



ATHENS 2016
WACS CONGRESS

Healthy
Mediterranean
Living

SUCCESSFUL BIDDING WITHIN THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

How to gain trust back



ARTION Conferences & Events
for the Hellenic Chefs' Federation

and **the World Association
of Chefs Societies Congress in 2016**



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1. Introduction

a. ARTION Conferences & Events profile

ARTION PCO is since 1995 a premier international provider of conference and events organisation services, specialising in high quality conventions and formal events, association management and bid coordination for European and International Association Congresses. Key assets are: commitment to professional services effective planning and efficient organisation that meets each client's needs.

Additional services

ARTION offers turnkey solutions on Association Management (AM) by supporting Associations, Scientific & Professional Societies and Organisations to upgrade their operation and profile.

ARTION is a dedicated bidder for European or International Conventions in Greece, supporting Associations in every step of the bidding process and coordinating all actions. The company commits financially to bidding for International Congresses.

b. The Hellenic Chefs Federation

The Hellenic Chef's Federation (HCF) has been working closely with ARTION for the last 2 years and is a member of the World Association of Chef's Societies (WACS). It has been established in 2003 and counts 1400 members. The HCF is focusing on education but also promotion of Greece, its cuisine, its culture and traditions to the international gastronomic community and therefore bidding for WACS Congress 2016, became a not to lose target. ARTION is known for the bidding activity and commitment and was therefore chosen as partner.

c. Bidding for WACS Congress

The World Association of Chefs Societies or WACS in short, is a global network of chefs associations first founded in October 1928 at the Sorbonne in Paris. Today, this global body has 87 official chefs associations as members. The biannual congress is a hallmark tradition of WACS and has been organized in over 22 cities across the world throughout its illustrious 80-year history. The Congress attracts from 500 to 1000 participants. The National Chefs Association and the bidding city as a whole must be in support of hosting a WACS Congress and demonstrate their commitment to making the conference a success.

ARTION with the HCF followed the steps of the bidding procedure: sent the letter of interest, the bid document and presented Athens bid as finalist candidate at the 35th WACS Congress that took place between 1 and 5 May 2012 in Daejeon, Korea.

Bidding for an International Congress is something we had done successfully before. Athens is a popular events destination in Europe. It is an interesting and historical city, well connected with all major capitals of the world. The Government and local authorities always support actions to enforce the tourism and congress market, or at least they used to.. Unfortunately, the whole procedure turned out to be very tough. Greece was in the middle of the Economic Crisis and Athens the battlefield.

2. Critical Marketing Challenges

What were the challenges we had to face in order to be shortlisted for WACS Congress 2016 and have the opportunity to present our proposal in the Korea Congress of 2012.

a. The Economic crisis

The European Economic Crisis and in particular the major Greek Economic Crisis led to following key issues, since our bid submission in 2011, making us realizing that the presentations, videos and beautiful images of Greece that used to be very effective till now, wouldn't be sufficient:

- Difficulties in Support & Fundraising:

The bidding procedure requires a significant budget that is usually raised from the local authorities of the bidding city/country, the local industry, government Institutions and Organizations. The Public Sector in Greece was the first to be influenced by the Economic Crisis. It was almost hopeless to expect any funding. The continuing discussions on upcoming national elections tied the hands of ministers and politicians that would have offered their support under other circumstances or at least their commitment to support the congress organizations if the bid was successful. In addition the industry and private sector was also influenced by the crisis and therefore sponsoring for an event that might take place in four years was not expected to be a priority for them.

- Strikes and protests:

The Summer of 2011, when we submitted our bid, was a very difficult period for the Greeks and the tourists choosing to visit our country for holidays. The strikes made reaching the city's historical centre a nightmare, Peiraeus port was blocked and passengers couldn't disembark from the boats, tourists arriving at the airport could find any transportation way to reach their hotels, museums and archaeological sites were kept closed, even the great Acropolis, symbol of the city. The bad experience was quickly shared and discouraged potential visitors to come to Greece and especially to Athens.

Frequently seen images of Athens in the last 2 years



- Negative publicity:

The media worldwide were overwhelming about the economic and social circumstances in Greece. Images of strikes and protests were repeatedly on the news showing a country that is ready to collapse. Statements by the most important officials and academics, predicted the country to declare bankruptcy very soon, leaving the euro zone and being isolated from the rest of the European countries. All this contributed to creating an image of a country of chaos that is definitely the least appropriate to host a successful international congress and made all usual marketing moves seem insufficient. We couldn't be seen as liable when we

submit a bid presenting the ideal congress destination and at the same time the media shows images of decline.

A year after, during discussions with participants from all over the world at the Korea Congress, before our official presentation and voting procedure we constantly faced the same questions: “Will you be in the Eurozone in 2016?”, “Do you have the funding for such a big event?”, “How are things in Greece now, how did you manage to be here?”, “Is it safe to run a congress in Athens?”. The feeling of being untrustworthy was so disappointing that winning the bid became day by day an untouchable dream.

b. The Competitors

The Economic Crisis damaged our potentials of been competitive. Athens was competing against two very strong cities and countries in the WACS Society: Istanbul, Turkey and Johannesburg, South Africa.

