

SESSIONS

Delegates attending the Congress were treated to a great choice of sessions to attend where emerging and existing concepts were explored. To recover from the formalities of sessions there was plenty of networking available in more relaxing and social situations.



Day 1

After a few brief words of welcome from the Congress Steering Committee and from **David Emery**, President of Dun & Bradstreet Asia Pacific the 3rd World Credit Congress & Exhibition got underway at the Sydney Hilton Hotel on 19 May 2011.



Harry Strausser III, no stranger to IMA members as the previous Master of Ceremonies and Keynote Speaker at IMA National Conferences in Christchurch, Gold Coast and Melbourne took control of the Congress. Those who knew Harry were very confident his ability to provide an effective and practical message for delegates to take back to their workplaces would be a key part of the event's overall success.

Morgan Lane, a Partner of Worrells Solvency & Forensic Accountants, as keynote speaker opened the congress sessions. He delivered a clear and practical message on *"Cash Flow – its reliance upon sound credit and collections management"*. The perspective offered was controversial at least from the viewpoint of another scheduled speaker, Abe WalkingBear Sanchez who in several questions sought to challenge the views detailed by Morgan. The differences in perspectives reflected where the two speakers fit into the credit-collections continuum with Morgan

giving observations from real life experiences as an official liquidator and trustee in bankruptcy whereas Abe's perspective is founded much earlier in the credit management cycle.

The next Plenary Session addressed the question of *"Can business function in a privacy compliant world"* and was delivered by **Mark Hummerston**, Australia's Assistant Privacy Commissioner – Compliance. The knowledge and experience of this speaker was very evident as he calmly and confidently explained the status of privacy regulation within Australia, holding the attention of all in the Congress Hall.



After lunch, the first of the concurrent sessions for different interests got underway.

Mark Hummerston was joined in a discussion panel by **Martin Sher** the current President of ACA International and **David Cains** the Immediate Past President of the IMA and together they handled questions from Congress delegates. Martin who hails from Birmingham Alabama enthralled the delegates with his deep rich southern accent as he detailed the privacy scene in the US and responded to specific enquiries.

In response to a question as to whether in his role, he could envisage a situation where third party (contingent) collectors might be restored access under the changes underway in Australia for positive credit reporting, to credit information limited to locator information Mark Hummerston expressed a view that whilst prefaced as not being an official or considered position, an argument based on very limited segmented data being made available via a specific product from the credit reporting agencies especially within an auditable environment would present a compelling case for consideration.

Other delegates joined a concurrent session where **Abe WalkingBear Sanchez** sketched out his perspective on *"Understanding our Largest Asset"* and the need to move from concepts on credit management established in the 1950s to a more progressive and profitable view.

CONGRESS

The next concurrent session involved an impressive and very informative presentation by **John Sutherland**, Executive Manager, Risk Services - Asia Pacific of Atradius Credit Insurance. Based upon the Atradius knowledge of its specialist risk analysts on the ground assessing the risks for customers around the world, John presented a perspective on claims and collections experience, insolvency and risks by countries and industries.

Sessions on Day 1 then drew to a close as delegates headed off to prepare for great networking at the Welcome Cocktail Party that evening.

Day 2

The first session of the day was slow to get underway as the PowerPoint presentation proved to be corrupted, however a quick dash to his room to retrieve his laptop and the original file soon saw **Dr Michael Turner** underway with his Plenary Session.



Dr Turner is President and CEO of the Policy & Economic Research Council based in Durham, North Carolina and widely regarded as one of the world's leading expert in credit reporting systems – his session addressed *“Trends in positive credit reporting in Asia Pacific region”*. Dr Turner's knowledge and confidence in his subject material was very much evident as he detailed the various credit reporting systems in use across the globe and provided a brief examination of Australia's current developments towards positive credit reporting.

After a break, **Dr Turner** was joined in a discussion panel by **Tony Lythgoe**, Principal Financial Specialist of International Finance Corporation (part of World Bank Group) and **Steve Brown**, Director - Commercial & Consumer Services at Dun & Bradstreet Australia.

