



## Italy us Europe

Italy goes for a system approach. And the various players in the congress business nationwide have discovered the key to the challenges of the future, namely: "coopetition"

# Coopetition, the key to the future

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Recent economic theories see competition as a key force in keeping companies stable and encouraging them to innovate. Some schools, including the Harvard Business School and the Yale School of Management, suggest a form of economic relations that develops from a concept of competition -thanks to the game theory- to one of cooperation with suppliers, customers or companies producing complementary products.

**Coopetition is the term that expresses this correlation between cooperation and competition. The concept is particularly useful for interpreting this last year's developments in the Italian conference business, starting from a real novelty: Italy has opted for a system approach!**

But let's see how the process has started and evolved.

The premise: internationally speaking, the last decade has seen nothing but shrinkage in the events industry, for a variety of reasons. In Italy, as elsewhere in the world, this has meant that companies that were not well established in the business, and lacked the solidity required to survive far-reaching world crises, have been forced out of the market. Those that have managed to survive have had to evolve and invest in hi-tech equipment and security and offer all-inclusive services. The outcome, first and foremost, is a highly dynamic, and proactive industry in Italy that is now ready and willing to cooperate in order to pay off its own very considerable investments.

The second result is that, in the face of such a positive reaction on the part of the operators, the category associations have also had to adopt a proactive attitude. They have, in fact, set up Federcongressi, the national congress industry council, which has given immediate proof of its efficacy, first by liaising with politicians at all levels (metropolitan, regional and national) and then by achieving ...

...a third result: little known, let alone officially recognized until very recently, the congress industry now ranks among Italy's most innovative fields of production and has been included in a skeleton law for national development. The Italian congress industry has therefore bonded, made plans for future developments and now appears to have good new prospects. Promotion has also had a hand in all this and has not been without developments itself, though not always positive. But who is in charge of promoting the congress business? - Enit, soon to become the National Tourism Agency with a new institutional framework, but which has still no properly defined operating plans for the events industry; - the Regions, which have a budget of several million euros up until 2006 precisely for, boosting promotion of individual local realities. And this is where the concept of coopetition comes in. As well as presenting themselves independently, the Regions have adopted this concept and produced a joint strategic plan of

action: once the management of promotional resources for the congress industry had been federalized, and the Regions thus became competitors, they decided to cooperate and launch a series of joint schemes. If anyone should therefore ask why we are still not going to see a single stand for Italy at the next major trade fair in Barcelona, the answer is simple: because the machinery of national promotion has effectively been defined, but still hasn't got all its parts running smoothly. There are 27 convention bureaux spread throughout Italy's regions except -and hopefully not for long - in the cities of Rome and Milan, but they are still not working in a network. One great step forward has, however, been taken: the various players have agreed to work together, under the banner of coopetition! In Italy there is a saying that goes "*Tra il dire e il fare c'è di mezzo il mare*" [equivalent to "easier said than done" but which envisages a whole sea between the 'saying' and the 'doing']. In our case, however, it is not the sea, but time, that is in the way. Not being a clairvoyant, I can't say how long the process will take. But, for sure, one really noteworthy achievement is that the Italians have **decided not to leave such an important industry for our national economy without the support of a suitable united promotion approach, as required by globalization.** And the increasingly active role of the international marketing experts is a clear sign of the ferment pervading the entire sector.