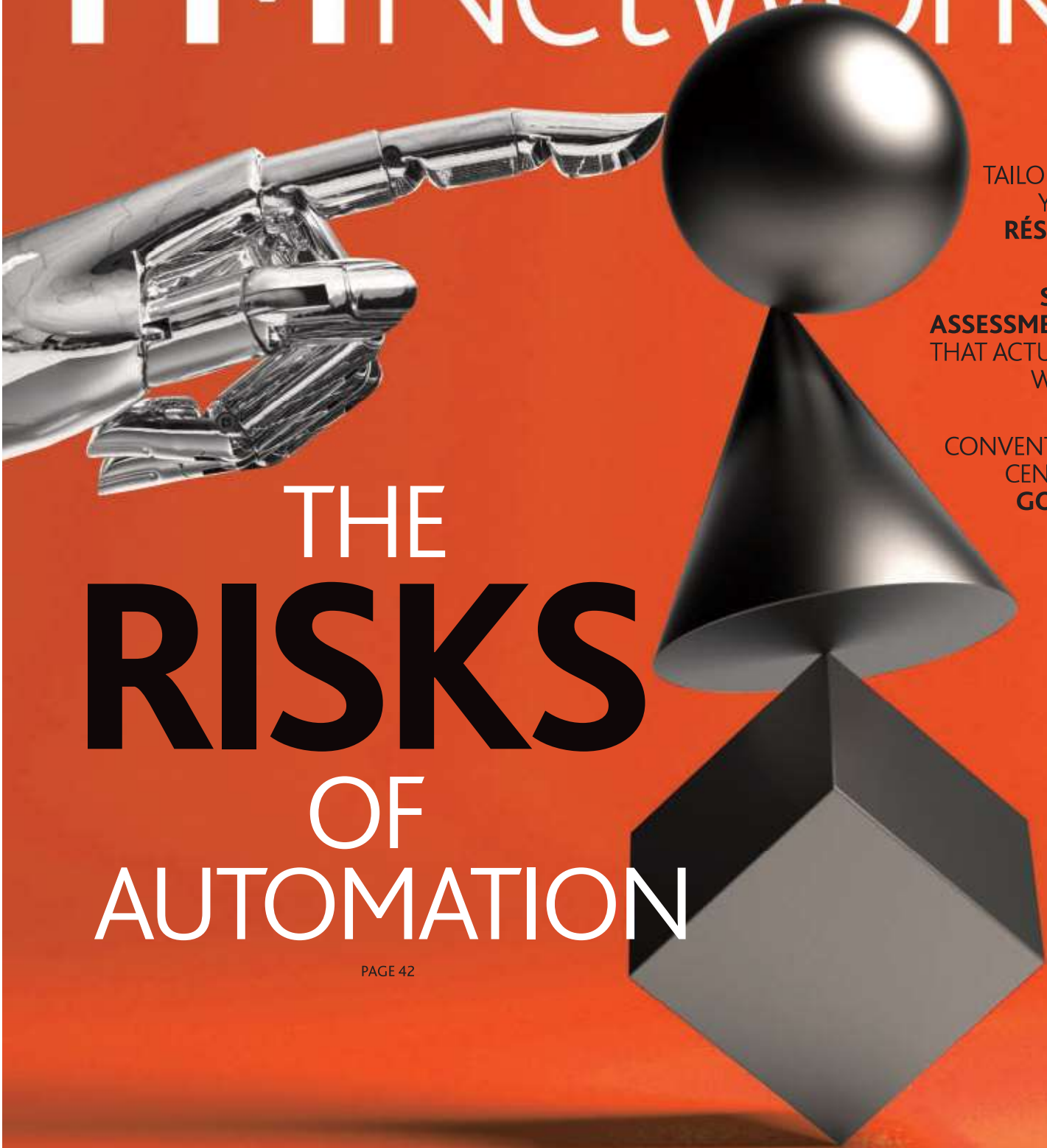


OCTOBER 2018 VOLUME 32, NUMBER 10

PMNetwork®



TAILORING
YOUR
RÉSUMÉ
PAGE 24

**SELF-
ASSESSMENTS**
THAT ACTUALLY
WORK
PAGE 48

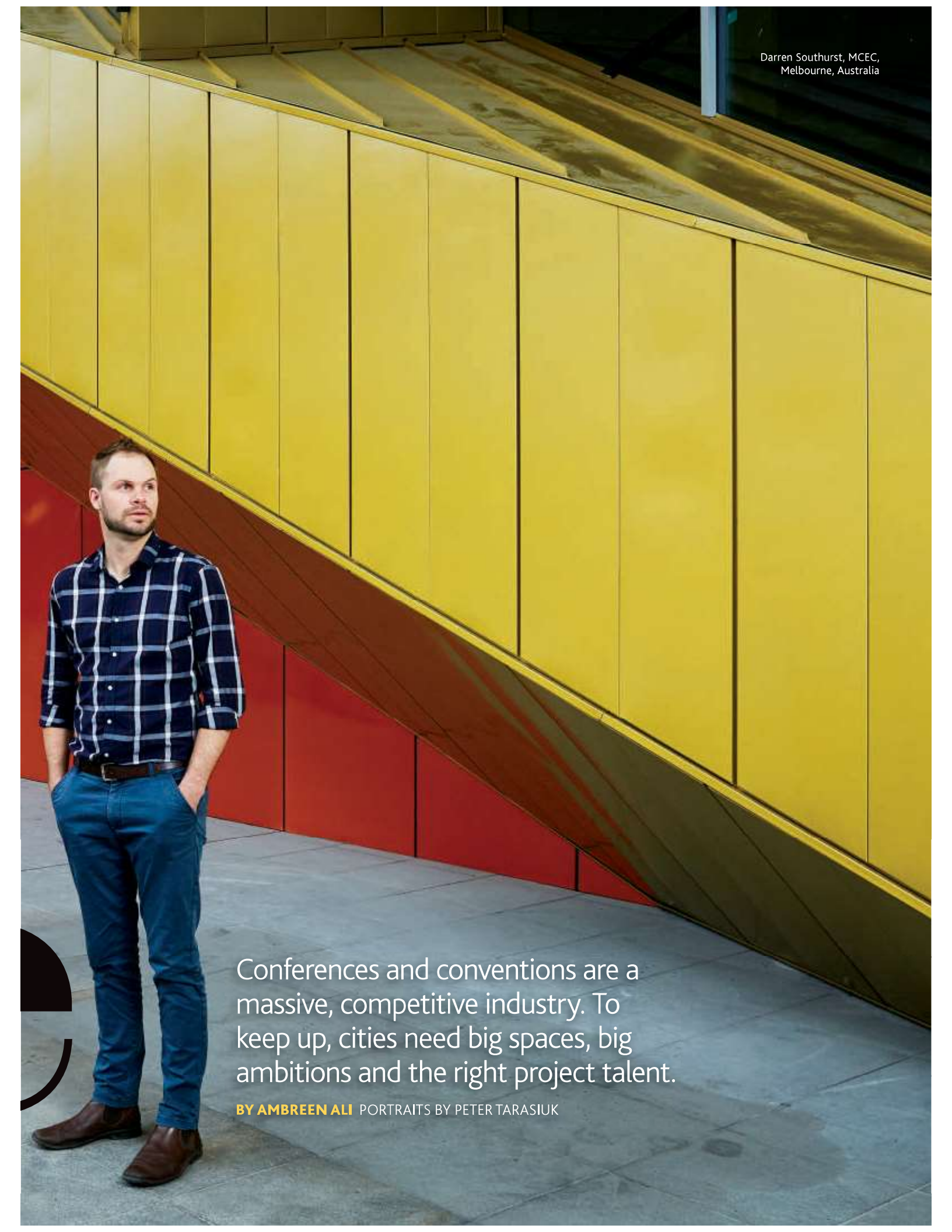
CONVENTION
CENTERS
GO BIG
PAGE 30

THE RISKS OF AUTOMATION

PAGE 42



Unconventional Scale

A man with a beard, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt, blue jeans, and brown shoes, stands with his hands in his pockets in front of a modern building. The building features large, vertical yellow panels and a red base. The man is looking off to the side.

