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## **The World of Exposition Industry Associations and IFES- International Federation of Exhibit and Event Services**

*By Larry Kulchawik- IFES Past President*

On June 7, 2014 I was asked to speak at the **World Meeting Forum/World Trade Show Forum** in Cancun, Mexico. As a representative of **IFES**, I shared the IFES mission, spoke to the differences when doing trade show marketing internationally, and promoted my new book *Trade Shows from One Country to the Next*. The purpose of the **WMF 2014** event was to exchange ideas and trends with world expo associations and expo industry leaders within the worldwide MICE industry.

When I was a member of the CLC (Convention Liaison Council) in 1989, it was reported that there were 22 expo related associations in North America alone. I suspect that there are over 100 more MICE related associations throughout the world today. Each of the association representatives that I spoke with at the meeting clearly see their association niche as important and valuable within the overall expo marketplace. Each association sees their expo specialty so valuable that they have created associations for the dedicated companies and groups who focus on the unique services they jointly provide. The WMF meeting was well attended by many world associations in the meeting and trade show sector. The truth of the matter is that no one industry segment alone fully represents the full breadth of what the exposition industry represents as a whole. Each expo industry segment is uniquely different to provide specialized services and value to their members. Two associations that attended were UFI and CLC. Both are umbrella associations whose members are made up of all expo industry related association segments. Confusing? Not really. As the world of meetings and conventions join closer together each year, each expo industry association group will integrate closer with each other to collectively support the full strength and power of face to face marketing- globally. This is what the main mission of the **World Meeting Forum** is all about. Whether it's a meeting or a trade show, the powers of face to face marketing must be shared and the value of the specialized association groups within must be understood.

The world is getting smaller and the markets are growing bigger. Our awareness of the different exhibit and meeting industry associations is key to reaching global unity and understanding. Measuring the effects of our efforts is critical to provide the best information and services that benefit partners and end users. Many associations are



beginning to measure and expand their reach with the services they offer, and sometimes overlap their services offered with other association services. As expo marketing experts, we cannot, nor should we, be members to all of these groups-so consolidation can be good to deliver dual benefits from membership to a single association. Consolidation will happen and will be driven by the member interests for specialized and ancillary expo service groups.

There will always be unique differences when doing trade shows in other countries. With that said, there should always be a global group and a local group representing similar interests. The geographical location of our customer's trade shows and meeting on the world market stage will always shift. Being prepared to assist our clients with local knowledge is critical to our value as world meeting associations and as consultants to end user customers. There is no need to consolidate all world associations as one, but not a bad idea to share best practices and create global certification programs that are mutually relevant with common concerns.

Sharing info between world associations in areas like sustainability, safety, exhibit/meeting space layouts, and regulations are good places to start. Small steps are better than no steps. As the location of trade shows and meetings continue to shift, being prepared and ready to serve our client/end users globally will be a requirement, and not simply a value added service.

One of the MICE industry associations worth noting is **IFES- *International Federation of Exhibit and Event Services***. The mission of IFES is to unify trade show designer/suppliers to share knowledge and resources for the benefit of the end user exhibitors. Today IFES represents exhibit suppliers from 47 countries, as well as 13 country associations. Each country supplier member is voted in as qualified and trust worthy, and is asked to sign a Code of Conduct agreement. The IFES mission is to share local knowledge and a resource to provide local services between global partners.

IFES was created in 1984 when French contractor, Roger Taurant, met with Belgium contractor, Koen Bogaert. Taurant asked Bogaert- "When crossing borders for trade shows, do you have the same challenges as I do?" The answer was an astounding-yes! On October 14, 1984, Roger Taurant organized a meeting in Paris with six European stand builders from Germany, UK, Switzerland, Netherlands, France, and Belgium. This group of six European stand builder nations quickly grew to (14) by 1991. At that time, only the country associations were the board representatives. (Thus, the word **Federation**- a group of associations was used to describe the group). In 2005 IFES changed their bylaws to include direct membership of the individual expo supplier companies, as well as the associations, as equal members. Membership now includes companies whose country do not have an association. Today 46 countries are represented with IFES supplier representatives. I am sad to report that Roger Taurant passed away October, 2014. His IFES vision and dream for world unity among exhibit suppliers is now a reality.

Each year IFES conducts an annual meeting called the **IFES World Summit**. This year you need not be an IFES member to attend the event in Vienna. The strongest way to create trust between IFES country members is to attend the World Summit, or other events like **Euroshop** or the **Exhibitor Show** where you can meet potential supplier partners in person. Same value as attending a trade show! Creating a trusting relationship with other exhibit supplier companies is difficult to achieve without meeting face to face. The same is true for the power of trade show marketing.

The next IFES World Summit will be held June 23-25, 2015 in Vienna, Austria.

*Plan to attend!* For further info on IFES and the Summit go to [www.ifesnet.com](http://www.ifesnet.com)

