

Best Practices for Meetings and Events

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“Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand.”

- Confucius

It's never been a more exciting, daunting, challenging and chaotic time in association management. The economy, failing sectors, technology, generations, social and cultural diversity – all impact the business of associations.

With our limited resources, we usually go with the safe, “it worked before” solution in our member offerings, in particular with our meetings. We fall into the trap of complacency with getting our direction from the same members on the planning committee, the same speakers and topics and repeating the same meeting format from year to year. We do evaluations and file them away, never using the insights and feedback to guide the next offering, especially if it makes us change the “tried and true” format.

Our speakers get us content last-minute and many times they tell us that what they are going to deliver in their program is completely different, resulting in a disconnect between our promise to our participants and what we actually deliver. The result – unsatisfied participants that not only might not come back next year, they might not rejoin and they certainly won't be our raving fans. It's time to re-think and re-do our meetings to remain relevant.

Digital advertising is growing far faster than other categories – by 23% in 2008, according to Carat, compared with 6% for advertising overall.

20 Ways to Enhance Your Meeting Experiences

1. Have a mission for the meeting and communicate it to all of the stakeholders – association leadership, members/nonmembers, sponsors, exhibitors, speakers, public, etc.
2. Research: Know the profile of your attendees/audience - demographics, learning styles and preferences, social interaction preferences
3. Take the time to define meeting objectives and measurable outcomes
4. Learner outcomes – performance, condition, proficiency, business impacts – time savings, greater productivity, reduce costs, increased sales...
5. Understand the characteristics of adult learners: self directed, multiple life experiences; problem-solving orientation
6. Knowles Adult Learning Principles: need to Learn; need for ownership; importance of relevance
7. Add new people to conference committee and get new insights through focus groups, surveys, phone interviews
8. Content, content, content
9. Delivery – mix it up – experiential learning, new formats, interactive tools, book signings, speed networking, ice breakers
10. Marketing plan – web, email, direct mail, social media, testimonials, cool design to get their attention, be consistent with brand, segment your attendees, public relations
11. Communicate content and relevance consistently and creatively
12. Be Innovative – try something new and don't be afraid to fail - Stop repeating the same conference from year to year
13. Create a memorable experience with everything from how easy it was to register to how they were greeted, to content and every seemingly “little” aspect of the event – excellent meetings are in the details.
14. Connect members during the year through the website and social media tools
15. Start looking for strategic alliances
16. Don't do evaluations unless you're going to use them – ask the right questions and LISTEN!
17. Increase vendor and sponsor value – online links year round, on floor demos, hoist a banner, how to sell without selling tips for exhibitors, create a real value exchange
18. Use your websites – white papers, content from conference, speaker forums discussions, quick polls, enhanced member only sections, networking tips powerpoint during a networking reception
19. Continue the conversations past the conference – forums, blogs, listservs, LinkedIn, Facebook
20. Lessons learned – collect lessons learned before, during and after, evaluate and make changes for next meeting

Rethinking Meetings Format to Deliver a More Engaging Experience

- Pecha Kucha: Speaker presents a maximum of 20 slides and comments on each slide no more than 20 seconds – presentation is less than 7 minutes that leaves time for discussion. Don't read slides to them. You can do more than one speaker. Used to inspire people to think at a higher level. www.pecha-kucha.org.

- Twebinars: combining webinar with Twitter. Utilizes the instant-messaging capabilities of Twitter to replace the standard Q & A period, so participants can comment before, during and after the webinar. Keeps the webinar “alive”.
- Second Life: virtual world/virtual meetings and tradeshows
- Project-Based Events: Instead of a lecture of how to build a budget, you build a budget in the session. Collaborative, unconference, open space where topics aren't defined until people arrive on site.
- World Café: Roundtable-style format to tap into the collective wisdom of the group. Clusters of five people sit in rounds and discuss issues surrounding the theme of the meeting for 20-30 minutes. Conversations are repeated three times as participants switch tables to interact with others. At the end, a group discussion is facilitated to identify key insights and ideas. Ask the right questions — engage people in a meaningful dialogue. www.theworldcafe.com

- [Meetings Remix, Associations Now, October 2008](#)

The five market segments of association annual meeting attendees include Knowledge Seekers, Value-Based attendees, Social Networkers, Convenience Drive attendees, and Creatures of Habit.

- Knowledge Seekers (22 percent of those polled) are frequent attendees who seek to expand their involvement with their industry, both in terms of education and interaction with colleagues, at conference.
- Value Based attendees (17 percent) are more sensitive to the costs involved in participating in such a meeting. They want to get useful information and ideas that they can put to work for their investment. Overall, these are the youngest registrants.
- Social Networkers (26 percent) enjoy the social aspects of the convention and like to combine business and leisure travel. However, they also attend to learn about their industry and to network.
- Convenience Driven attendees (17 percent) are infrequent attendees, most likely due to

Generations at Meetings

- Boomers** Time-efficient, factual, accurate, thorough, the “why”, new horizons, social interaction, enhance ability for financial security for retirement
- Gen X** Visual, computer, interactive, quantify the session, get down to business, stay focused, efficiency, enhance skill-set, formatted for individuals rather than teams — present problem and have them find the solution; relevant to careers and lives
- Gen Y** Team-oriented experience that is technologically advanced, focus on big picture

- *Professional Meeting Management, Professional Convention Management Association*

- busy schedules. They also experience time constraints at the annual meeting, making it difficult for them to accomplish all their goals.
- Creatures of Habit (18 percent) attend the most annual meetings, but they have less of an interest in furthering their industry knowledge than other attendees.

- [“Who Attends Association Annual Meetings and Why,” MPI Foundation](#)

Using Your Website Effectively for Your Meetings

Pre-Event

1. Collect Speaker proposals using the form generator
2. Promotion - podcasts, email blasts, conference archives
3. Volunteer Engagement - Registration using the form generator
4. Email confirmations to attendees
5. Speaker page on website
6. Exhibitor Sign Up
7. Exhibitor booth map - links to exhibitors, add value for exhibitors
8. Give them a reason to want to come to the destination — feature CVB website and resources

“Contrary to traditional thought, young professionals ages 18 to 34 communicated a strong preference for receiving information in the mail over electronic options. Privacy was pegged as one of the main reasons for this surprising partiality,”

- Peter Myers, Vice President of ICOM Information and Communication in Chief Marketer.

During event

1. Photo gallery during event
2. Daily evaluations emailed to participants
3. Use for updates to conference
4. Quick polls
5. Recording - audio and video

After event

1. Evaluations
2. Archives - Speaker presentations online
3. Post conference and save the date for the next year
4. Ongoing sponsor and exhibitor recognition
5. Continue to connect virtually through the year — Webcasts, LinkedIn

Resource Websites

[Meetings Technology](#): corbinball.com

[3D Virtual Conference](#): virtualbeginnings.com

[Audience Polling](#):

ars-technologies.com; braehler.com; theextremegroup.com

[Text-phone polling companies](#):

www.log-on.nl; www.polleverywhere.com; www.quickmobile.com

[Page turning pdfs](#) - <http://issuu.com>

[Experiential learning](#): learningfromexperience.com

Associations

[American Society of Association Executives](#): asaecenter.org

[Convention Industry Council](#): conventionindustry.org

[Meeting Professionals International](#): mpiweb.org

[Center for Exhibition Industry Research](#): ceir.org

[Green Meetings Industry Council](#): greenmeetings.info

[International Special Events Society \(ISES\)](#): ises.com

[Professional Convention Management Association](#): pcma.org