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RESEARCH WHITE PAPER May 2012

The Future of Meetings

The Future of Meeting Design

The Future of Meetings study is published in partnership with The Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI) Foundation.

The Future of Meetings – Overview

In 2002, Yahoo! Mail was five years old; iPhones hadn't been created; and Facebook and Twitter were non-existent. Ten years later, more people access the internet via mobile phones than computers; social media is a way of life; and the average consumer has more than one email address. The world is changing more quickly than anyone could have possibly imagined, with the technology explosion as the driving force behind change.

As the meetings sector makes plans for the next two to five years, all of the stakeholders are working hard to figure out what the future holds and how to best prepare. Having a clear picture of what to expect is a particular challenge for the sector due to the diversity of its members and the existence of constant change in the marketplace.

Those involved in planning or executing meetings come from a host of diverse industries, each with different imperatives. The needs of meeting planners and designers, venue managers, speakers, exhibitors and suppliers are very different. The expanding scope of meeting types (e.g., conferences, trade shows, educational sessions, motivational gatherings, conventions and gala business events), even makes an issue of defining what constitutes a "meeting."

To address these issues, Maritz Research has undertaken an extensive project to examine the future outlook for the meetings sector through a combination of primary and secondary research. The goal of The Future of Meetings research series is to integrate these individual pieces of information into a cohesive story. A lot of information has already been published in this area. Our purpose is to synthesize this information and share the collective findings in four succinct white papers.

Description of the Research Process

Primary research was conducted through an online, qualitative survey of 1,612 meetings sector stakeholders. This study, the most comprehensive of its kind, examined four primary areas: technology, meeting design, suppliers and venues, and social media. The online study surveyed 1,612 stakeholders who worked in the meetings and events sector. Forty-six percent (46%) of the respondents currently work as meeting planners, with another 43 percent currently employed as suppliers to the meetings industry. The remainder represented a diverse group including speakers, attendees, and procurement agents.

Unlike most surveys, this process asked the survey participants to generate their own thoughts and ideas about the future in response to a series of open-ended questions. The average length of the survey was more than 20 minutes, but some reported spending several hours to complete the survey. The fact that so many took the time to express their thoughts in such detail demonstrates the high amount of engagement in the topic.

Additionally, numerous in-depth interviews, both formal and informal, were conducted with sector experts and commentators. Maritz also conducted an extensive literature review to reconcile key findings from other credible resources to complement the primary research.

How to listen to a thousand people at once

The survey questions allowed stakeholders to share their predictions for the future of meetings in their own words, and to talk about the things they considered most important. Through use of text analysis software, the study "listened" to all of the feedback from the 1612 participants, and used this feedback to create a classification structure (taxonomy). This automated text analysis allowed systematic analysis of stakeholder comments and identified key themes and insights contained in the comments. The analysis also identified relationships between topics and discerned the sentiment of the comments. The text analysis software, based on extensive knowledge and experience with natural language processing, was supported by Maritz' extensive understanding of the meetings sector. In the very simplest terms, this analysis consolidated similar responses together using common keywords and phrases to provide a snapshot of the group's collective conversation and allowed distillation of the story of what these stakeholders predict for the future of meetings in the primary areas of inquiry.

In addition to this large scale, qualitative study of meeting sector stakeholders, Maritz also conducted an extensive review of published academic reports, articles, interviews and other research studies on the future of meetings. Over 50 hours of video, webinar and audio presentations and interviews were reviewed.

Top level results

The text analysis yielded ten phrases that represented the respondents' most popular themes. In order of frequency of mention, these themes are:

- Integrating technology (22 percent)
- Designing the meeting experience (17 percent)
- Cost and value (17 percent)
- Value of face-to-face meetings (9 percent)
- Meeting designer's job evolving (8 percent)
- Pre and post use of social media (7 percent)
- Role of technology and social media (7 percent)
- Meeting venues need technology (7 percent)
- Sustainability (3 percent)
- Generations (2 percent)

The white papers begin exploring these themes as an initial point of investigation and elaboration, although there are quite a number of other interesting comments that emerged apart from these ten.

The Future of Meetings White Papers

The information that emerged from these research efforts was combined to form an overall story about the future of meetings. The findings are divided into four white papers, one for each of the prominent themes of the survey. In some cases, there was overlap. For example, technology was a theme that was an undercurrent that went across all four papers. This serves as an introduction for all four papers. The paper presented here is *The Future of Meeting Design*.