Tony Lythgoe, another well respected international expert provided an overview explaining the global development of information sharing, which is moving through the following journey:

Historically:

- Focus on Negative Data
- Prevent bad debts

Today's requirements:

- Benefits to Lenders and 'the financial system'
- Full File Data –positive information

- Inclusion of Non Traditional Data
- Financial Inclusion (Micro and SME)
- Prevent Over Indebtedness
- Responsible Lending

The future:

- Broader Public awareness of Credit Reporting
- Consumers/ Businesses take responsibility

Taking on those international perspectives, Steve Brown provided delegates with a context for Australia on its journey towards positive credit reporting, before the discussion group dealt with the questions and observations of delegates.



After the lunch break, delegates moved into concurrent sessions for different interests. Some joined into the second session presented by **Abe WalkingBear Sanchez** being targeted to *“Putting credit management at the front and centre of your business”*.

Those same delegates then joined **Damian Karmelich**, Director of Marketing & Corporate Affairs at Dun & Bradstreet Australia as he conducted his comprehensive session *“The new normal – commercial credit trends in a post financial crisis environment”*. Trends that Damian shared with delegates included:

- Australian businesses are paying their bills at their slowest pace in three years;
- Smaller firms experienced the worst deterioration but large firms remain the slowest payers; and
- Accessing credit remains a concern, with almost one in five firms believing this will be their primary challenge for the quarter ahead.

Not surprisingly, in the online survey completed by delegates, Damian rated highly in terms of subject knowledge, being articulate, relevant, easy to listen to and follow.





This group of concurrent sessions concluded with a discussion panel comprising **Abe WalkingBear Sanchez, Damian Karmelich** and **Luis Eduardo Pérez** who considered with delegates the topic “*Commercial credit in a post financial crisis environment*”.

Meanwhile whilst those sessions were in progress, other delegates participated in different strands of sessions.

One group joined the discussion panel session comprising **Don Coulthard** (Chairman of Australian Collectors & Debt Buyers Association), **Carlo Cataldo** (Responsible Lending Leader – Australia & New Zealand, GE Capital), **Peter Wong** (Business Development Manager at Total Credit Management Group) and **David Huey** (Managing Director - Australia & New Zealand for Atradius Credit Insurance) as they considered the topic, “*Risk Management Challenges in the Asia Pacific Region*”.

Starting off the discussion session, the panellists made some introductory comments. Don Coulthard provided an interesting snapshot of the Australian Collections Industry following the data survey of members of ACDBA. Carlo Cataldo provided an overview of the work being performed by ARCA (Australian Retail Credit Association) on the development of an industry code for positive credit reporting whilst Peter Wong provided an overview of collection and credit considerations in China and how they relate to other areas of the globe. As a last minute participant to fill a vacancy caused by the late unavailability of another panellist, David Huey was excused from making a formal presentation and instead provided some observations of the perspectives he was bringing to the discussion panel.

Meanwhile, another group of delegates were in concurrent sessions tailored to IMA interests. The emergence of compliance under the new National Consumer Credit protection regime was the driver for ensuring Kate Keating’s session was a popular destination for those engaged in the Australian industry.

As most IMA members already appreciate, **Kate Keating**, a

director of CreditWise Pty Limited has a practical and down to earth style of telling obligations as they are and then explaining where attention is needed to ensure compliance. Not surprising this popular speaker at IMA events was again highly rated by delegates in terms of relevance, subject knowledge and her articulate and easy to follow style. At this session, Kate was joined by her co-director, Steve Edwards who assisted in responding to questions from delegates.

Next on the agenda of concurrent sessions was **Gerard Nelson** of Australian Workplace Strategies. Another regular speaker at IMA Conferences and a regular contributor to the AGENT, Gerard was again popular as delegates listened to his very practical and relevant employment observations and advice. Never failing to impress with his very dry wit, Gerard challenged delegates to consider carefully the contemporary employment issues facing Australian employers and extended a generous offer of a free first consultation to those IMA members who found themselves caught out by an employment challenge.