Darren Southurst, MCEC,
Melbourne, Australia

Conferences and conventions are a massive, competitive industry. To keep up, cities need big spaces, big ambitions and the right project talent.

BY AMBREEN ALI PORTRAITS BY PETER TARASIUK

W

When leaders at the Washington State Convention Center were deciding whether to expand the already-large space, one staggering fact stood out: Over the previous five years, the convention center had turned down more business than it had booked. The fervent demand for convention space is hardly limited to Seattle, Washington, USA, either. On the other side of the globe, in Melbourne, Australia, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) had turned away 20 percent of its business opportunities in 2017, the year it began construction on its AU\$205 million expansion, which was finished in June.

The global meetings and conventions industry was expected to grow 7.5 percent annually from 2017 to 2023, hitting US\$1.2 trillion in 2023, according to a 2018 report by research firm Allied Market Research. And while much of that growth will take place in the United States—the top meeting location in the world—it certainly won't be limited to that country. High-profile megaprojects to build or expand convention spaces span the world.

Project teams are keenly aware today's organizers and associations are looking for more than simple meeting spaces. Convention center teams are pulling out all the stops to convince people that their center is not only the biggest—it's the best.

KNOWING WHEN TO FLEX

With events, project completion deadlines are typi-



Four views of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre expansion in Melbourne, Australia



cally set in stone. The same deadline rigidity can apply to convention center megaprojects, which may have to be wrapped up in time for specific booked events to happen. When the MCEC project moved into its construction phase in March 2017, every person on the team knew that the project schedule was nonnegotiable because a 1,000-person malaria conference had already booked the new space for July 2018, says Darren Southurst, project manager, MCEC, Melbourne, Australia.

To make sure the team nailed the deadline, Mr. Southurst built in time contingencies upfront, so any materials delays, for instance, wouldn't require



“We almost had a direct line to the guy operating the jackhammer, and the minute we needed him to stop, he did.”

—Darren Southurst, MCEC, Melbourne, Australia

the team to fast-track the schedule or blow the budget on overtime. He also closely tracked the timeline along the way, reminding team members and stakeholders alike both of the deadline and the immovable reason behind it.

The biggest scheduling challenge, though, was that the project unfolded in a live environment, with the existing center remaining open for ongoing events and meetings. To keep project progress brisk while minimizing disruptions for guests, Mr. Southurst coordinated closely with administrative staff and the contractor. The disruptive work (like drilling and demolitions, for example) was slotted

around the event calendar and when the convention center was closed. “It was to the point where we almost had a direct line to the guy operating the jackhammer, and the minute we needed him to stop, he did,” Mr. Southurst says. “It came down to the relationship we were able to have with the builder.” That back-and-forth with the builder helped the project team avoid even a single complaint from center visitors.

Proactive stakeholder management also helped keep an arduous design process on track—and on schedule. Though the Melbourne convention center’s foundation had originally been built with the

possibility of expansion in mind, each decision of the growth project had to be vetted and approved. A design brief was established four years ago, and a two-year design phase preceded construction. “There’s quite a process, with the operator quite an influential stakeholder,” Mr. Southurst says. “It takes a lot more time than it would in a standard type of construction.”

To generate consensus and speed the approvals process, the project team held design workshops with all of the architects, engineers and consultants involved. And rather than hold out for overall approval—and potentially slow the project in the process—the team opted for incremental approval. That meant as soon as there was agreement on the structure, construction began, while the team continued to meet and discuss internal details such as paint colors.

