



Susan Harris, CEO, ITS Australia

Interview with Susan Harris

CEO, Intelligent Transport Systems Australia

It has been said that the status quo is made to be broken. How about bringing some positive changes and improvements by setting ground-breaking records?

Under the banner, *ITS-Enhancing Liveable Cities and Communities*, the 23rd World Congress on Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) held in Melbourne, Australia in October 2016, hosted approximately 11,500 delegates from 73 countries. ITS Australia partnered with MCI Australia to organise the five-day event, one of the most complex congresses in the world, which set some impressive records and ground-breaking industry firsts. Susan Harris, CEO of ITS Australia, shares with us some of the records shattered and the strategy which lay behind them.

MCI: What was so unique about the 23rd World Congress?

Susan Harris: The congress introduced new elements with a distinctive Australian twist. It showcased the Asia Pacific ITS industry to an international audience, received federal, state and local government backing, promoted all transport modes and introduced community programmes. I feel we have achieved this objective by creating a platform of exchange for industry leaders and policy decision-makers in the industry by building collaboration and setting some impressive records and ground-breaking industry firsts.

MCI: Tell us about the congress' unique features?

S. H.: The city centre location, with events conveniently located nearby, enhanced the delegate experience. Over 5,000 live technology demonstrations experiences were held on public roads and at the Grand Prix circuit, and the journeys to these venues also showcased new technology. With the world's largest tram network, Melbourne enabled 17 technical tours across all major transport modes, including air, sea, road, freight, rail and tram. In other firsts, we held a hackathon, school and university students were fully integrated into the programme, a 20,000 square metre exhibition involving 300

organisations and 50 congress partners, and delivered a user-friendly mobile app.

MCI: What is your formula for success?

S. H.: Strategy, Execution and Innovation. When executed correctly, congresses are one of the most efficient and effective ways of translating your business strategy into results. But a good strategy is nothing without seamless execution. Execution is what the audience sees and experiences, it is how they get engaged and activated, and what they will remember. And, of course, just enough innovation to build excitement and enthusiasm from our audience.

MCI: What are the priorities for your organisation?

S. H.: We wanted participants and delegates to be fully engaged and have the opportunity to connect. The congress provided a variety of networking events, both formal and social. To ensure full-time delegates had access to information, over 600 presentations were captured and shared to a larger audience well beyond the end of the Congress.

MCI: How important is it for ITS to capture its congress content?

S. H.: It is crucial. We want ITS professionals around the globe to feel part of

our community. And for this they need to have access to our content. Additionally with so many business activities going on during the congress, not to mention the sheer volume of concurrent sessions, being able to have access to the content post-event was an excellent value-add to delegates and non-attendees alike.

MCI: Where do you expect the ITS Congress to be in five years?

S. H.: Bigger and to remain the leader in the industry.

MCI: Do you feel the 23rd ITS Congress has broken the status quo?

S. H.: Each World Congress is uniquely different and Melbourne 2016 will be remembered for a long time. The introduction of new elements, the perfect location and our distinctly Australian hospitality was a powerful combination. The congress was the second largest association conference in Melbourne ever and brought over \$25 million to the local economy. Feedback has been extremely positive and we are confident it raised the profile of the industry and ITS Australia.

Insider's view



Cindy-Lee Bakos,
Account Director, MCI Australia

MCI: How did you make it happen?

Cindy-Lee Bakos: These impressive results were achieved through a combination of various efforts including international delegate boosting, content capture and dissemination, performance measurement, sustainability auditing and compliance; and social events. These striking records could not have been met without the support from four local MCI offices and a combination of efforts and expertise from six other MCI offices from around the globe. The ITS congress is the accomplishment of an eight-year journey.

MCI: No fewer than 208 sessions were audio-recorded during the congress. How did you ensure it reached a larger audience?

C-L. B.: An online portal was built to host all recorded sessions and made accessible free of charge to all full-time delegates within one week post-event and with a unique access code. At the same time a sales campaign was initiated via email and onsite to offer it to all day delegates, students, sponsors, exhibitors and exhibition visitors. Then a mailing was sent to a database of non-attendees to offer access to the portal for a fee. Finally, sponsorship packages were put together to provide a custom-branded portal to organisations that wished to have multi-user access.

MCI: Can you share some results?

C-L. B.: To date we have offered complimentary access to over 2,000 attendees, as well as sold packages to 50 participants which has generated an additional revenue of nearly \$10,000 for the organisation. Our sales team is also following up with over 70 expressions of interest taken onsite at ITS 2016.

MCI: What about social media?

C-L. B.: An intense social media resulted in reaching more than 125,000 people, including 4,000 active followers on Twitter, 13,800 profile visits, and 480 mentions. The Twitter campaign generated a total of 336.7K impressions and a total reach of 43.2K with Facebook. Over the course of 91 days around the event, the number of likes on Facebook increased by 122% and we still have new likes every day! On average we earned about 12 clicks per day to the website, media releases, videos and partners' content.

MCI: How did you select the social media channels?

C-L. B.: We used ITS Australia existing channels, as well as creating new ones and building the following from scratch. We spent many months in the lead up to the event generating and sharing relevant ITS content to grow our following, and then added in

more relevant congress content closer to the event. Social media played an important part in helping us reach a larger audience using these media.

MCI: Something you would have done differently?

C-L. B.: Supporting our existing social media campaign we introduced a multiplier marketing programme to significantly leverage the large number of sponsors and exhibitors already invested in the event. To achieve this, we had a full-time digital marketing specialist actively providing content for sponsors and exhibitors to push out through their own internal and external networks (using newsletters, websites, social media, events etc), as well as us sharing their messaging via our social media channels. This saw a huge spike in the success of our digital marketing efforts.