



Doing Marketing in China ——Education Is the Key

By China Star Ltd.

In terms of the global meetings industry, China is quite different to any of the other countries active worldwide. We probably should not completely copy the experiences and practices which have been proved successful in other places.

Our Challenges

As a PCO in China, the biggest challenge we are facing with is **the Chinese administrative system**. One needs to get permission from the government to run international conferences in China. Only the central ministries and commissions and the first-class associations directly under the leadership of the central ministries and commissions are qualified to apply for such permission from the government. For this reason, China hardly has any real “PCOs” or



“qualified PCOs” in the strict sense of the term. It is very common for the associations to bid for and manage international conferences by themselves. As a result, some associations have monopolized some sectors of the international conference business in

China, for example, the Chinese Medical Association and the China Association for Science and Technology have almost completely monopolized all the international medical conferences and those related to science and technology held in China.

Along with the progress of reform in China and increasing opening-up, foreign PCOs entered the market and locally based Chinese people who want to go into the meeting industry started to connect with international professional associations such as ICCA and MPI to learn advanced experiences and engage in bidding, operation and management of international conferences as real “meeting professionals”. Some travel and meeting companies have become more and more professional and aim to catch up with the international standards.

Even so, “PCO” is still a new concept in China. Though most of the associations and government organizations have no meeting professionals, they prefer to run conferences by themselves instead of working with PCOs. Quite a lot of them are unaware that there are companies like this exist. Running the conferences by themselves, they are driven crazy by so many details, attending to some things and ignoring others, resulting in poor management and poor event quality. They are busy with something which should not be their mission but neglect what they should be doing, namely the Science or Content. In fact, this monopoly hinders the development of China’s meeting industry. Therefore, as a PCO in China, we also



bear the social responsibility of popularizing the common knowledge of the meeting industry.

The second challenge is the unfair competition. Take the 29th ISME World Conference which was held in Beijing in August of 2010 as an example. When heard about the conference through researching the ICCA database, we immediately contacted the local host, the China Conservatory and Music Education Chapter of the Chinese Society of Education and tried to convince them to give us an opportunity to bid. Without the ICCA database, it would have been really difficult for us to get the necessary information. However, before the local host invited public bidding, an internal decision had already been made and a travel company with some kind of special relation with the local host was appointed to work for the conference as both the PCO and DMC. Obviously we lost the bid though both the ISME international staff and the local host agreed that we were the best. Unexpectedly, the travel company withdrew six months before the opening of the conference because they finally realized that they didn't know how to do it. The local host contacted us urgently and asked us to take over.

Many Chinese conference hosts and organizers tend to break down the service into pieces, keep the easy and profitable jobs to themselves and subcontract the difficult ones with limited profit to meeting companies. Though we did many meetings before, most of them were bilateral meetings or corporate meetings. The 29th ISME World Conference was the first real international conference, according to ICCA's definition, we were involved with. We decided we should do it as long as we could make breakeven. We took it as a good opportunity to learn and practice. We were also prepared to help the local host to solve problems whenever they were in need. Not being professionals, they were not able to foresee problems that might emerge. But they wouldn't admit this or entirely trust the professionals. Sometimes, the organizers were required to give in to the personal will of the decision-maker. In this situation, we were not able to force them to accept our ideas; we had to be patient and wait for the right opportunity to "educate" them with facts.

Another even bigger challenge is to coordinate a healthy relationship among different parties. To run meetings, especially those in which the government is so involved, we have to coordinate the Tourism department, the Security department, the Fire-fighting department, the



Foreign Affairs department plus the food quality supervision and inspection departments and many others. If there is an outdoor event, the Cultural Heritage Administration and the Ministry of Culture are also involved. For any event over 1000 attendees, we have to request the permit from the Large-scale Events Management Office of the district where the event will be held. During the preparation of the 29th ISME World Conference, we attended numerous coordination meetings and accompanied the Deputy Mayor of Beijing and other government officials for many site inspections.