The survey questions allowed stakeholders to share their predictions for the future of meetings in their own words, and to talk about the things they considered most important.

Introduction – The Roles They are A-Changin'

The future of meeting design as a practiced discipline is changing and it is being influenced by two key factors: the emergence of new meeting technologies and the tightening of the economy. While the outlook is positive, there will be some challenges.

The lure of being able to offer a more custom meeting experience through greater participant engagement can best be taken advantage of if meeting organizers practice greater meeting design thinking ahead of time. Consequently, the role of meeting organizer is evolving to include both greater meetings technology expertise and greater involvement in the meeting design process.

Further education and training will be required of meeting designers to effectively make use of rapidly changing meetings technology and an increase in educational standards and programs are predicted to gain momentum in the future.

In addition, a rise in specialization in the sector is anticipated. This will create a challenge for meeting designers as an increase in the prevalence of a team of design specialists working together could dilute the cohesion of meeting design as a discipline on its own.

As we look into the future, the continued tightening of the economy is predicted to have both a positive and a negative impact on the future of meeting design. Support of the growth of meeting design thinking is attributed to an increased need for organizations to demonstrate a return on investment (ROI) from meetings and measurement of ROI requires meeting organizers to focus on the objective of the meeting – an essential element of meeting design. However, the conflicting reality of shorter lead times associated with our new economy will continue to pose a challenge to meeting design into the future.

The Discussion

When respondents in a study of 1,612 meetings sector stakeholders were asked to share their vision of what the future of meetings looks like to them, two of the top ten topics of conversation included "designing the meeting experience" and the "meeting designer's job evolving."

Survey respondents report that at this point in time meeting design is typically only being employed by leaders, first-movers, or early adopters. This discussion of the "current state of affairs" was deemed necessary to draw attention to the significance being placed on meeting design in the future (as the sector is clearly not there yet).

"I have seen little adoption of meeting design thinking as a corporate strategy for events."

"We have not adopted the meeting design thinking."

"…there are a couple groups that I deal with that are leading the (meeting design) charge locally. But they are ahead of the curve at this point."

"Most companies have no clue about meeting design… Leading companies have figured this out and allow the meeting planner(s) to do their job."

Further education and training will be required of meeting designers to effectively make use of rapidly changing meetings technology and an increase in educational standards and programs are predicted to gain momentum in the future.

However, meeting design is said to be the way of the future. Survey respondents went on to mention the future role of meeting design in the broader sector perspective as being essential. This is a view also taken by those outside of the survey research.

Articles, commentaries, interviews and other research point to this fact numerous times and in various ways – from the identification of a problem existing (for which meeting design is the solution) to blunt statements of the future of meeting design.

- Survey findings from Convention 2020 – The Future of Exhibitions, Meetings, and Events" report that the main barrier to meeting effectiveness today is "a lack of focus in the design of events." [D1]
- In an interview, Dr. James Canton, futurist, author, CEO and Chairman of the Institute for Global Futures reports, "I am always amazed at the lack of design that goes into meeting content today."[D2]
- In an article entitled, Design for the Future, Dalia Fahmy charges meeting organizers to "…acknowledge the lack of meeting design at the present and spur demand for meeting design… to elevate meeting design from exception to common practice." [D3]

Factors Impacting the Future of Meeting Design

Customization through Technology

The evolution of meetings as a whole that is occurring through the continued rise of alternative forms of meeting delivery is predicted to result in a push towards greater meeting design thinking.

It is projected there will be an increase in customized meeting design in the future. The participant experience will be consciously designed – unique to each meeting, based on an understanding (through research) of who is attending, what they want and how best they can be reached.

Often repeated phrases found both in the research and in the views of commentators and sector experts are "no more cookie-cutter" solutions and "one size no longer fits all" (or variations of each). These comments illustrate the general recognition that the meetings of the future will not resemble those of the past which are deemed now to be too standardized or uniform.

Meetings and participants are unique and survey respondents illustrated this uniqueness:
- Some respondents feel meeting participants will be reluctant to try new approaches, while others predict a trend toward breaking out of traditional formats.
- Some report that the participants of tomorrow will want fast-paced programs where they are constantly occupied, while other respondents see participants wanting more unstructured meeting experiences with more free- time.

The lesson -- there is no generic "participant" in the future of meetings.

A clear danger of not moving to embrace meeting design thinking is that meeting organizers will be marginalized in the meeting business of the future. This point was made by both survey respondents and commentators and experts in the sector.