Both countries are very active in the international chefs’ community and bring a great delegation to the World Congress to participate at the competitions or to be educated. On the contrary, the Hellenic Chefs’ Federation faced difficulties in bringing its members to Korea due to the upcoming national elections. In addition both countries offered incentives such as discount rates on airfares, what we couldn’t possibly offer since the two major Greek air companies were in-between merging negotiations.

Turkey

One of the Greek arguments to host the congress was the fact that Greece is a South East European country and the congress never took place in this particular region before, but so is Turkey, a country that was bidding for the second time. Last but not least, Istanbul is a top conference destination combining also culture and high technology modern infrastructure.

South Africa

Johannesburg and South Africa were considered to be the favorite to win candidate since it has a very active and respectable Chefs Federation and the former president of WACS, originated from South Africa and very popular was very passionate in hosting the 2016 event and declared it openly.

3. How did we face the challenges – How did we gain the trust back!

a. Financing the bid:

ARTION is a medium private company based in Thessaloniki and we don’t have the financial capacity to fund all bidding procedures (marketing, exhibition booth, travel expenses) but we were determined to win this bid, in this particular period in order to contribute in overturning the country’s image abroad and off course bring business to Greece now that it is more needed the ever. Moreover, we wanted to prove that despite the crisis extroverted entrepreneurial activities, being part of our business mentality and core priorities, can serve development factor and boost up local economies as well as national competitiveness. After all, since there was no choice, we undertook the risk of covering every item of the budget and managed to arrive in Korea for the final presentation.

Approaching supporters

- We approached all relevant associations (food & tourism) the strongest companies, the Ministry of Tourism, the local authorities, sending them several letters, inviting them to meetings, informing them about the importance of funding this effort and hosting a big international event in Athens.
- In an effort to attract the attention of government bodies and local authorities, business and government stakeholders, we organized in the heart of Athens a press conference with the Minister of Tourism. During the conference, the Minister, the associations and other Greek bodies expressed their support to the Greek Candidacy, but no financial commitment.
- We didn't lose our faith and sent letters again to thank the participants of the press Conference for their involvement and ask again for funding. At the end we manage to have financial support from the Mayor of Athens but it covered less than 1/10 of the bidding expenses.

b. Marketing actions:

In an effort to reverse the negative publicity of Greece and ensure that Athens' candidacy will have the strongest impact possible to its targeted group - that was the Korea's Congress chef delegates that would vote their favorite city - ARTION focused on its marketing strategy.

Before the Congress this included careful strategic steps based on the branding of the candidacy by building a visual identity that could distinguish from crowd and strengthen its impact through communication activities and well-established media relations, focusing on the below:

o Logo design & branding

As a picture is worth a thousand words, we endeavored for the logo to speak for itself. And that's what it actually did. We used the most well-known and appreciated monument of Athens, a strong symbol of Ancient Greece: the Parthenon of Athens Acropolis in the bright blue color of the Mediterranean Sea. And we did it in a way that could stick in the delegate's minds; we used culinary gadgets (spoon, fork, knife, eggbeater) instead of columns. The result was the creation of a powerful image that could really take Athens to the top of the delegate's preferences.



○ Media and Communication

Given the fact that the available budget for media planning and advertising was very low, we started promoting the candidacy to the general public through sending of press releases to national and international media. In parallel we focused on spreading the news of the Greek candidacy among the voting members of WACS using e-newsletters and social media. Our intention was to create a positive buzz around Athens. Media activities included in detail:

Press releases, News bites, Social Media

News was disseminated by press releases to both national and international media. The media where selected based on the countries participating in Korea Congress from the online press database available at ICCA website for its members. During the whole time before news bites were included in the monthly newsletter of ARTION distributed to approximately 75.000 recipients. The outcome of these outreach activities for this event, was for the candidacy to be acknowledged well before the official presentation at WACS Korea Congress.

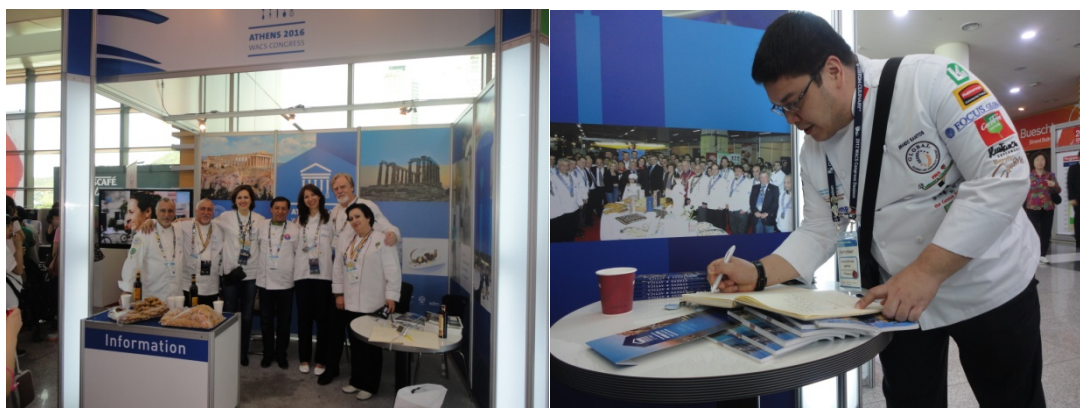
E-Newsletters and Social Media

Targeted newsletters were addressed via internet to the members of the Hellenic Chef's Federation (HCF), as well as the Presidents of the Chefs Association's members of WACS, while social media played a vital role in sharing the news, through ARTION's official accounts (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) strengthening the word of mouth campaign among the delegates, making the winning of the bidding more feasible!

