

News Release

For Immediate Release

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## BECA's robust Q1 performance demonstrates event marketing can carry brands through the storm

Manama, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2009 --- Just as in football, where an interception can change a game's momentum, three international business-to-business events held at the Bahrain International Exhibition & Convention Centre (BIECC) during the first quarter of 2009 achieved their best performance ever, raising the game for professional exhibition and conference organisers in the region.

All three events were held under the patronage of His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, The Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

MEFTEC, the world's leading dedicated financial technology event, opened its fifth annual edition in the country to a sell-out audience whilst the delegate and exhibitor attendance at the 16<sup>th</sup> Middle East Oil & Gas Show & Conference (MEOS), Bahrain's premier petroleum event for 2009, was up 30 per cent on MEOS 2007.

HRH Prince Andrew, The Duke of York and UK's Special Representative for International Trade and Investment, visited MEACO 2009 and met with the Senior Management of BECA.

Delegate attendance at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the Middle East African Council of Ophthalmology (MEACO) in Bahrain was the highest-ever for MEACO and exceeded its delegate numbers at its Dubai Congress in 2007. MEACO 2009 was the first-ever international Medical Association Congress won by Bahrain with more than 2,000 high-spending medical professionals and over 500 international speakers visiting the destination.

Bahrain International Exhibition & Convention Centre (BIECC), the country's largest, interconnected and most flexible trade show and convention facility is managed by Bahrain Exhibition & Convention Authority (BECA). BECA functions under the Industry and Commerce Ministry with His Excellency Dr. Hassan A. Fakhro, Minister of Industry & Commerce as Chairman of the Board of Directors.

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### **Face-to-face interaction**

**One+**, the official publication of Texas-based Meeting Professionals International (MPI), reports in its March/April 2009 issue that one of the top reasons executives say event marketing is so effective is because it brings customers and companies face-to-face. And that, in turn, helps foster relationships more effectively than any other form of interaction.

According to preliminary findings from the *EventView 2009* survey published by the MPI Foundation, Event Marketing Institute and marketing firm, George P. Johnson (GPJ), the numbers concur. Forty-four per cent said that event marketing is the marketing discipline that best accelerates and deepens relationships, trailed by a wide margin by public relations at 23 per cent.

*EventView* is the longest-running study of the event marketing industry and has been annually published since 2002. Respondents primarily consist of top-ranking marketing executives at companies in Western Europe and Asia with Euros 200 million to Euros 4 billion in revenue. Everything from trade and road shows to sponsored concerts to intimate client meetings are classified as events in the survey.

Buoyed by encouraging policy measures including economic stimulus plans recently announced by governments in the Gulf in response to the challenges of the global credit crunch, Bahrain's MICE industry is weathering the storm with a robust performance in the first quarter of 2009.

It landed the World Academy for Laser Applications – WALA-Laser2009 Universal Conference & Exhibition with Anti-Aging and Aesthetic Symposium account. Commencing 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> October 2009 at the BIECC, this three-day international medical event is expected to attract more than 1,000 delegates from all over the world particularly from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Iran, India and the GCC countries, of which 120 are speakers from the laser profession including a few Nobel Prize winners. WALA-Laser2009 is supported by the Arab League, GCC, ASLMS and King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center (KFSHRC) and will be attended by business experts from the global arena.

Prof. Farouk A.H. Al-Watban, BSc, MSc, PhD, Consultant for Laser Medicine, and Laser Technology, President for the World Academy of Laser Applications 2009 (WALA), and past President (2006-2008) of the World Association for Laser Therapy (WALT) says, "This progressive multidisciplinary conference and exhibition is designed to bring an update on new laser, aesthetic and anti-aging technology and products in a very interactive format that will provide unparalleled educational experience."

Elegant Training, the Bahrain-based organiser of the inaugural medical event, has booked 150 room nights for the speakers. With approximately 200 companies exhibiting, the WALA meeting and exhibition is forecast to generate an economic impact of US\$1.37 million for Bahrain.

BECA also converted a lead for the 21st Congress of the Arab Division of the International Academy of Pathology into a sale. This will run from the 6<sup>th</sup> till the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2009 in BIECC's Convention Centre. Continued on Page 3

Several other potential new businesses are being explored by BECA, of which three are based in the U.S., two in Germany, one in the UAE and another in Bahrain.

### **Icing on the cake**

Winning recognition from three globally-renowned organisers for delivering exceptional customer experiences during the first quarter of 2009 was the icing on the cake for BECA.

BECA won praises from U.K.-based Media Generation Group plc and PennWell Corporation as well as Saudi-based MEACO for going the extra mile in the delivery of its services during each of the three events that were hosted at between February and March 2009.

