

REACHING THE TOP OF A VERY COMPETITIVE INDUSTRY - Service: The standard bearer for DCC

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How do you open a convention centre in what, at the time it was planned, was perceived as a somewhat remote or frontier part of Australia? Let alone take it to join the top ranks of a well-established and competitive international market inside four years?

This was one of the challenges facing AEG Ogden in 2005 when the company signed the agreement, as a member of the private consortium that won the PPP tender issued by the Northern Territory Government, for the construction and management of the Darwin Convention Centre.

At that time, the benefits of Darwin being the closest Australian capital city to Asia had not yet been appreciated, nor had the Territory's rise to economic success among all Australian states and territories begun - and it was yet to enter the lucrative business events industry as a major player.

The answer to other issue for AEG Ogden - of "Who?" - was Malu Barrios, who brought her extensive experience in the meeting and hospitality industries in Australia and internationally, to her appointment as General Manager of the Darwin Convention Centre (DCC).

Mrs. Barrios' first step was to introduce AEG Ogden's established, comprehensive and proven operational systems and experience to the particular requirements of Darwin, to become the strategy and standard for the future operation of the DCC.

In a recent interview with a respected national business newspaper, Malu provided some indication of the hurdles she confronted when implementing the strategic decision to invest heavily in staff training and superior service standards as a priority for the opening of the Convention Centre in a city without a strong tradition or demand for hospitality skills.

"Convention Centres have very high requirements for numbers and standards of staff to meet the needs of their range of services and clients. So we were very much starting from scratch knowing that we had to establish and develop a persona and reputation that was sufficiently strong and positive, to provide an appropriate basis - indeed, the Brand - for future years," said Mrs Barrios. Mrs Barrios said that when the DCC opened, staff recruitment was a particular challenge. "Skills training is much needed in the hospitality and tourism industries and there always seems to be a shortage. I work on the basis that, apart from the established training channels, interest should be encouraged from unconventional channels.

"Our investment was not only in the Centre but in Darwin and we initiated a workforce development strategy that reached out to the ethnic and indigenous communities, seniors and those who were happy to work in 'after 5.00pm' jobs. This program not only assisted the Centre in hiring staff but it was also gratifying to be able to give back to the community and to encourage the individuals involved," said Mrs Barrios.

As well as being effective in establishing a strong and loyal staff nucleus that is proving to be very stable and developing successfully, the strategy was also recognised by the International

Association of Convention Centres and earned the Darwin Convention Centre the Members' Choice Innovation Award in 2009.

That early commitment to and focus on service professionalism and service standards has delivered steady increases across the Centre's business each year to date, with the Centre receiving a 96% positive response in client feedback in the 2011/12 year.

As Malu explains, "it may seem a simple thing, but regrettably what is increasingly missing across many businesses today is - **service**."

"You can have the best looking product in the market but if it is not promoted and delivered with an appropriate standard of service and product, it will not be the most successful."

Malu encourages feedback from clients on their experiences with the Centre as a way of measuring service delivery and client satisfaction and determining areas for improvement.

Responses from two experienced meetings industry professionals who recently attended events at the Darwin Convention Centre are summarised below.

"The most pleasing aspect of these examples was that their strongest impression from their experience was the Convention Centre's service standards. I would like to think that this explains why the Centre is punching above its weight in terms of performance against other centres in Australia," said Mrs Barrios.

- **Gina Samuels, The Production House Events, Toorak, Victori**

Last week we held the 35th Annual ASAPS Conference at the DCC and I just wanted to give you some feedback on how unbelievable your staff were.

"Janae took over the conference following Andrea's absence and picked up everything so competently. She was incredibly thorough and was a pleasure to work with. Throughout the conference week nothing was too much trouble for Janae and she was incredibly helpful. This is a level of service we rarely see at other venues.

We also want to compliment Billy who was assigned to us all week; he went beyond the call of duty and was absolutely brilliant. Nothing was too much to ask and he moved at the speed of light. If only we could have a Billy at every conference we do. We also must commend Benita and her motherly care for us; at all times she ensured we were looked after and had everything we needed. We also had a very demanding trade area which required the buffet tables to be moved regularly and although this was a lot of work for Benita and her team, they did it all with the understanding that we had to keep the trade happy.