New and existing technologies can create the misconception that organizing a meeting is becoming merely a feat of mastering the new meetings technology. However, it is only through a focus on meeting design that the value of meeting organizers as a group will continue to be demonstrated and that a continued stewardship of all the meeting types can be justified and insured. [D4]

Before meeting organizers can focus on any of the new demands of meetings, they will need to first answer some very basic questions (e.g., whether or not a meeting should be held and what type of meeting would be best given its broad goals to inspire, build relationships, transmit communicate information or something else). Consequently, meeting organizers will have to possess a consultative mindset best exhibited by the practice of meeting design if they do not want to be marginalized in the future. Survey respondents shared:

"The meeting planner needs to be a part of the process from beginning to end and needs to be able to come to the table prepared with suggestions… even if it means eliminating the meeting."

"All of these modern technologies cannot make up for a unclear and poorly crafted message that leaves people wondering what the idea was in the first place… the electronic technology that delivers that story is secondary.

It's as Easy as B, D, A…
The engagement of participants both "pre and post" meeting experience, specifically through the use of social media was a top of mind conversation topic in the Future of Meetings survey research. Greater overall participant engagement is a major element of successful meeting design and it is widely discussed as a key trend of the future.

Consideration for participant engagement "before, during and after" the meeting will be at the forefront of meetings of the future. The B-D-A approach is discussed in many ways: how it is currently being used, changes that will result from it being used and the value of it in the future.

Respondents see current and developing communication technologies (e.g., social media) as facilitating the engagement of stakeholders and participants throughout the design process and execution of meetings.

Jim Ruszala, senior marketing director of Maritz Travel notes, "The integration of mobile devices has led to greater engagement opportunities through social media, but not everyone is at the same level in terms of adopting and embracing social media. Such is the case, the need for opt-in and integrated approaches have to mirror unique audiences."

(B) Before the Meeting
There will be continued growth in participant input before the meeting. The need to survey participants in advance of a meeting is discussed extensively. In the context of meeting design, the reasons to do so are to assist in determining the participants' preferred communication methods, desired level of interactivity at the meeting, expectations, understanding of the meeting's desired outcomes, preferred learning styles, and content development. [D6]

Additionally, survey respondents and commentators both discuss the need to engage participants (attendees and speakers) before the meeting through program updates, pre-meeting discussions with one another and with meeting owners and organizers.

Consequently, meeting organizers will have to possess a consultative mindset best exhibited by the practice of meeting design if they do not want to be marginalized in the future.

This "before the meeting" surveying requirement and engagement is well served by emergent technologies including social media (e.g., Twitter and Facebook are often mentioned), "wiki" sites, text messages and website delivered documentation and surveys that utilize one of the many available custom meetings software applications. [D7]

> *"Easier for attendees to have advance input into the program by online chats and feeding in their comments on program format etc."*

> *"We can use technology to create a pre-conference experience, previewing content, forming advanced networks, and other activities that will help attendees make the most of their conference experience once onsite."*

> *"Work with stakeholders to define objectives for the meeting, assess the current state of attendee engagement, understanding, etc. and then seek input from the attendees on what would create an effective meeting environment. This is done prior to the meeting and if done correctly, uses the input to design everything from the format, the content, the content delivery, the activities, the destination, etc."*

Taking this one step further, events and tradeshow technology analyst, Corbin Ball makes the ollowing point in a group interview, "The idea of how you plan and market meetings is changing—instead of everything coming from the top down, it is now bottom up. You will see more participation. The hierarchies are being flattened."[D8]

(D) During the Meeting

Greater interaction during a meeting is also widely discussed by both respondents and others outside the survey research. The key feature mentioned most often is the ability to receive instant feedback. Stakeholders, meeting organizers, speakers, other participants and even the world outside of the meeting can all be informed about a meeting session as it happens. Again, this immediacy is described as a key benefit of available communication technologies (e.g., mobile devices and social media in particular). [D9] Survey respondents commented:

> *"Realize all about the attendees, get their immediate feedback and get them super involved in interactive."*

> *"(Technology) allows immediate response and feedback, allows interaction during meetings. Helps make meetings more engaging."*

> *"With social networks you can get real-time feedback and responses from attendees."*