Here, we want to share our experiences with ICCA members. If you want to develop your business in China, make sure that you have done good homework. You should know Chinese culture and Chinese people and understand how the Chinese associations and the government operate meetings. For example, the contracts have never been signed on time. We signed the contract for the ISME World Conference on July 22, 2010, 10 days before the conference started. We didn't receive the first payment until seven days before the opening ceremony. Therefore, you need to know the organizer well to make the right judgment so you can get money in time. However, the good news is that you will definitely get your money sooner or later for working for the conferences sponsored by the government.

Recently we found that the international associations could play an important role in the healthy development of the meeting industry in China. An international association told the Chinese local host, who originally wanted to do the international conference by itself, that its conference in China had to be managed by a "real PCO".

Our Innovation and Creativity

The meeting industry is still in an early stage of development in China. The innovation and creativity we are going to talk about will probably seem to be not worthwhile mentioning to the majority of international professionals.

Quite a lot of Chinese meeting organizers don't pay enough attention to the image design of the theme. When we took over the ISME job, there were only six months before the conference was due to start but the local host still didn't have a plan for the image design. We put designs forward several times, but no one cared or was interested. When there were only



three months to go, we went to their leader's office and explained that the conference consisted of several parts such as the conference, the exhibition and the show. If different images were used, these events wouldn't be like "children from one mother" and there would be no brand effect, which would greatly decrease the influence of the conference. They



accepted our suggestion immediately. The vivid metaphor “children from one mother” works every time when we try to explain the importance of image design of the theme.

The theme of the 29th ISME World Conference was “Harmony and the World Future”. To



highlight the theme of “harmony” and to embody the music element and Chinese culture, we used Flying Apsaras (a famous piece in the Dunhuang murals). The color of yellow, symbolic of the imperial family, and the color of red greatly favored by most Chinese, feature in the conference design.

The goddess is looking down at the earth, plucking at the strings and stroking the city of Beijing with her colored silk ribbons. The melody is rippling in the air as if the whole city could hear it. There is harmony both in heaven and on earth. The design was highly praised by both the host and the organizer of the conference and all the participants.

Another shining point was the feature entrance set up at the conference venue. We set up a 40-meter-long and 6-meter-high arch in the shape of two huge high-pitched notes. It was the largest and most beautiful feature entrance ever used in China National Convention Center since it was opened in 2009.

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Serve the People with Heart and Soul

The objective of our company is to serve the people with heart and soul, which is very important in China if you want to build a long-term cooperative relation with the government departments or the associations. As meeting professionals, we predicted there would be many problems. However, we couldn’t argue with the local host committee as most of its members were high-ranking officials or experts in the industry. Therefore, we were ready to offer our service in a modest and humble way at any time to help the local host solve their problems as they were discovered. Our goal was to help them accomplish a successful conference.



We started our company's crisis management mechanism and anticipated all the problems that might emerge before, during and after the conference. Our office was available round the clock 24 hours before the conference started in case that unexpected situation might occur.



The conference was of large scale and attended by many senior government officials. So the security check was very strict. All the badges had anti-counterfeiting marks and different colors were used to differentiate the categories of the participants. One day before the conference, the local host lost 600 badges. To be on the safe side, we declared the 600 badges no longer usable and made 600 new ones in the shortest time.

On the night before the opening ceremony, the organizer gave us a last-minute order and asked us to number the 3000 seats. We delivered the 3000 numbered stickers to the venue



early next morning and pasted them on the backs of the chairs quickly and accurately just before the attendees rushed in the venue. The host was very impressed by our efficiency, our ability to handle the emergency and, most importantly, our attitude towards the client.



We served them with heart and soul, so they felt it very easy and comfortable to cooperate with us. As the conference was approaching, the organizer constantly added lucrative service items to us. When working with the government or associations in China, if you provide the service exactly based on the contract and do not want to do anything extra, you are not likely to get their trust or more business opportunities. We anticipated all our client's needs and thought of everything in their best interest, which brought us the following benefits:

First, we got full payment from the organizer very fast and much earlier than the other suppliers.

Second, we won their trust and established long-term cooperation with them. We have obtained the outbound business of the school.

Third, we made the local host, the government officials and people from the association realize PCO is the key guarantee for a successful conference.

