



# CALGARY•TELUS CONVENTION C•E•N•T•R•E

## Report to the Community

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Marcia Lyons, General Manager of the  
Calgary TELUS Convention Centre

By **Tom Keyser**

After a lengthy period of study and planning, the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre (CTCC) is rolling out a cost-effective sales strategy designed to attract convention delegates from around the world, an untapped market with almost limitless potential.

It's a creative and bold new direction, which makes perfect sense from both a business and a historical perspective. In short, the time is right.

"We've been concentrating on the Canadian Association/Corporate market since we opened our doors 32 years ago," explains Helen Greenwood, director of sales for the CTCC.

"But this represents a fresh start. We're basically in year one of this initiative and I couldn't be more excited," she continues.

"We have proven our product and our geographical location are both second to none. So tackling the international market is the logical next step," adds Greenwood.

A respected campaigner who draws upon a wealth of sales experience, Greenwood stands as an authority on the subject. In recent years, her talented sales corps have worked hard to broaden revenue streams and beef up Canadian market share by taking advantage of cooperative industry partnerships and innovative sales practises. Their efforts have helped to generate a more robust bottom line as well as unqualified praise from the sales director: "I have the best team in Calgary," confirms Greenwood with a smile.

And in light of such productivity, Greenwood and CTCC general manager Marcia Lyons decided it was time to push the envelope.

But the move to sample international waters was no snap decision. CTCC's blueprint for carving out a share of global markets has evolved one methodical step at a time.

Initially, the Calgary sales team was motivated by the success of their counterparts from the Vancouver Exhibition & Convention Centre, which has explored European markets with demonstrable success.

As CTCC sales manager Patty Buehler explains, "Our colleagues in Vancouver felt we were losing out on a key market. They felt Europe would be perfect for us due to our size, but that we weren't going after it aggressively enough using current strategies at that point."

Adds Helen Greenwood: "At some stage, you reach a saturation point in domestic markets ... you have to open the thought processes to new possibilities."

Both women admit the new thrust couldn't have been considered prior to 2000, when a \$70-million expansion gave CTCC administrators a total of 130,000 square feet to work with. Today's Convention Centre is able to offer an enormous range of modern technological

services, amenities and configured-to-order conference areas to match the best in the world.

Perhaps more importantly, senior planners love the sensible economics of the global project. For one thing, no budget-busting advertising campaigns are needed. Managers correctly reasoned that a shotgun sales blitz aimed at urban Europe would be unproductive, as well as prohibitively expensive.

As an alternative, CTCC added an invaluable sales tool that seems certain to produce rich dividends. Two years ago, the Centre purchased membership in the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), which represents more than 750 members in almost 80 countries worldwide.

According to Buehler, who's been asked to quarterback CTCC's friendly global assault, ICCA members gain access to an invaluable and exclusive database that contains pertinent information on more than 14,000 international organizations.

Buehler's job is to scour the database for candidates that seem a good fit for conventions in Calgary. Ideal targets include professional, scientific, academic and cultural organizations (preferred size of delegations: 500 to 1,500) likely to be attracted by the unique attributes of southern Alberta and the Rocky Mountains. "The database allows you

to narrow your focus, identifying organizations by means of any criteria you wish," explains Buehler. "It includes important information on each group: its history, key contact information and links to Canadian-based affiliates."

The idea is to cultivate a list of Canadian contacts who are already connected with these global organizations, as well as to subsequently enlist their help in presenting a bid to the target group.

Another bonus: ICCA membership entitles marketers to exchange information

with other convention centres sharing similar aims, goals and capacity. Example: CTCC staff have struck up a working relationship with the centre in Christchurch, N.Z., which has been extremely generous about sharing potential sales leads.

So far, results have been encouraging, although CTCC sales pros emphasize that scouting, preparing and landing international bids is a long-term process.

"It's a bit like a mini-Olympic bid," Buehler says by way of illustration.

Buehler cites encouraging feelers already received from an international group of veterinary parasitologists (target convention date: 2009); a ski federation (2010); and a hereford council (2012). Locally based host/champions have agreed to submit bids in collaboration with CTCC later this year.

Greenwood believes a 40 to 50 per cent success ratio is a reasonable expectation. She also points to research that demonstrates why off-shore visitors are to be prized above all others.

"International travellers spend more money, stay longer and bring their family with them."

"That's the beauty of the international market. It's dynamic, it's fresh, and it's open for the taking. So let's begin to sing our praises - yes, it's Calgary!"



CTCC Sales Team.