Media Generation Group plc and PennWell Corporation organised MEFTEC 2009 and Power-Gen Middle East 2009, respectively, whilst MEACO is the association behind the region's largest ophthalmic biennial meeting that attracts eye care professionals and exhibiting companies from the Middle East and Africa, Europe, the Americas, South and Far East Asia and Australia.

"This reflects BECA's commitment to building a culture that places our customers at the heart of everything we do," says Hassan Jaffar Mohamed, Acting CEO of BECA. "It demonstrates that customers' needs and aspirations genuinely form the basis for the design and delivery of our services."

In separate letters addressed to the Management of the Authority, the two British organisers praised the quality of the service they have received from Bahrain's forerunner business tourism organisation. MEACO conferred an award on BECA for exemplary service at the inauguration of its five-day International Congress in Bahrain.

Ms. Debbie Stanford-Kristiansen, Deputy CEO of BECA, received the award from Dr. Ebtisam Al-Alawi, FRCS, MRCOphth, DO and Chairperson MEACO 's Organising Committee in Bahrain.

"Our goal is to challenge the expectations of people who may have preconceptions about Bahrain by doing everything possible to ensure the country is at the top of the list when it comes to organisations choosing their destinations," says Debbie Stanford-Kristiansen, Deputy CEO of BECA. "Providing exceptional value through customer service does not only work to BECA's advantage, it also ensures that our stakeholders and the community benefit."

"Suppliers are becoming more and more aware of the value of business-to-business events and business-to-consumer exhibitions in these challenging times," says Ms. Stanford-Kristiansen. "They are realising the importance of face-to-face interaction in instilling confidence in their customers and marketing their company's products or services in the current economic crisis. Amongst peers, you are more conspicuous by your absence."

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In support of its recommendation to diversify and include a strong international association element in BECA's events mix, the Authority earlier this year became a member of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). ASAE is an individual membership organisation of more than 22,000 association executives and industry partners representing nearly 11,000 organisations. Its members manage leading trade associations, individual membership societies and voluntary organisations across the

United States and in 50 countries around the globe, as well as provide products and services to the association community.

"ASAE is the key medium to reach buyers from North America," explains Ms. Stanford-Kristiansen.

This move complements BECA's membership in Singapore-based Asian Federation of Exhibition & Convention Associations (AFECA), Brussels-based International Association of Congress Centres (AIPC), Paris-headquartered Union des Foires Internationales (UFI), Amsterdam-based International Congress & Convention Association (ICCA), Dallas-based Meeting Professionals International (MPI), Chicago-headquartered Society of Incentive Travel Executives (SITE) and Hertfordshire-based Association of Event Venues Limited (AEV).

Ms. Stanford-Kristiansen also initiated the holding of the Team Bahrain MICE Conference at the BIECC earlier this month with Paul Flackett, Managing Director of IMEX - the biggest MICE conference in the world - as the guest speaker. More than 50 decision-makers and representatives from Bahrain's MICE industry including the media attended the first of many events BECA will be organising with industry stakeholders. More than 30 companies and organisations were represented at the event.

According to Mr. Flackett who has spent 25 years in the meetings and incentives industry, the MICE industry is robust, "The Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) industry in the region has survived two Gulf Wars, the Sars outbreak, terrorism and a tsunami, so it will certainly survive the credit crunch."

Ms. Stanford-Kristiansen says, "The next session will be more interactive working session or round table discussions with a panel of speakers so that we get everyone actively involved."

Representatives from George P. Johnson (U.K.), the world's premier experience marketing agency, visited BIECC last month. BECA organised their two-day site inspection of the destination's meeting facilities and other venues.

According to Ms. Stanford-Kristiansen, the Authority's long-term, harmonised alliances with industry stakeholders such as Tourism Affairs, the Bahrain Economic Development Board (EDB), Gulf Air, Bahrain International Circuit, Bahrain Chamber of Commerce & Industry and others from the leisure and hospitality sectors is valuable. "We need their active involvement in order to extend Bahrain's marketing reach and generate demand for the destination well into the future," she emphasises. ENDS

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**About Bahrain Exhibition & Convention Authority (BECA) :**

Bahrain Exhibition & Convention Authority (BECA) is the forerunner organisation with a mandate to market the Kingdom of Bahrain as a preferred, all year-round business destination and cultivate partnerships with key Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) industry stakeholders by pursuing market development work in the international business sector. Its MICE, Destination Marketing & PR Department seeks to achieve this mandate by nurturing a healthy business environment for the exhibition, convention, meetings and incentive travel community in partnership with the Bahrain International Exhibition & Convention Centre (BIEC), the Bahrain Economic Development Board (EDB), Gulf Air, Bahrain Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Tourism Affairs and the hospitality and leisure tourism industry.