

MEET DARWIN



CONVENTION CASE STUDY – DARWIN, AUSTRALIA'S NORTHERN TERRITORY

EVENT NAME: Hardware & Building Traders National Conference

DATE: 13 - 15 June 2012

TOTAL ATTENDANCE: 600 Delegates

EVENT ORGANISER: Susan Adams, Conference and Event Coordinator
Tim Starkey - Group Manager

BACKGROUND:

Hardware and Building Traders (HBT) is a buying group for independent timber, hardware, garden and building supplies retailers. The organisation commenced operation in 1997 with 13 member stores and has grown rapidly to recently achieving 400 member stores in 2012. All member retail stores are independently owned and operated and located throughout all States and Territories of Australia.

The attraction of membership is the main objectives of the group; to achieve lower buying prices and higher margins for its stores, and to build volume for its suppliers.

EVENT OBJECTIVE:

As a benefit of membership HBT hosts regular meetings in each state as well as an annual national conference and exhibition with the purpose of providing informal forums for the exchange of ideas and information between members, and for suppliers to present new products and build relationships.

The annual conference is also a great opportunity for business owners to take a break with many attendees bringing their partners and families, so choosing a destination where members get a chance to unwind is very important to HBT. The objectives for the 2012 event were to continue to achieve strong attendance for both members and suppliers, ensure an attractive social program, and to manage the event budget successfully. The event is hosted by HBT for its member stores, and suppliers cover the cost of exhibiting.

EVENT FORMAT:

The program included a 2 day conference with an exhibition as well as a welcome function and gala dinner. Joint member and supplier sessions where group challenges and product issues are discussed openly as well as information sharing on industry developments were all on the agenda. 'Members only' forums are also included. The exhibition is all business as members and suppliers get a chance to meet and discuss new products, negotiate arrangements and generally develop and foster great business relationships. A highlight is the opportunity to socialise and have fun at the welcome cocktails and gala dinner.

THE DARWIN CONVENTION CENTRE EXPERIENCE:

Of particular appeal to the HBT team and the suppliers was the arrangements and procedures with the Darwin Centre. "We had the best bump in and out that we ever experienced, it was so smooth, not one glitch. The way the management team handle arrangements, their efficient yet relaxed way, made us feel like we did not have as much work as usual, they took the stress out of it," advised Susan.

The Conference Gala Dinner was held at the Centre and "we were very impressed with the level of service", said Susan. "It all went very well with wonderful food, expert audio visual and technical support and general organisation".

NORTHERN TERRITORY EXPERIENCE:

For many years Darwin was in the top three destinations that members suggested through post conference surveys as a suggestion for the national conference. Susan Adams, the conference coordinator and her team at HBT have always looked for something different for their annual event. They face the usual challenges of matching suitable venues to their event needs, and the Northern Territory (NT) brought particular concerns regarding the feasibility

for its suppliers and the costs potentially involved, so it was constantly left off the “wish list”. Until unexpectedly, an invitation arrived for Susan Adams to join in a group familiarisation of the Top End hosted by the Northern Territory Convention Bureau and the Darwin Convention Centre. Keen to investigate the option, and following a detailed inspection of venue options and a glimpse of the NT’s attractions, Susan reported back to her management on the potential to finally satisfy their member’s wishes. She was particularly impressed with the Darwin Convention Centre. She felt its size and location would work well for their conference and trade show and the general attitude of the management was so supportive. Her inspections of the social venues options and the related ideas she experienced were also very exciting. “It was so different to other cities, I just knew our members would be happy if we went to Darwin,” she claimed.

Although HBT was keen to deliver on its members wishes, the concerns regarding the potential to have reduced attendance and supplier support for the exhibition did continue so plans were put in place to manage their budget accordingly and to expect a sizeable drop in attendance. Research was also conducted into local suppliers and solutions were found that provided excellent services such as freight logistics and exhibition services at competitive rates. Bill Zammit, a local motivational speaker with a background in Tourism was chosen as master of ceremonies, a choice that proved very popular especially with his own successful business achievements along with stories of touring adventures in the Top End.

As the planning continued for the event, it became clear that concerns for reduced numbers would lessen as both members and suppliers began to register in much greater numbers than expected. Although not as high as numbers achieved in larger cities, Darwin attracted over 600 delegates and 92 exhibitors. The appeal of Darwin showed great results with over 75% of participants bringing their partners and 20 children were recorded as attending.

There were many highlights to the 2012 annual conference according to Susan, “it was all just brilliant” she said. “The Croc Cove for the welcome reception and Mindle Markets were a big hit and we had fantastic unsolicited, appreciative emails from so many members. Along with the usual business they had great fun in a very different environment”.

OVERALL RESULT:

The 2012 conference was very successful for all involved and it was great fun according to Susan Adams. When asked if she would recommend Darwin to another organisation, she said that she would not hesitate to recommend it and that she would advise them to “definitely go!”

QUOTES:

“.. a unique family feeling to the HBT conferences”

Ray David, Uni-Pro Painting Equipment - Delegate

“.. a fabulous event and thoroughly enjoyed our stay in Darwin..”

Joe and Sallie Schorer, Midland Timber, Bellevue WA. - Delegate

For further information or comment, please contact:

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