpose of the discussion was to determine together what the advantages are for the various parties to enter into partnerships. Twelve representatives from the industry discussed the pros and cons. Angelique Lombarts acted as chairperson. The discussion, on the basis of some statements, took place in the historic Van Heukelom room in the Dom tower in the city of Utrecht.



Lombarts: "So we can make good use of the Amsterdam brand to attract conventions to The Hague or Rotterdam?"
 Van Es: "Certainly. It is a brand that everybody knows and we all profit from. In this case the importance of jointly getting an event is bigger than the interest of just one city."
 Bart Klaver: "When we talk about conventions, we absolutely mention Amsterdam in our sales pitch. But only as a side issue. I sell my own city. That is what you represent, what you stand for. But internationally speaking, it is obvious that Amsterdam has more appeal than The Hague. Just look at the accessibility, and Schiphol Amsterdam Airport. From an international point of



view it is almost impossible not to mention that and, of course you make use of it. But then I quickly replace the focus on my own city.”

Marc Horsmans: “Let me interpret the statement differently. If a convention bureau has to perform its duty as an objective, neutral partner to a destination, you could say: ‘who pays the bill, decides’. Suppose that from a total available number of 100 hotels, 30 pay a lot of money and the other 70 just a small amount, and a meeting planner wants to book overnight stays, will you then put the 30 up for choice and ignore the other 70? That can hardly be called professional.”

Lombarts invites the others to react: “What do you think of that?”

Martijn Bulhuis: “I have always maintained that if you want to market your city or your destination, you have to show the entire package. That implies that you cannot present only the those that pay the most.”

Horsmans: “Of course, it is a matter of give and take.”

Marc Winters: “But what also plays a role is the phase in the process you are in at that moment.”

Yvonne Nassar: “In my opinion there is also a difference between thinking along with the client and not doing that. You have to place the client centrally, think from his perspective, and less from your own. Where and how can you add value to the proposition and which partner can I include best in the project. That is how we can build excellent, longlasting relations.”

Horsmans: “And that can be very easy. As a convention bureau you are an objective, neutral organisation and necessarily bound to winning a bid for a destination. And that is our role. You tap into an element of trade from which in principle the entire city can profit. After that, it is the responsibility of the city’s business world. That is all they can hold you accountable for, partnership or not. You bring something to the city, that is what you are fighting for. Without a convention bureau, a city cannot survive in the world of conventions.”

Middendorff: “I have my doubts about this complete impartiality. You make a certain choice, and that does not have to become an issue. A destination’s partners as well as the non-partners should realise that if, for instance, the RAI convention center is booked full, the entire city of Amsterdam will be pleased. If there is no direct business, then there will certainly be indirect trade. The entire destination area profits from the contribution those partners give to the initiator of the marketing process. You do not have to be completely independent, it is alright to have a preference for certain contributing partners, because you know that everybody profits.”

Bakermans: “I always compare partnerships to an aeroplane. You sit first, business or economy class. The main goal is to go from A to B, but if you sit up front, you are more visible for the flight attendant. So a partnership provides a basis and that is extended with the amount of visibility you buy. That is what makes the difference.”

Nassar: “In the future, the granting element will become more and more important. There is a lot of uncertainty in this world. You cannot rely on big companies and governments to provide stability. The younger generation is much more used to networking as a basis to come into contact with the party they grant the concession.”

Statement 2: Partnerships cause more problems than advantages.

Winters: “The basic question is: what is a partnership? In the city of Groningen we have a completely different model compared to other cities. There, you expect to get something in return for the fee you pay, whereas in Groningen it is considered some kind of economic deal. It reminds me of the comparison between apples and ideas. If we exchange apples, we both still go home with one apple. If we exchange ideas, we both go home with two ideas. And that is the added value of partnerships.”

Van Es: “There are also many unofficial partnerships. If at a meeting you hear something but it is not suitable for you, the first person you suggest it to is the per-

son standing next to you. And eventually it comes back to you from the other side. That is an other element of that granting culture Yvonne was talking about earlier. And of course, networking is also extremely important!”

Lombarts: “So you have to trust each other to grant each other the business and in the end, get on in the trade?”

Klaver: “Absolutely. But we do make a strict distinction between the corporate market and the association market. The approaches to those markets is completely different, so the partnerships are also quite different. If I look at the approach to the corporate market, my community says ‘we can do that ourselves’. Fine, so that puts us more in the role of communicator and less in that of a lead generator. In the association market it is just the opposite. There, my added value is much bigger.”

Statement 3: Partnerships make me lose my neutrality or independence.

Winters: “That depends on which role you have. As a venue you often have by definition a commercial interest. But if you collaborate with a PCO (Professional Congress Organizer) you have an independent proposition. What I mean is that it can also work the other way around.”

André de la Porte: “You should include more partners. I once invited several PCOs at a venue. The client thought that was fine, but the PCOs had to keep their mouths shut, otherwise it would become too commercial!”

Bakermans: “I think that a good PCO is worth the investment. Associations that want to hold a convention in our country should not let their secretary perform certain tasks. Hire an expert to do that.”

Horsmans: “The POC’s role in this is very important. That is a fact. And everybody at this table knows that.” ■

After the discussion Ronald Trum, Director Utrecht Toerisme and historian, gave the attendees an interesting guided tour of the Dom tower. Afterwards, enjoying a drink and a snack, the attendees sat on talking about ideas for a next round table discussion. All agreed that the discussion had been successful and were looking forward to a follow-up.