



# CORONA IMPACT - AVIATION CONFERENCES WILL CHANGE

News / Business aviation, Events / Festivals



**“Under the current circumstances, aviation conferences will change. We have seen that a large number of major conferences and conventions had to be cancelled. Disappointment is one thing, at what expense, is another,” says Cdr. Bud Slabbaert, Chairman and Coordinator of the Caribbean Aviation Meetup conference, or CARIBAVIA for short. “There is much talk about a ‘New Normal’. Even the ‘New Normal’ will not be forever. Yet, new aviation conference models may be developed that will stay with us for quite a while, because they make sense, are more flexible and more targeted. The traditional major international events will return, but a lesson will be learned from the advantages that the new model conferences will bring.”**

The Caribbean Aviation conference (CARIBAVIA) also had to be cancelled this year, as most other events. But the need for communication in the industry remains and it just asks for another appropriate platform. Worldwide, quick fixes and changes were made by organizing virtual conferences and webinars. It is just not the same.

Currently, it has become clear that the planning of large major events is risky. The planning of participation either as attendee or exhibitor has become just as difficult. It does have an effect on budget preparation and spending, as well as on calendar issues for those attending or presenting. One may say that things have become confusing. Confusion and insecurity are not appreciated in business. However, the industry cannot stop communicating with existing and potential clients. Smaller events have a better chance in that regard. Smaller doesn't necessarily mean becoming regional. It could be international, yet more targeted. It is very much up to the industry to assist in shaping the smaller events into an effective communication platform for them.



“After our own event had to be cancelled, I have decided to make the beginning of new communication platform in addition,” says Slabbaert. “I consider it a communication platform without limitations. It’s a logical development, not an innovation. It is just doing things differently that make sense. We can now have the presentations in a conference setting, yet the meeting can be recorded and put online. And I don’t mean life streaming. The presentation will be available online as video-on-demand. That means anyone in the world, at any suitable time can watch a conference presentation.”

The interesting thing of the model is that conference and video-on-demand platform go hand in hand. Communication will continue one way or another; conference cancellations or not. It can be done without any subscription or registration. However, it will require sponsorships to realize this. Yet, since the channel is wide open to watch, the sponsors will be exposed to audiences that are larger than the attendees of any major conference. Even if there is no conference going on, other

presentations can be recorded and put online at any time. So now there will be a communication platform beyond set dates, beyond any audience size, and beyond geographic borders. Sponsors may get more out of a combined sponsorship.

Regardless of possible new event concepts, the CARIBAVIA conference will return next year June on the island St.Maarten. From the beginning, five years ago, it was already conceived to be different. Where major conferences have become events with industry palaces built in the exhibition areas with the intention to show off; where male representatives were all dressed up as lookalike penguins. They were held in convention halls or conference hotels that all similar. Rush, pressure and tension. And at what expense? CARIBAVIA has developed a different concept.



“Let’s call it furthering the human effect in an inspiring comfortable environment. If participants feel well, they will communicate much easier, and in a less artificial, and a more friendly natural manner,” continues Commander Bud as many call him. “They will get a better impression of their potential business connection. They will recognize the difference between what is an act, and what is for real.”

Besides an increased informality, the Caribbean offers an environment that the region is famous for. Previous CARIBAVIA welcome dinners were held outdoors under a tropical night sky with a free view over the waters. A series of sessions were held in an open hangar at an airport with a free view of the aviation activities at the location. It was also possible that a participant would ask “Where were you today? I missed you.” And the response was “I participated in a mini-summit on the neighbor-island St.Barth.”

“Creating an event, where participants afterwards say that they want to return next year because they loved it, is high priority to me. There is quite a difference between ‘they loved it’ or ‘they had to’. It means that the investment to participate was worth it for attendees, speakers and sponsors alike. What is wrong with an event that feels like a retreat? I could even arrange for conference sessions at the beach or swimming pool.” concludes Cdr. Bud Slabbaert.

The organizational advantage of a conference like CARIBAVIA being held on an island, is that the local tourism offices, airport and other stakeholders will do their best to support the event and go that extra ‘mile’ to provide a bit of a starry-eyed atmosphere, because it promotes the island or

region and is like an invitation for participants to return at some time for a vacation with their families or loved ones. Mind that for these Caribbean islands sometimes 80% of the economy revenue is tourism. Win-win opportunities!



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