○ Presence in Korea

The Booth

We prepared a booth with bright decoration and images of Athens and the wider region and a plasma screen playing videos of Athens and Greece. Our purpose was to make our booth a meeting point for all chefs during their coffee breaks, before the sessions opening and after their daily closure. This was achieved partly by offering Greek cookies, sweets, spirits and other local products (more than half a ton!) that were offered by Greek producers and transferred to Korea. This was a nice surprise for the participants since there was nothing offered by the organizers during the coffee breaks and it showed as well that the food producers in Greece are ready to support a gastronomy congress and promote the Mediterranean Cuisine and Greek gastronomy.



ARTION team was wearing chefs' uniforms to fit in with the congress delegates and mingle, distributing the message "You and WACS in Athens". This message was also printed on the uniforms that were offered as gift to WACS presidents.

We gifted out of pins of Athens and WACS Athens 2016: Pins are very popular among the chefs and we participated in their game of collecting the most pins.

We invited the participants to sign our book of impressions, for good luck.

Our presentation

Besides the regular destination presentation, we let our tourists speak for us: in the videos that were played during our presentation and sponsored dinner, the congress delegates could see and hear tourists from all over the world recommending Athens and Greece given the great time they are having and how safe they feel.

Dinner Sponsorship

By sponsoring the congress dinner and promote through it the funding of the Mayor of Athens we manage to convince the participants and voting members that despite the economic crisis, the Greek Authorities do invest in tourism and are willing and capable to do so. During the dinner, banners were hanging from the ceiling promoting Athens candidacy. For that particular night we managed to have the honor of having with us the Greek Ambassador of Korea, who addressed a speech to the delegates of WACS Congress for supporting the bid.

A full page advertisement in the congress book

In this way we could be sure that even if we didn't won the bid, two pages in the Congress book would testify that Athens was competing and was there.

c. Public Relations & Personal Contact as the most efficient tool:

o Before Korea Congress

The president of the HCF was invited to the annual presidents meeting organized in 2011, in Istanbul, Turkey. ARTION decided to travel and participate as well in order to meet the evolved people and the European voting members. The presence of our representative was a crucial networking move highly appreciated by the meeting participants. The HCF president officially announced the intention of Athens to bid for WACS 2016 Congress and so did unexpectedly the Turkish president. The first challenge was in front of us: A bidding neighboring country, belonging to the same region while our country is been exposed in the media in the worst possible way. Our only mean to face the first reactions and questions about the Economic Crisis was to talk with each member, introducing our company, our activities and convince them of our commitment in hosting a successful event.

o The final countdown: 5 days at Korea Congress

We prepared ourselves to face questioning and prejudgment about the economic circumstances in Greece. We realized quickly that the only way to convince people and gain their trust back was to be honest and professional and personalized our

strategy for each of the voting members. We talked with them and explain how the situation really is in Greece and what the potentials are for the future.

Every single vote was collected one by one by exploiting in the best possible way the opportunities we had:

- At our booth
- During the social events
- In our free time
- At the hotel: ARTION chose for a hotel that was hosting the greatest part of the participants

Personalizing our approach

The voting members had several reasons for choosing one or another of the competitors. We tried to find out what each one of them was looking for, what his fears or doubts were to vote for Greece and gave them the appropriate information. We wanted to show them the truth, the country that we live in: Greece wants to change, people in Greece are working hard and do care about tourism and international events, Athens does have the needed infrastructure, it's a safe city and we will be there to make sure that everything will run well.

4. Our achievement

We were able to change our strategy, to reconsider the way we promoted Greece, as it was impossible to do it the same way we did years ago, when Greece was known for the 3 "S" (see, sun, sex).

We actually managed to convince the majority of the voting members that they will have a perfectly organized congress with the financial support expected. Athens won the bid. From the first voting round Athens received the majority of votes, but only 3 more than Johannesburg. Istanbul fell out and at the second round we got 2/3 of the votes.

But this is not the only achievement. Our experience for WACS Congress was shared through our company's newsletter to international media and associations, such as ICCA and was the best publicity for Greece and Athens. It is a motivation for other Associations or Congress Organizers that don't feel comfortable lately with the thought of doing business in Greece to dare and trust. It's a plus point in our list of arguments for hosting other events in Greece.

5. What is the lesson ICCA members can learn from this experience

- Don't underestimate the power of personal contact: the added value of personal public relations is significantly higher than using any e-media tool
- Don't be afraid of facing negative publicity, even when it's worldwide and lasts for years
- Be ready to change and adapt to challenges, forgetting and putting aside what you are used to