Hayley, Casey and the rest of the team also did a great job and we must compliment you on your choice of staff as we were incredibly impressed and grateful for the service we received

Thank you again and we have every intention of coming back soon."

- **Victor Goldsztein, Victor Goldsztein Event Management, St Kilda, Victoria**

"I finally bring a client to the Darwin Convention Centre and find you are not in the country when I arrive! However I must say that you can leave the country any time you like, because the centre is in very good hands whilst you are away. You truly do have an A-Team!

From my initial sales contact with Carrie and my event planning with Janae and Shara, your sales/event planning team has been nothing but helpful, hard working, problem solving and absolutely wonderful to deal with!

Chanaka and Benita run a great food and beverage team. All the team on the floor were nothing but helpful and pleasant. Chef should be congratulated on wonderful food. As

always, the cleaning staff not only kept the venue looking great but they said hello as you walked past. Everyone on the floor seemed happy to have me and my client in the building. Your AV team did a great job.

And lastly I need to thank Kevin - a banquet waiter. After helping me down to the front entrance with several suitcases so that I could try to get a taxi, he drove past me after he left his shift some twenty minutes later and when he saw that I was still trying to get a taxi, he offered me a lift with all my linen and drapes to the Crowne Plaza Hotel. There's Darwin Convention Centre service for you!

I understand that the above excellent attitude and service comes from the top all the way down to all levels of staff. It is always wonderful working with you and your team have done you proud. I hope I get a chance in the not too distant future to come back and work with the centre. I am certainly an ambassador for you - you all did very well!"

For further media information or comment, please contact:

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About AEG Ogden:

AEG Ogden is a joint venture between Australian interests and AEG Facilities of the United States.

AEG Ogden manages venues throughout the Asia Pacific region, including Sydney's Acer Arena, the Brisbane Entertainment Centre and the Newcastle Entertainment Centre, and the Perth Arena (currently under construction); the Brisbane, Cairns, Darwin and Kuala Lumpur Convention Centres, the Qatar National Convention Centre (currently under construction), Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane and live theatres including Perth's His Majesty's Theatre and the Perth Concert Hall.

About AEG Facilities

AEG, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Anschutz Company, is the leading sports, entertainment and venue operator in the world. AEG Facilities, a stand-alone affiliate of AEG, owns, operates or consults with 100 of the industry's preeminent venues worldwide, across five continents, and works in concert with affiliated AEG entities, including live event producer, AEG Live, AEG Global Partnerships and AEG Development to support the success of AEG venues across the globe. AEG owns, operates or provides services to venues including STAPLES Center (Los Angeles, Calif.), The Home Depot Center (Carson, Calif.), Nokia Theatre L.A. Live (Los Angeles, Calif.), Citizens Business Bank Arena (Ontario, Calif.), Valley View Casino Center (San Diego, Calif.) Sprint Center (Kansas City, Mo.), XL Center and Rentschler Field (Hartford, Conn.), The Rose Garden (Portland, Ore.), KeyArena (Seattle, Wash.), KFC YUM! Center (Louisville, Ky.), AmericanAirlines Arena (Miami, Fla.), AT&T Center (San Antonio, Tx.), Time Warner Cable Arena (Charlotte, N.C.), Prudential Center (Newark, N.J.), Target Center (Minneapolis, Minn.), Mercedes-Benz Arena (Shanghai, China), MasterCard Center (Beijing, China), The O2 Arena (London, England), O2 World (Berlin, Germany), O2 World Hamburg (Hamburg, Germany), Ahoy Arena (Rotterdam, Netherlands), Pernambuco Stadium (Recife, Brazil), Acer Arena (Sydney, Australia), Globe Arenas (Stockholm, Sweden) and the Qatar National Convention Centre (Doha, Qatar). For more information, please visit www.aegworldwide.com.