

## Organising the perfect conference in Germany

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IMEX invited meetings planners to put forward ideas, tips and strategies that will improve the experience of today's business events.

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Asked, *'What makes for the perfect conference?'* over 90 specialist meetings buyers and agents in Germany responded (November 2008) to this inaugural IMEX email survey. Typical job titles include: managing director; project manager; senior consultant; PCO; global business manager; training and event manager; president; and manager, business development.

### key qualities

First, planners were invited to rank in order of importance to them what they believe are the key qualities of a venue for the PERFECT CONFERENCE. **Table 1** identifies their selection:

*	<i>'service standards in the venue that ensures the smooth running of the event'</i>	1 <sup>st</sup>
*	<i>'prices at the venue that match your budget'</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
*	<i>'image of the venue that fits the purpose of the event'</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
*	<i>'professionalism of the venue management that understands your needs'</i>	4 <sup>th</sup>
*	<i>'dining and leisure facilities that keep delegates content'</i>	5 <sup>th</sup>
*	<i>'environmental awareness at the venue that makes for a greener event'</i>	6 <sup>th</sup>

Further recommendations for venues included greater transparency in respect of their costings; be more flexible; improved display in advance of the potential layouts of meeting rooms; and that efforts should be made to ensure that the venue appears 'unique' and 'extraordinary', and 'highly appropriate to the intended type of event'.

Second, tips were invited as to what matters most when communicating with venues. Five characteristic suggestions included:

- \* *'explain your priorities, mission and goals for the event'*
- \* *'having just one point of contact'*
- \* *'request that venues create the necessary atmosphere and*

*ambience'*

- \* *'seek to ensure that delegates feel the venue is really trying hard'*
- \* *'ask that the venue provides plenty of destination tips for delegates'*

Six examples of German venues highly rated by conference planners include (random order): Hotel Bayerischer Hof, Munich; Hemingway Lounge, Frankfurt; Maritim Hotels; ICM International Congress Centre, Munich; Mercedes-Benz Museum, Stuttgart; and Deutsches Eigenkapitalforum, Frankfurt.

A further point of view, offered frequently, is that such short-listing venues for praise is not possible 'because so much depends on the type of event and the nature of the intended audience.'

Third, respondents were requested to consider, introspectively, what they think are the most important qualities of the PERFECT CONFERENCE ORGANISER. **Table 2** identifies their proposed ranking:

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|---|-----------------|
| * <i>'thoroughly plans every detail'</i>  | 1 <sup>st</sup> |
| * <i>'takes full responsibility for event ROI (Return on Investment)'</i>   | 1 <sup>st</sup> |
| * <i>'sets a conference programme that incorporates maximum opportunities for interaction/participation/discussion'</i> | 3 <sup>rd</sup> |
| * <i>'seeks the full views of delegates before, during, and after the conference'</i>                                   | 4 <sup>th</sup> |
| * <i>'makes full allowance for delegate variability (by gender, age, ethnicity, personality, diet etc)'</i>             | 5 <sup>th</sup> |
| * <i>'plans an event that is not viewed as excessively extravagant or environmentally wasteful'</i>                     | 6 <sup>th</sup> |

### **key personality characteristics**

Next, research correspondents were asked which key personality characteristics do they feel are essential for the PERFECT CONFERENCE ORGANISER. Five typical answers were: 'keeping a sense of perspective and maintaining the overview'; 'displaying honesty and integrity'; 'always being flexible'; 'retaining self-confidence'; and 'act as if you are the delegate and therefore achieve the desirable level of service'.

Fifth, the survey emphasis was switched to conference attendees, with the question posed: what qualities make for the PERFECT CONFERENCE DELEGATE. **Table 3** identifies the answers as follows:

- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| * <i>'prepare in advance in order to make a useful contribution'</i>   | 1 <sup>st</sup> |
| * <i>'be smart, punctual, polite, and a positive example to other delegates'</i>   | 2 <sup>nd</sup> |
| * <i>'concentrate throughout and make his or her views known'</i>  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> |
| * <i>'engage his/her personality qualities to the benefit of the event (leadership ... morale-boosting ... friendliness ... discipline, etc.)'</i> | 4 <sup>th</sup> |
| * <i>'demonstrate awareness of the potential environmental 'costs' of the event'</i>   | 5 <sup>th</sup> |
| * <i>'not be fussy when it comes to bedroom standards, meal content, status issues, timings, etc.'</i>   | 6 <sup>th</sup> |

### **best from delegates**

Adding to this were organiser suggestions as to how to get the best out of conference delegates. Five characteristic examples follow: 'keep them happy'; 'ask in advance for their detailed special needs'; 'incentivise their participation'; 'make them feel good'; and 'invite ongoing feedback'.

In conclusion, the search for the 'Perfect Conference', whether in Germany or elsewhere, seems likely to prove a long-term quest. As one organiser put it, 'nothing is ever perfect'; another adding, 'it's time that we spend time training delegates in how to maximise their contribution'. Surely, however, the central issue is recognised in the simple secret offered by one leading organiser, *'in order to get it right, you must first understand your audience'*.

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**IMEX would like to thank those MICE specialists who responded so thoroughly and professionally to this research.**