

A meeting of like minds

20 years of experience have made this firm an expert in its field, says **Joan McFadden**

IN August this year, as Meeting Makers celebrates 20 years in business, the directors will be thanking clients, staff and partner organisations for their input to the ongoing development of this successful company.

When it was founded two decades ago it had just two members of staff to put together all the elements of the first conference for an impressive 450 delegates, establishing the foundations of a conference management company which now has more than 600 conferences and events to its credit.

The workforce has now expanded to 13 full-time staff with a large database of temporary staff used on a regular basis and continues to grow in both turnover and profit.

"I'm one of the original members of staff," says Lynn Samson, joint managing director of Meeting Makers. "We set up in offices in Strathclyde University's premises in Rotten Row, aiming to work with the university in conference management as well as drawing in clients from elsewhere.

"It proved to be a very worthwhile move, as word of mouth recommendation, hard work and experience has seen us grow from a small but highly effective Scottish organisation to being one of the leading UK providers of conferences and exhibitions.

"We have organised conferences and events in all the major UK centres including Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Brighton. We're now based at Strathclyde University's Jordanhill Campus, well placed and easily accessible and organise a large number of high-profile corporate events for companies including the financial and legal sector as well as the drinks industry. We also admin-

ister and manage the membership, finances and general affairs of a number of associations."

Over the years the conferences organised by Meeting Makers have attracted more than 40,000 visitors to the UK, which has been worth around £28m to the local economy. Business tourism also generates around £1bn a year to the Scottish economy with Meeting Makers playing an integral part in this sector, with the largest congress they have organised taking place in August 2008 at the SECC.

The International Association for the Study of Pain's 12th World Congress will bring 6500 delegates into the city, generating around £8m into the Scottish economy.

While this is the biggest conference to be organised by Meeting Makers, one of its most innovative and environmentally friendly had to be the Velo City Conference which involved working in partnership with Glasgow and Edinburgh city councils.

This is an excellent illustration of the on-going development of the collaboration between the two cities, which aims to raise Scotland's profile with VisitScotland, Glasgow Marketing Bureau and Edinburgh Convention Bureau working with organisations such as Meeting Makers to bring conferences into Scotland. The Velo City Conference was the first of its kind to be held in two cities in Scotland and involved more than 500 delegates from all over Europe.

"This type of conference really showcases Scotland's ability to host major conferences, the diversity of our venues and facilities, and the professionalism of our support services," says Caroline Packman, head of business tourism at VisitScotland. "By working in partner-



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ship, we can guarantee any meeting planner a seamless, high-quality and memorable experience in Scotland."

The first two days of this unique conference were held at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre and the delegates then cycled through to Glasgow with the last two days being held in Glasgow Crowne Plaza/SECC.

"It went really well," recalls Samson, clearly delighted to have played such a large and successful part in the smooth operation of the event.

"The delegates were so organised that they made it look easy, as they hoisted their folding bikes over their shoulders and made their way from

one place to another. There's no doubt that the carbon footprint is certainly lower for this type of conference."

However successful the event, planning ahead to the next event is an intrinsic part of Meeting Makers' strategy as illustrated by their recent working with Glasgow City Marketing Bureau, SECC and the University of Strathclyde to win the bid to organise the 4th World Hydrogen Technologies Convention coming to Glasgow in 2011. This event will attract 1000 delegates over three days with pre and post conference tours organised to encourage delegates to take a holiday or extended break either before or after the conference.

As the company has developed over the years its ethos of the highest quality service remains central to the resources it provides, whether in the medical, scientific, academic, government or corporate sectors. This is further enhanced by state-of-the-art administration systems, backed up by friendly and personal service from staff who clearly enjoy a career, rather

than just a job, as most of them have been with the company for more than ten years.

Meeting Makers are also members of the International Congress & Convention Association, Meeting Professionals International, the Association of British Professional Conference Organisers and Investors in People, ensuring a continuous high standard of service and reassurance that clients are working with the best.

As the company has grown, so too has the range of services on offer, especially over the last three years, and a new business development manager has been appointed to develop the company's expansion. "We're very excited about celebrating 20 years in business," says Samson.

"It's great to look back and see how far we've come, especially when so much of our success is tangible for both our clients and ourselves. We aim to continue to go from strength to strength, with all the benefits that will bring to our company, our clients and our partner organisations."



ALL THE MOD CONS: A stage set-up for speakers at a conference, left, and an elaborate banquet at the Royal Museum, right, Edinburgh, both organised by Meeting Makers.



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