To wind up the Congress, delegates rejoined as a combined group for the final Plenary Session where MC **Harry Strausser III** provided some perspective on the Congress sessions and provided a motivational message for delegates to take back to their respective workplaces.

Alan Harries and Luis Eduardo Pérez on behalf of the Steering Committee declared the Congress was drawing to a close and thanked all who had made the event such a success: sponsors, exhibitors, presenters and delegates. Recognition was paid to Abbie Thompson and Alan Harries for their considerable administrative work in ensuring the event run smoothly for the benefit of all involved.

Delegates moved on to ready themselves for the evening’s networking aboard the John Cadman II for a dinner cruise on the impressive Sydney Harbour.

Day 3

The final day of the event had the focus as an IMA day. After some leadership meetings, members gathered for the IMA's Annual General Meeting.

Margaret Persson was elected as an Honorary Life Member of the IMA whilst national executive positions for the ensuring year were finalised.

Following a short break, sessions got underway with the first a Collections Forum with a discussion panel comprising **Tim Lord** (Chair of the IMA's Collections Committee and a Director of ACDBA), **Mark Woods** (Director for Oceania, International Members Unit, ACA International) and **Alan Harries** (Executive Director of IMA and CEO of ACDBA).

Alan Harries led the Forum through a presentation detailing the significant work undertaken over the previous year in the collection space principally by ACDBA and supported where appropriate by IMA – without doubt, some significant successes had been achieved. He then commented on the snapshot of the Australian Collections Industry established from the recent data survey of members of ACDBA. Mark Woods made some remarks on developments in the US industry before the panel responded to questions.

Next up were **Sue Fraser**, Senior Manager – Social Advocacy Services at Kildonan Uniting Care and **Matt Angell**, Chief Operating Officer for Credit Corp Group who jointly presented a session on how to “*Listen more, collect more*”. The presentation was based on the outcomes of an initiative of Credit Corp Group in equipping their collection team with improved skills in understanding the dynamics involved in working through financial commitments with consumers some of whom are facing financial hardships.

The project is aimed at providing an effective bridge of the divide between consumers and collectors by:

- Promotion of a philosophy of respect and a willingness to listen;
- Removal of ‘tunnel vision’ from collection practice;
- An accelerated process for financial counsellors and regular engagement with the consumer sector;

- Adjustments within the collection operation (accountabilities in the areas of profiling, legal action, compliance, respectful practice, etc.) and
- Introduction of training on today's society to build improved understanding on issues that impact debtors.

The results of the project to date were reported as positive and include:

- Revenue up by 16%;
- A record level of 70% of revenue from repayment arrangements;
- Accounts on payment arrangement increased by \$66m in FY2011 H1, up by 25% on the \$53m increase in FY2010 H1;
- Accounts on payment arrangements up;
- Material decrease in attrition of repayment arrangements; and
- Financial counsellors and consumer advocate perceptions are steadily improving, leading to a lower incidence of unnecessary complaints to EDR or regulatory bodies.

Interestingly, the response of delegates was somewhat polarised with some very enthusiastically considering how similar strategies could be adopted into their own businesses, whilst others were clearly resistant to the concept of changing their long standing approaches to collection practices.

Following the lunch break, the final session of the day was the Field Agents Forum - the discussion panel comprised **Ian Mitchell** (IMA National President), **Alex Caruana** (IMA National Vice-President Administration) and **Jason Storey** (IMA Chair of the Repossessions Committee).

First up, Jason Storey led the group through a skiptracing process involving the use of internet search engines before handing over to Alex Caruana to workshop with delegates contemporary issues facing field agents. Based on the interaction and engagement with delegates, this forum was both very practical and successful.

After three very big days, the Congress finally came to a close with an abundant sense of harmony, goodwill and satisfaction evident amongst those who attended and participated. ■



SURVEY



In keeping with IMA practices delegates to the 3rd World Credit Congress & Exhibition were surveyed for their thoughts on the event.

At the time of publication the following survey outcomes were evident:

Delegates to the 3rd World Credit Congress & Exhibition held at the Hilton Sydney from 19 to 21 May 2011 principally came from Australia and also from Belgium, China, Germany, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore and the USA.