Fourth, the local host highly recommends our company to other universities, local associations and international associations.





Our company helped the local host train the student volunteers.

Conference Effect and Goal

The vision of the International Society for Music Education (ISME) is to lead and support music education worldwide. Their mission is to build and maintain a worldwide community of music educators characterized by mutual respect and support; to foster global intercultural understanding and cooperation among the world's music educators and to promote music education for people of all ages in all relevant situations throughout the world.

The society concluded that the 29th ISME World Conference helped them to achieve their mission.

The conference had 4019 registered participants, among them were 3000 domestic participants and 1019 foreign participants.



This conference meant a lot to the Chinese delegates. Many of them came to Beijing for the first time and communicated with foreign counterparts for the first time. For those music educators who came from remote and mountainous areas, it was a good opportunity for them to learn knowledge, to learn more about the world and to get the world to know about them.



During the conference, 976 performers from 47 international performing groups and 2803 performers from 50 domestic performing groups participated in the show and networking activities.

Besides, there were also 300 exhibitors, 668 volunteers, 310 primary and middle school students who attended the teaching presentation, 203 work staff, and 713 invited guests. The total number of people involved in the conference reached 9138, the highest record of participants in the ISME world conferences.

711 seminars were held including 59 symposiums and round-table meetings, and 480 paper sessions. Four world renowned professionals (a musician, a music educator, a composer and a leader) delivered wonderful keynote speeches.

103 concerts with distinctive national features were also held during the conference. 163 workshop and teaching presentations were given by music experts and scholars from all over the world.



**Mr. Wang Anshun, the Deputy Party Secretary of Beijing
Municipal Government announced the opening of the conference.**





Mr. Graham.Wiltz, president of the International Society for Music Education, said at the closing ceremony, "This is a first-class also the best and biggest event in the history of world music education."

Mr.Yasuharu Takahagi, a world famous music educator and the Honorary President said, "Nowadays, international conflicts of various kinds are increasing, unfortunately. On the other hand, music is the sound of the human heart and also has very unique communicative functions beyond language. Therefore I am very confident that this 29th ISME World Conference in Beijing will contribute greatly to another good start for promoting global development of music education and better mutual understanding among nations for a peaceful world, with its exciting scale and content based on the theme of 'Harmony and World Future'."



Thanks to running this conference, one of the organizers China Conservatory has established an international network for national music research.



The local host convinced the municipal government of the importance of music education and gained financial support from the government and a couple of sponsors, which ensured success of the conference.



Becoming a Competitive PCO Overnight

The meeting industry started late in China. Some people think it cannot be called an industry yet. Strictly speaking, we worked more like a DMC for the 29th ISME World Conference. We undertook part of the job, services like hotel booking, conference image design, registration, tour and transfer service, volunteer training, stage design, and design and making of print materials. A Western meeting professional once told us that there was no qualified



PCO in China and China Star was only a DMC. We agreed with him. However, the 29th ISME World Conference is not only a milestone in the development of our company; it also serves as the catalyst to make the local PCOs develop faster. We made the case into brochures, used it for marketing and achieved favorable results. As a result we got the opportunities to work for the following events.

1. TM Symposium China 2011
2. 41st World Congress of IAFEI 2011
3. 42nd Annual Meeting of The International Continence Society 2012
4. FISITA 2012 World Automotive Congress
5. WHO 2nd Global Symposium on Health System Research 2012

In 2010, our company bought the event business management software developed by USI, being the first private company in China to own international brand software on meetings. We also held a lot of training for our employees and two of them joined the MPI program and took the first CMP exam in Beijing in August.



Another piece of good news I'd like to share with you is China Star, as a full service PCO, has won the WHO 2nd Global Symposium on Health System Research which will be held in Beijing in 2012.

Now, let's return to the theme of this presentation: **Education Is the Key**. Maybe we cannot change the system and policy of a country, but we can certainly influence people, even the government with our knowledge and ideas. In big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, more and more associations, academics and officials have come to realize the importance of PCO services; more and more government officials realize the importance of CVB, which has laid a good foundation for the development of China's meeting industry.