

Attractive prospects

The conferencing industry is proving to be a significant revenue stream for Ireland, with events yielding good economic returns so far this year, while also impacting other sectors

IDENTIFYING a niche for Ireland's growing business conferencing sector, Fáilte Ireland is pooling all of its resources to up the ante by giving conference ambassadors crucial help in the form of an Association Conference Support Fund. This fund supports bidding for an association conference, site inspections and marketing of the event.

"Site inspections encourage decision-makers to make a trip here to experience first hand the quality of our product and encourage them to make a decision in favour of Ireland being the host destination," says Emma Sweeney, manager, Business Tourism Unit, Fáilte Ireland.

This year Fáilte Ireland supported 71 conferences (1,000 delegates) worth over €2m in revenue through the Association Conference Trade Support Fund, up from 59 conferences supported for the same period in 2008," she claims.

In addition, 36 conference deals have been generated in the Fáilte Ireland's Business Tourism research team, with the potential for 30,675 delegates and an economic impact of €39.9m. This figure is up from 15 leads given the same period in 2008," says Sweeney.

A similar fund to the Association Conference Fund led the International Business & Events Fund has just been launched by Fáilte Ireland - its purpose is to support business events that do not fall under the Association Conference Support Fund.

In addition, Fáilte Ireland has a Site Inspection Fund for destination management companies who are pitching for corporate business events in Ireland. So far this year 45 site inspections have been supported.

What really stands out from conferences supported and is in bidding is not just the potential revenue for business tourism and the knock-on effect in related industries, but the sheer variety of events being held here.

The European Winners Dog Show took place at the RDS between 30 May and 1 June and, following on from the equivalent show last year in Budapest, this year event, which was organised by the Irish Kennel Club,



Pictured at ESACT 2009 were, from left to right: Terri Cullinane, MediConference Partners; Keith McCormack, head of Business Tourism, Fáilte Ireland; The Minister for Health, Mary Harney TD; Michael Comer, head of research at Fighting Blindness and chair of ESACT Organising Committee; and Nicola McGrane, Conference Partners



Keith McCormack, head of Business Tourism, Fáilte Ireland; Marion Campbell, secretary, European Winners Dog Show; and Brian O'Hara, chairman, Irish Kennel Club

attracted over 4,000 pedigree dogs and their owners from all over Ireland, the UK and the rest of Europe.

"Whilst winning titles was the main reason why overseas exhibitors visited Ireland, win or lose no one can deny the fabulous spirit of the show atmosphere and all of these visitors will go home with lasting memories of true Irish hospitality," explains Keith McCormack, head of Business Tourism, Fáilte Ireland.

"The show vibe was also very reminiscent of shows in days gone by, where there was much camaraderie outside the

ring, whilst fervent competition and ethical sportsmanship reigned inside the ring."

The event ran for over three days at the RDS, and aside from participating and appreciating pedigree dogs, much business was generated as the RDS temporarily became a shopping paradise for dog owners.

Science was also very much to the fore this year, as the Citywest Conference Centre in Dublin welcomed ESACT, the European Society for Animal Cell Technology. This Fáilte Ireland-supported conference had 80 exhibitors, 900 delegates (an impressive 100 more than originally expected) and 300 poster displays.

The keynote address was delivered by the Minister for Health, Mary Harney TD.

"What was most encouraging in respect of this conference was the high level of sponsorship attracted despite the present difficult climate," says McCormack.

As Ireland strives to become known as an innovation nation, it is becoming increasingly important to attract science and technology events.

When conferences such as the 2011 European Society for Biomaterials Conference, which will be held in the new Convention Centre Dublin, come along research students here can benefit greatly from the influx of world-renowned experts.

"We have a lot of academics who, as part of their career progression, are looking to talk to their peers and their international colleagues," he explains.

"The best way of doing that is usually through international conferences, we would encourage them to do that.

"It is also a key opportunity for Fáilte Ireland to talk to these organisations, saying that now is the time to come to Ireland with our support, as people can give you access to the right relationships including universities, hotels or conference organisers."

Other recent conferences that were held in Ireland with the support of Fáilte Ireland have included the Joint Conference of the Society for Research on Nicotine And Tobacco, which was held in April 2009 and the Linking Global Foster Care: International Conference, which took place in mid July.

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