

EVENT NAME:	2010 Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) National Conference
DATE:	25-26 October 2010
TOTAL ATTENDANCE:	Over 400 delegates 51 visionary international and national speakers
CONFERENCE CHAIR:	Jeannette Button, PRIA 2010 Conference Chair, President, PRIA Northern Territory Division Council and PRIA Board Director

CONVENTION OBJECTIVE:

The Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) National Conference is the largest and most comprehensive event for PR and corporate professionals in the region.

It attracts 400+ public relations and communication practitioners from across the country and enables the best minds to get together to debate best practice, exchange ideas and network with their industry peers.

Held for the first time in Darwin, the conference theme “PR in a Different Space” focused on different approaches practitioners can use to develop and implement effective PR strategies.

Attracting delegates from the UK to the Vatican, Canada, Singapore and across Australia, the conference offered a range of inspiring international and national speakers, hands-on practical workshops, interactive panels and an opportunity to meet, network and share challenges, experiences and success stories with fellow PR practitioners.

DESTINATION SELECTION RATIONALE:

As an active member for more than 10 years, PRIA 2010 Conference Chair and President of the Northern Territory Division Council, Jeannette Button said the aim was to introduce people to different experiences in a very different location and motivate everyone to say, “I really want to go to that conference”!

“We wanted to capture and amaze members on what Darwin had to offer. Most importantly, our benchmark was to produce a very memorable program in a memorable location that added value to their membership” she said.

This goal was achieved with attendance being higher than expected. Over 50 local Territorians attended with many becoming PRIA members for the educational and networking benefits. PRIA’s Chief Executive Officer, Jon Bissett said Darwin has set the challenge for future host cities to attract more attendees than members from their respective cities.

Another key aspect in choosing the Northern Territory was the destination appeal for participants to extend their stay and experience a part of Australia that may not have had the opportunity to visit before.

“For us, the location of Darwin added a strong community feel surrounding the event. Normally when the conference is held in the metropolitan capital cities, the delegates head back to the office or home at the end of the business sessions,” commented Mr Bissett.

“In Darwin, we had a captive audience. It also took people out of their comfort zone creating a greater sense of camaraderie that does not always happen in major city locations. The relaxed tropical atmosphere also attracted a higher than normal attendance at our dinners and functions. No-one left early!” he said.

THE NORTHERN TERRITORY EXPERIENCE:

Held for the first time in Australia's most northern capital, PRIA's Conference Chair, Jeannette Button said the 2010 PRIA conference program promised to take delegates into a 'different space' and that they did.

Over two days and nine afternoon sessions the conference explored the hottest topics in PR in a packed program. More than seven hours were dedicated to networking breaks that allowed delegates the opportunity to forge new links with the who's who of the Australia PR and corporate communication industry.

As there are many different ways to tell a story, the conference program incorporated the traditional Larrakia landowners reading their 'Dreamtime Story' in their native language with simultaneous English translation.

Renown for their spectacular dot paintings, Arremte indigenous artists mesmerised the audience by sharing their stories by drawings in the sand. Everyone was spellbound knowing this was a quite possibly a once in a lifetime experience.

"We also 'transported' people to the 'desert' in an interactive Aboriginal dot painting workshop. This session were sold out. It was incredible to see about 80 delegates in their business attire, sprawled across the floor, totally absorbed in these activities," stated Ms Button.

THE DARWIN CONVENTION CENTRE EXPERIENCE:

In the past, the size of PRIA's annual event was more suited to a hotel environment, however PRIA's Jon Bissett now beckons that the Darwin Convention Centre was the ideal size.

"The venue was fantastic and the number one stand out in my mind. The layout, design and size gave us the extra space without feeling lost and we really did get that resort feel with the magnificent backdrop of the waterfront precinct and Darwin Harbour.

"The close proximity of the Vibe and Medina Hotels and the Waterfront Precinct made it a perfect place to hold a conference," added Bissett.