Looking at where in the credit and collections industry delegates came from, the breakup was:

Consumer Advocates	0.51%	
Credit Management	22.56%	■
Financiers	5.13%	■
Guests	0.51%	
Industry	50.77%	■
Industry Consultants	3.08%	■
Industry Suppliers	12.82%	■
Organisers	2.56%	■
Regulators & Others	2.06%	■

Venue

When it came to venue selection for accommodation it seems the decision was right as delegates who stayed in-house at the 5 star venue rated the Hilton Sydney as:

Meeting or exceeding expectations		
Value for money	71%	■
Proximity to shops etc	100%	■
Cleanliness of rooms	100%	■
Room standard	87%	■
In-house dining & bars	94%	■

Comments from delegates about the venue's performance in terms of conference hospitality included:

"Food was best I have experienced at a conference in a long time."
 "Sydney Hilton is always a very good venue. Did not disappoint."
 "The amenities, service, quality and food were better than at most similar functions I have attended."
 "The food at all breaks and over lunch was above the quality I have experienced at most of these events, so well done!"
 "Great venue, catering was exceptional!"

Speakers

Almost without exception delegates reported they found our speakers to be knowledgeable, articulate, relevant, easy to follow and enjoyable to listen to. Not surprisingly Dr Michael Turner, Mark Hummerston, Kate Keating, Gerard Nelson and Damian Karmelich as prominent experts in their respective fields were among the most highly rated presenters. Delegates told us:

"Scheduling of sessions was a challenge as I found I actually wanted to go to two sessions being run at the same time."
 "Relevant topics and enjoyable meeting other like minded persons from other countries."
 "I enjoyed myself immensely and thought the speakers were very knowledgeable and generally interacted well with their respective audiences."
 "The Congress was valuable for all attendees with an open mind willing to learn and of good value."

Networking

Delegates immensely enjoyed the IMA format of networking:

Respondents who enjoyed event		
Welcome Cocktail Party	93%	■
Harbour Cruise Dinner	88%	■

"The opportunities to network were extensive and I met many interesting people some of whom may become clients and business partners."
 "Every credit and collections professional should attend these events. It is too easy to get caught with tunnel vision around our day to day obligations and responsibilities and so take a moment to see and hear what is happening in our industry is really important."
 "Enjoyed both the cocktail party and the harbour cruise!"
 "The congress was a fantastic opportunity to meet and learn from industry professionals and there was such a fantastic group of people that attended which I really enjoyed meeting."
 "A wonderful feeling of respect and community was evident at the Congress. Attendees were friendly and inclusive."

Assessment

Delegates rated the Congress as:

Meeting or exceeding expectations		
Event organisation	93%	■
Relevance of content	77%	■
Networking opportunities	85%	■
Exhibitors presence	72%	■
Event value for money	77%	■

They specifically commented on the overall Congress:

"As well run a trade event as I have been to."
"Overall, a very good Congress! Well done to all concerned."
"Congratulations on the smooth running of a conference catering for a group of attendees with a wide variety of interests - it was remarkable that harmony was evident during the whole time."
"A great effort by the organising committee for the congress."
"I would like to thank the Congress Team for a wonderful event."
"Organisation was second to none, thank you for making it so easy as a delegate & speaker, well done."

Some final thoughts from delegates

"I enjoyed the time with my Aussie friends again as always! It is my opinion that the Congress was a success from the many people I engaged with during the event."
"Great to see some highly competent women taking leadership roles in this industry."
"Every credit and collections professional should attend these events. It is too easy to get caught with tunnel vision around our day to day obligations and responsibilities and so take a moment to see and hear what is happening in our industry is really important. The more we support our association to provide these events the better and more relevant they become"
"We thought the event was extremely worthwhile and have decided to attend the next one. The venue was ideal and the speaker presentations were all of great value. Congratulations to the team for putting together a very informative and value added congress & exhibition."
"I found the Congress very interesting and enjoyed it most thoroughly."
"...as always a brilliant conference!" ■

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 At: Adelaide Convention Centre

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Mark the dates in your diary NOW!

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