

son says destination and venue play the most important part in a decision to attend a convention. "[A delegate asks] do I want to see New Zealand? Do I want that holiday in London?"

"Once you've decided on the destination," says Clarkson, "the venue itself becomes an important factor. Will it be suitable for a partner to spend a week? Is he or she going to be happy to play while the delegate works?" Get those two factors sorted out and everything else falls into place, says Clarkson.

Kelly points out that conference organisers and conference delegates have quite different agendas. Destination is a significant issue, but so is the social element. "Most conference delegates go because their associates are going," says Kelly. New Zealand's destination advantage is supported by the Government's '100% Pure New Zealand' message, and the continuing impact of *The Lord of the Rings*.

"They haven't released all three parts in Japan yet," reminds Kelly. "We'll probably see a ripple effect from *The Lord of the Rings* for the next five to 10 years."

Kelly then looks through the organisers' glasses: "Firstly, the conference organiser must make sure they have the support of the executive part of their organisation," he says. "Secondly they must have the infrastructure, and thirdly they must have a quality of room that meets the needs of the association."

Air flight capacity is also important to organisers, says Kelly: "Say it's a conference for 1500, they must be able to fly 1500 delegates into that site over a day, or two maximum."

McKenzie also sees infrastructure as important, saying organisers look at proximity to venues, city layout and facilities. "Nobody wants to spend an hour in a bus getting to the conference venue," he says.

While some, like Auckland's Hyatt Regency provide accommodation and convention facilities – recently enlarged

to banquet 650 – many conference planners struggle to find suitable combinations of the two.

In Taupo the problem is reversed. Capacity is good – the Great Lakes Centre and the Taupo Events Centre can banquet thousands – but being so far away from an international airport makes it difficult to attract overseas conferences.



Entertainment that cuts through is becoming a key part of conferencing.



Professional actors are becoming a fixture at corporate events. Enthuse's John McKenzie does Austin Powers.

Sometimes you've just got to get creative. That's why Mike Simpkins, of Creative Functions, converts warehouses into 1920s' gangster venues – or rather, he did once. "It's not the sort of thing you want to do all the time! We did that for Price-WaterhouseCoopers," says Simpkins, "because there wasn't anything they wanted to use that they hadn't done before."

"These things are usually annual," says Simpkins. "You just don't want to keep going to the same place."

Coming up with fresh venues is an interesting challenge. For last year's antique fair at the Ellerslie

Convention Centre, the organisers wanted to do something a little different. The Convention Centre is part of the Ellerslie Racecourse complex, so they decided to have the fair in the horse stalls.

"We were thinking, how the hell can you have a conference in here? It smells of horse..." (at the last moment, Ellerslie Convention Centre director Craig Fenwick remembers his words are going in print). At first the team was sceptical, but they cleaned it, layed some carpet and it was a great success, recalls Fenwick. "As an added capacity to this event centre it's massive; it probably fits 1000 to 1200 people."

Mark Ferguson, famous (or infamous?) for hosting reality TV show *Living the Dream*, has a day job creating business theatre through his company Ovation. Ferguson provides the theatrics, while logistics are provided by Eventive, headed by Marina Nola.



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