“It’s quite a condensed project, as far as time goes, so those kind of finite details have been happening as the project has been constructed,” he says. “We didn’t want to put ourselves in a position where we had our first event butting right up to the end of the construction.”

The project team behind the US\$1.6 billion project to double the capacity of the Washington State Convention Center also expects its upfront planning will result in a speedy execution phase. Though the convention center will still be approximately just the 30th largest in the nation when completed, the project itself is massive: It involves expanding underground and over an interstate, tunneling under downtown streets, and dealing with overlapping jurisdictions, a complicated city review process and a long list of stakeholders. The land acquired for the expansion came from four owners as well as one ground lease.

Given that, the planning phase was nearly a

decade in the making (with construction finally starting in July). During that time, the team facilitated the land transactions, hosted more than 100 meetings with neighbors, associations and other stakeholders, and came to an agreement with a community coalition requesting a large package of public benefits. The coalition and the project agreed to more than US\$90 million in benefits for the community, including funds for affordable housing, renovation of a freeway park, and improvements to pedestrian paths and bicycle lanes. The team also intends to award US\$80 million of the project to women- and minority-owned subcontractors. That has made the project more complex, but it has also ensured support from key stakeholders, says Matt Griffin, principal and managing partner of Pine Street Group, Seattle, Washington, USA.

“Because we set the table right, there didn’t need to be as many interactions with the stakeholders during execution,” he says. “We should be executing the plan we all agreed on and apprising them on updates.” Construction is expected to be completed in 2020, with the expanded space open for business the following year.

EYEING THE HORIZON

There was a time when Wi-Fi dead zones and static signage were a given at convention centers, but these days, lackluster tech capabilities are a total nonstarter, says Robert Svedberg, principal of tvsdesign, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. The firm is part of a consortium behind a US\$1.4 billion project to give a vibrant new look—and future-ready capabilities—to the nearly 60-year-old Las Vegas Convention Center.

One of the most notable events at the center each year is CES, the Consumer Technology Association’s expo in which global tech leaders congregate and showcase what the future of technology—from driverless cars to autonomous drones—may look like. That high-profile mega-event was top of mind when



“Because we set the table right, there didn’t need to be as many interactions with the stakeholders during execution.”

—Matt Griffin, Pine Street Group, Seattle, Washington, USA

Sustainable Spaces

A trio of standout convention centers puts sustainability front and center in project plans.



Energy All-Stars

Portland, Oregon, USA

It was the first convention center to earn LEED certification for an existing building, in 2004. Since then, the Oregon Convention Center has completed more than 30 efficiency projects to move its eco cred even higher—as well as begun a US\$35 million renovation project slated to be complete next year. The space is now home to more than 6,500 solar panels, one of the largest solar power arrays on any U.S. convention center.



Arbor Stewards

Buenos Aires, Argentina

The Buenos Aires Exhibition and Convention Centre, which opened in late 2017, was designed with architectural and design conventions in mind. For those clients, an environmentally friendly space would be a plus, says Gonzalo Robredo, president of the Tourism Board of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires in Argentina. Green measures included replanting the trees that were removed during construction, using rainwater for irrigation and installing low-energy lighting. Since opening, the convention center has hosted Smart City Expo Buenos Aires and the first G20 summit in South America.



Nature Planters

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

The LEED Platinum Vancouver Convention Centre includes a 6-acre (2.4-hectare) roof garden featuring 400,000 native plants and grasses, plus honeybee hives. There's also a restored marine habitat built into one of the foundations and a heating and cooling system powered by seawater.

Starting

While some centers are built with an eye for future expansion, other projects are constructing convention centers from the ground up. That can put project planners in a tough spot, as they can't lean on historic data about visitors, bookings and space use to inform future plans.

In Dwarka, New Delhi, India, the project team behind a convention center of unprecedented scale used an extended feasibility study to help solve the question of how much business a space could attract. The India International Convention and Expo Centre (IICC), on 89.7 hectares (222 acres), is a 9-year, INR257 billion public-private partnership project led by the national government. Its high-stakes goal is to put India on the international meetings and exhibitions map. The project is expected to be completed in 2025.

