

Washington, DC and IABC: Powerful Combination of Sights and Sensations

The spot is rather nondescript. No plaque, no nothing. It's just the side of the parking garage tunnel entrance to the Washington Hilton, my home away from home. Until I heard the tour guide point out its significance, I hadn't realized that was the spot where President Reagan was shot by John Hinckley.

This was just one of many surprises I encountered while recently attending IABC's 2005 International Conference in Washington, DC. As this was my first visit to our nation's capital, it didn't take me long to get a sense of the awesome power the city radiates.

Massive, gray buildings with names like "Justice," "Commerce," "Agriculture," "Treasury" all diverted my attention from the primary source of authority on this Sunday afternoon: traffic gridlock. Rush hour, it seems, does not take the weekend off in Washington.

Neither, it seems, does construction. Traveling in and around the city, I was struck by the extensive construction around many of the monuments. I felt like I never left Houston!

While touring aboard the Little Red Trolley, however, one sees the many historic landmarks most of us have only viewed through photographs or television. The Supreme Court building is simply magnificent while The White House and the Capital are as stately as ever. The White House appeared much smaller than I imagined but the Capital was imposing in its enormity.

Having attended only the Los Angeles IABC International Conference last year, I wasn't quite sure what to expect during this 2005 conclave in DC. In LA, attendance was 1,150 from I don't know how many countries. This year's conference reached almost 1,400 folks from 40 countries, including over a dozen from IABC Houston. I could tell there were more of us simply because of the lines waiting on the bartenders.

I've been to two Leader Institutes and two International Conferences and I've learned both have a common denominator: one is in constant motion from arrival to departure. You arrive excited and energized. You depart mostly the same way except you're so damned tired, you don't realize how energized you've become. You also don't know what day of the week it is. They all seemed to have blended in together.

The Washington Conference, as in LA, was jam packed with interesting topics and speakers (for the most part), elegant and fascinating events (networking night at the Kennedy Center), fun-filled Dine-A-Rounds (this city loves their crab cakes), and a surprisingly interesting and phenomenally entertaining IABC Research Foundation luncheon.

You owe it to yourselves to check out the DVD's on the website <http://www.tangibledata.com/iabc> to "be a part" of some of these sessions. I ordered the special DVD of the 35th anniversary salute to IABC from the various chapters. You'll

probably be seeing some of this during upcoming professional development events in Houston.

As sessions go, most were well attended, some were standing room only while one or two (from what I was told) were not up to par. One SRO session I attended was “Managing your Career Success” and could have easily been extended another two hours. Seems a lot of people still have concerns with the job market and its instability.

A few career tidbits I picked up: 1) Explain what it is you do in their (prospective employer’s) terms; be simple, be specific; 2) Be confident about what you do and show it; 3) In counteracting the “commoditization” issue (we provide a professional service, not a commodity), play up the strategy role along with one’s depth of experience. Kinko’s may produce a brochure for xx number of dollars, but I seriously doubt they can match any of us on the strategy aligned with that brochure.

Other packed sessions that held my interest dealt with “Internet Marketing Made Simple” and “Putting Your Copy on a Diet.” Of particular interest was a session entitled “The Rise of Advertising and the Rise of PR: The Future of Advertising.”

This session held that the variety of messaging being what it is, both here and abroad, the need exists for more PR involvement in shaping advertising creative briefs (foundation on which the creative direction is based). This is to better gauge the impact of idea executions *before* production. The aim is to strengthen the message to your audience.

Ads can backfire and unintended audiences can be hit and offended. The future of advertising foresees much more segmentation in the marketplace. Messages will be even more diverse with respect to the different types of media.

Perhaps, at least for me, the most unexpected, informative and entertaining session was the IABC Research Foundation luncheon, featuring Dr. TJ Larkin. His presentation, “What Each Channel Does Best: Web, Paper, Face to Face,” not only answered oft-debated questions, but put a very humorous twist on the fact that management is so generally clueless when it comes to getting out the right kind of message.

Do different messages belong on different channels? Yes.

Web is best for short, quick, information retrieval. Paper is best for learning new, long, and complicated ideas. Face to face is best for overcoming resistance to change.

If you can locate this session on DVD or CD, buy it. It’s more than worth it if nothing else than for the comic and truthful relief. He is hysterical. Then, take a timeout with your boss, get a coffee, sit back and enjoy.

My two IABC international conferences have both offered pleasantly diverse encounters. In Washington, I enjoyed wonderful conversation during the Dine-Around between a young lady from Idaho and an engaging couple from Australia. An after-hours sojourn in

the lobby bar ended up with an in-depth conversation about Canadian politics with my “outgoing president” counterpart from the Ottawa Chapter along with his fellow patriot from the Canadian version of PR News.

Aside from Canadian and US politics, Malcolm and I compared notes on each other’s year as president. I enjoyed a similar conversation with my colleague from Portland who will just be beginning his presidential stint.

Interestingly, we all had very comparable experiences, good and not so good, regardless of the sizes of our chapters. It seems that challenges and opportunities are everywhere a leader looks. It doesn’t make any difference what size chapter one serves.

And now, IABC Houston is part of an even larger area of different sized chapters. As my last official act as President of IABC Houston, I cast my vote to solidify the legal formation of our new Southern Region, which has now officially combined the former Districts 5 and 7 (the southeastern part of the US). Bylaws are adopted, budget is in place, officers are elected. The Marriage is consummated. We are one.

All this took place on the heels of the annual general meeting where David Kistle, ABC (from Minnesota) handed over the gavel to Warren Bickford, ABC (from Canada). And, like David this year, Warren will be coming to Houston early next year for a presentation. Those Northern guys just can’t turn down the likes of Southern hospitality.

All in all, DC was a good conference. Yet, I can’t help but be invigorated by the thought of next year’s conference: Vancouver, BC, Canada. Though I will be ending my stint as Houston’s Past-President next summer, Vancouver would make for a delightful vacation. At least, that’s what my colleagues from our “neighbors to the North” kept telling me this year. Oh, Canada! Oh, IABC!

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