

The Turn of Events; Bringing Business Events Back
Brisbane Panel Transcript
Wednesday, 16 September 2020



Introduction:

Welcome everyone to The Calile Hotel. It is wonderful to have you all here today, and a welcome to all our virtual attendees joining us this evening.

My name is Ashleigh and I am a Project Manager at Arinex based here in Brisbane. I'd like to introduce you to our panel joining us this evening. At the end, we have **Leonard Chong**, the Events Strategy and Insights Director for Tourism Events Queensland.

Next, we have **Rob Unson**, the General Manager of the beautiful Calile Hotel in which we are at this evening.

And joining us virtually, we have **Steven Capilli**, Business Development Manager at Exponet.

Thank you all for joining us!

Questions and Answers:

I would like to start the panel discussion with Leonard who brings a broader perspective on business events in Queensland.

Leonard – *How has your approach to bringing business events into the state of Queensland changed based on border shutdowns and the current international travel ban?*

TEQ provides annual financial support to 5 convention bureaux in Queensland (Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Townsville and Cairns). For Brisbane, Gold Coast and Cairns the funding has traditionally been to support their international marketing efforts however since COVID, the criteria has changed to include national marketing initiatives as well. For the Sunshine Coast and Townsville, the funding was to support their national marketing so no changes have been necessary.

TEQ continues to support the industry through our Acquisition and Leveraging Fund. This fund supports the industry bid and secure International Association Events as well as International Incentive Events. It is pleasing to see that bidding for international business is still continuing as securing these events will provide the industry with support in the outer years.

Leonard - *What activity are Tourism and Events Queensland undertaking to bring business events back to QLD? Do you have any specific campaigns for this sector?*

TEQ will continue with our national marketing campaigns and whilst they are not specific to business events, the message is clear and that is Queensland is ready to welcome visitors (limited at present due to border closures).

The convention bureaux manage their own campaigns as part of their marketing activity as they can tailor make the message relevant to the target market to include a call to action.

Rob – *How are you managing the constant change in government guidelines when planning events 2/ 6/ 12 months into the future? How are you integrating these guidelines and planning for these events?*

Being part of TFE Hotels our Senior Leaders in Sydney meet daily and distribute the key messaging to each state. In addition, we have a portal on a shared drive with all key documents on hand.



*What were the most important considerations when developing your VenueSafe Plan?
What are the main principals of the VenueSafe Plan?*

The key items were ensuring that it was safe for our guests and teams, and more importantly that they were easily changeable, as the restrictions would need to come and go at times depending on advice from Chief Medical Officer.

Have you made any changes to T&Cs - for example what happens if 200pax are expected in person, but you only get 100 because border restrictions didn't lift in time for interstate or international guests to attend in person?

We've not changed the actual T&Cs however we are flexible as needed.

Steven – *How do you see the future of exhibitions evolving beyond this year – how are exhibitions changing forever? Or will they revert back to how they were?*

Exhibitions will definitely evolve beyond this year. We will need to be acutely conscious of the needs of organiser but also general visitor and delegate sentiment. I think the main focus will be on the safety of the event and what would be the best way to mitigate any risk. We have been and will continue to work with venues, organisers and key stakeholders to develop solutions to their requirements.

Exhibitions will not revert back to how they were, but it is our job within the industry to make them seem like they have.

Steven - *Has this experience highlighted any areas for improvement within exhibitions specifically, or within the company to assist in better results?*

I think some areas which have been improved over this period are some of the touch points we have developed. We have taken a look at organiser feature areas and improved on the existing ideas and have complemented them with COVID safe solutions.

We have also had some ideas into the design of conferences and exhibitions and how we can both improve the flow of traffic to all sponsors and exhibitors and create a safer one way system for visitors.

Great thank you, now I'd like to move on to some more generalised questions.

Leonard, Rob and Steven – *What are your thoughts on the continuation and adaption of virtual and hybrid events beyond COVID and how will this affect your business in the future?*

Leonard - From a TEQ perspective, our mandate is to attract visitors/delegates to Queensland in order to meet our objectives (visitors, economy, profiling, community pride) therefore we would prefer physical attendance however we're aware that we also need to adapt to changes.

Rob - I think they can be used to enhance all future events. The options you have on hand increase.

Steven - I think it will be an important complement to exhibitions and conferences. We will need to respond to the requirements in the market and help conference organisers deliver these virtual and hybrid solutions. We have done so in the past and we will continue to innovate and develop ideas to suit engagement.

All - *What are you doing / offering to maintain or strengthen clients' confidence in moving forward with business events in 2020 / 2021?*

Rob - Sharing successes of what we have done with clients that meet with us, and again advising of the flexibility we'd be offering.



Leonard - The industry has been given the pathway to plan for the restart of live events through the Industry Framework. We now need to support the industry to share positive stories where events can gather delegates and attendees in a COVID Safe way, to demonstrate to the health authorities that further restrictions can be eased. TEQ will work with the Queensland convention bureaux and national bodies to promote these stories.

Steven - Even during this tough time we are striving to serve our clients to the high standards that we set ourselves. With all our clients we have rescheduled any requirements and continue to support them any way possible. We became a COVID safe business very early on in the pandemic and have policies in place to mitigate any risk going forward. We are well versed in this skill as we continually develop our WHS policy and Risk Assessments through the business.

All - And lastly, what COVID legacies do you see impacting your business and our industry in the future?

Leonard - Events as a driver of social change has been a widely discussed topic during this period, as event businesses look to reinvent their business models. Sustainability practices is one area we would like to see further progressed in the Queensland industry – how to do it better and how to tell the world we are doing it better.

Rob - Sanitising and contact tracing will be here to stay!

Steven - We will be very prepared for the next pandemic – but hopefully that never happens. Virtual and hybrid solutions will form part of most, if not all, events going forward and that will mean more engagement overall.

Closing:

We have unfortunately run out of time with the panel, so I would like to leave it there and thank all of you for your input and participation this evening! It was a really interesting discussion and I hope you all got something out of it.

I'd like to now invite you all to participate in networking drinks out on the Terrace. Before we do so, I would like to advise it is a venue requirement to remain seated if you are eating or drinking, so please keep that in mind.

Thank you all for joining us this evening, its great to be able to meet face to face, and I'm sure we'll be seeing you again soon.

Thank you to our Panellists:

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