The feasibility study found that India has captured less than 5 percent of Asia's share of the global meetings and exhibition market. For many countries, such events are a significant economic driver, says Alkesh Kumar Sharma, CEO and managing director of Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corp. Ltd., the government-run infrastructure company implementing the IICC project. "In the absence of world-class exhibition and conference facilities, India has not benefited from the potential benefits." The goal of the IICC is to increase India's share of the Asian



"We didn't want to put ourselves in a position where we had our first event butting right up to the end of the construction."

—Darren Southurst

the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority launched the second phase of its three-part project. The project team was tasked with building a space that would appeal to such tech-forward events, as well as other conferences and conventions that demanded the best guest experience possible.

To make it happen, the project team took a phased approach to avoid displacing and disrupting current tenants. Phase one of the project included acquiring 26.3 acres (10.6 hectares) of adjacent land and demolishing the land's existing structures. Phase two, which moved into construction in October, has a budget of US\$860 million and involves adding 1.4 million square feet (130,000 square meters) to the current convention center facility.

It's slated to be complete in time for CES in 2021. Phase three will renovate the existing 3.2 million-square-foot (300,000-square-meter) facility and is slated to be finished in 2023.

The project goals aren't just a bigger space, but a better one that doesn't quickly feel outdated. "It's not just about using technology for technology's sake," Mr. Svedberg says. "It's in the service of running the building better and providing a better guest experience."

For ideas, the project designers surveyed convention centers around the world, including China, whose convention centers compete with Las Vegas for events. They incorporated features such as portable video screens that can be moved around depending on the event's needs, creating flexibility,

From Scratch



“In the absence of world-class exhibition and conference facilities, India has not benefited from the potential benefits.”

—Alkesh Kumar Sharma, Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corp. Ltd., New Delhi, India

meetings market to 13 percent by 2024, a figure comparable to Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Once the project’s study was completed, the team developed a master plan that guided the development. It held consultations with stakeholders and assessed the market appetite for such a large project, using that info to shape the plan, Mr. Sharma says.

The resulting design includes a 10,000-person convention center, an exhibition area, a multipurpose area that can hold 25,000, and retail shops, commercial offices and hospitality and entertainment facili-

ties. It’s being designed with large, column-free spaces to accommodate defense and aerospace exhibits, as well as smaller, adaptable halls with soundproof partitioning and retractable seating systems.

For lessons learned and best practices, the project team looked to other large-scale projects in the United States, Singapore and Hong Kong. Some of the elements it incorporated include connecting a mixed-use district with hotels to the complex; creating separate en-



try and exit spaces for VIP guests, the public and cargo; and building the exhibition hall without a basement to avoid weight restrictions for exhibits with heavy machinery and defense equipment.

and digital wayfinding tools for guests, which can make large spaces more navigable.

The team also took inspiration from sports arenas and concert halls, incorporating tech elements that have existed in those spaces for years but haven’t yet been executed at a convention-center scale. For instance, digital services kiosks across the center will be able to read computer chips embedded in attendees’ name badges—giving them instant, personalized maps, schedules and conference info. Those embedded chips will also sync with local public transportation, allowing event hosts to offer next-gen perks like hassle-free, scan-and-ride monorail access. And rather than relying on printed banners and signs, the upgraded convention space will be flush with

digital displays—spanning public hallways and the entrances and walls of the exhibitor areas.

In addition, the project team was mindful to review design specs not just for the latest and greatest in tech, but for future potential tech needs. For instance, would the space accommodate not just cellphones and laptop usage but augmented reality apps, virtual assistants and interactive videos? “We don’t know where technology is going,” says Mr. Svedberg. “But when we look at the building’s infrastructure, we kept asking ourselves, ‘Do we have the backbone and the system right so that the building can handle what the next 20 years throw at it?’” Time—and future convention center visitors—will tell if the project team got it right. **PM**