The Golden Target Awards and gala dinner was held at the Darwin Convention Centre. Delegates walked from the auditorium through a reveal into a stunningly decorated evening event. Delegates commented on the quality of the food throughout the conference.

PRIA's Jeanette Button also agreed saying the Darwin Convention Centre team were incredibly professional and nothing was too much trouble.

"Previously, we have always used classroom style setting. The Centre's tiered auditorium worked brilliantly for us. It was such a comfortable environment to work in and had the venue had the right amount of breakout rooms to suit our needs," she said.

CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS:

Darwin was chosen to announce the success of PRIA's bid to hold the 2012 World Public Relations Forum. Being held in Australia for the first time, this event will attract the world's best communicators from more than 70 organisations to attend.

Dan Tisch, Chair-Elect of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management said Australia has long been a leader and trendsetter in the global public relations community and PRIA demonstrated that leadership and innovation in the competitive process of the bid.

All speakers embraced the conference theme and because it was being held in Darwin, they paid attention and challenged themselves to think 'outside the square'.

It was Jeanette Button's goal to secure a speaker from the Vatican. With sheer determination and an endorsement from the Bishop of Darwin, Most Reverend Eugene Hurley, Jeanette was successful in securing the man responsible for the Catholic Church's communication strategy.

Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Monsignor Paul Tighe presented new media adopted as a means of getting their message across to the younger generation of the Catholic community. Mgr Tighe gave insight on Pope2you.net featuring YouTube clips, Facebook and iPhone apps that achieved five million hits in four days.

Other keynote speakers included Virgin Galactic's Sales Manager, Steve Attenborough on the commercial aspect of selling space travel and an enlightening presentation from the great, great grandson of Sir Charles Darwin.

One of the difficulties was the access of Darwin for international speakers from North America, as their stay is extended to 5-6 days instead of 3-4. However, several speakers saw this as an opportunity to extend their stay and explore the wonders that the Northern Territory has to offer.

THE VERDICT:

In the eyes of international participants, PRIA 2010 has placed the professionalism of the PR industry in Australia and the Northern Territory on the same playing field as the rest of the world. That is the legacy that this conference leaves behind.

"It was the right decision to hold our event in Darwin. Everyone was easy to deal with. The last time I was at an event in Darwin, the Convention Centre and waterfront precinct was not built. This time it was a totally different experience," added Jon Bissett.

CLIENT QUOTES:

"Rock art was probably the first form of mass public communication and information. Holding the 2010 PRIA conference in the Northern Territory, where we have some of the world's oldest examples of such communication, is a powerful symbol of our industry's long and evolving tradition."

Noel Turnbull, RMIT University

"Australia has long been a leader and trendsetter in the global public relations community. PRIA's successful bid for the 2012 World Public Relations Forum to be held for the first time in Australia and the competitive process clearly stood out and demonstrated that leadership and innovation."

Dan Tisch, Chair-Elect, Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management

"Any concerns of holding our conference in Darwin were alleviated. It was the right decision to hold our event in Darwin. Everyone was easy to deal with. The last time I was at an event in Darwin, the Convention Centre and waterfront precinct was not built. This time it was a totally different experience."

Jon Bissett, CEO, Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) 2010 Annual Conference

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Jon Bissett, CEO, Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) 2010 Annual Conference

MEET DARWIN



CONVENTION CASE STUDY – DARWIN, AUSTRALIA'S NORTHERN TERRITORY

"In Sydney and Melbourne, the hotels are a greater distance from the Centre. The close proximity of the Vibe and Medina Hotels and the Waterfront Precinct made it a perfect place to hold a conference."

Jon Bissett, CEO, Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) 2010 Annual Conference

"I would encourage anyone to use Darwin as long as the organisation had the membership demographics that has the ability to travel plus can afford the extra expense of travel."

Jon Bissett, CEO, Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) 2010 Annual Conference

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