It should be noted that there is also discussion of the challenges that this immediacy and connectivity to the "outside world" made possible by mobile devices and social media sites can present. In extreme cases it can directly cause problems for organizers and can compromise a meeting's objectives. Examples include:
- Speaker "overload" from questions submitted during a talk
- Alienation of participants who were not "heard" (in the case of an editor being used to mediate the flow of feedback from the audience)
- The lack of message-information control (i.e., things getting made public that were intended for participants only, such as a press-embargo not being respected). [D10]

Survey respondents also spoke to this:

> *"With Facebook, Twitter, 4square, etc., feedback, comments and criticism is instant. Presenters need to be on their game at all times."*

> *"Speakers will need to become… more social media savvy and able to respond to more questions."*

The benefits of using emergent technologies are more easily seen than are the potential problems, however success in the future requires awareness of both.

(A) After the Meeting

New technologies including online communication methods and social media are also viewed by both survey respondents and sector commentators and experts as facilitating fulfillment of the post-meeting goals of meeting design.

The ability to extend the impact of a meeting through continued dialogues among participants and with stakeholders and speakers is one feature that is considered invaluable. Continued engagement can occur through the use of websites, wikis, and social media sites (e.g., LinkedIn groups set up for a meeting), which can cover anything from meeting content to discussion forums.

Continued engagement, or the meeting "living on" is one important post-meeting undertaking, while another is the crucial matter of measuring how successful the meeting was in achieving its objectives. Measurement of results is discussed in terms of return on investment (ROI) by both the survey respondents and sector commentators. Ruszala of Maritz Travel adds, "Beyond ROI, there's ROE or return on experience that needs to be measured from the attendee's point of view. Overall this is what we're calling the "double-bottom" line of performance measurement."

The Measure of Success

The future of meeting design may very well be written by the continued demand for, and refinement of, ROI measurement. The discussion on this point is unwavering - both survey respondents and sector commentators and experts speak to the fact that increased demand for ROI accountability leads to meeting design thinking. Meeting organizers need to align meeting and organizational (business) objectives before the meeting to ensure measureable ROI after the meeting.

The evolution in the incentive meeting market where ROI is a headline leading every conversation about the future provides an example of this connection. An article by Dalia Fahmy, regular contributor to One+, MPI's online magazine states that "Innovative incentive vendors understand it's not enough simply to design a program and hope that the metrics fall into place. In fact, incentive planners are increasingly designing programs with specific outcomes in mind, in order to facilitate measurement." [D11]

Given the increasing demand for ROI measurement, focusing on the business objective of the meeting, which is an essential element of meeting design, is emerging as a way of the future. As Tony Castrigno, founding partner and CEO of Design Contact, a 3D experience design studio commented in an industry article, "Now the business objective is being moved to the forefront of the meeting… and making sure that every aspect of a meeting has a meaningful business outcome." [D12]

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Survey respondents also discussed the connection of increased demand for ROI accountability and increased relevance of meeting design thinking.

> *"…what was the purpose of the meeting (i.e. objectives), what did they know, feel, believe before they attended, what did they learn, feel, believe and retain during the meeting and how did they apply the meeting's objectives after the meeting? Then finally, how did those results measure against the meeting's objectives?"*

> *"Meeting objectives subject to greater scrutiny than ever before… a serious focus on ROI."*

> *"More than reviews, it requires measuring your results after a meeting to test for retention, behavior changes and obtaining results (such as sales, reduced errors, etc.) that affect the bottom line."*

The circular relationship is clear. Meeting owners require a robust ROI measurement – they need to work with meeting organizers to ensure that business objectives will be served by the meeting's objectives and the success of achieving these objectives can be measured at the end. The critical element linking ROI and meetings design is found in one word: measurement.

Measurement, including surveying of meeting participants consistently throughout the process (e.g., before, during and after a meeting) is discussed by sector leaders and members as critical to addressing increasing demands for ROI accountability. Meetings that are not well designed will not be successful in providing a good ROI.

> *"Meetings and events are more strategic, designed with a specific outcome in mind… those who understand how to design a meeting with that kind of "end in mind" thinking will win. Meetings that are designed to advance business strategy (and are successful) will be seen as an asset not a cost. We all need to raise the bar."*

> *"I am hoping more people in our industry recognize the value of communicating the value of meetings, and this may not be ROI but Return on Objectives (ROO)… clearly identifying the value of meetings to an organization and its stakeholders. I also hope to see more people in our industry thinking about the design of their meeting and their content from a strategic perspective… thinking about how the event can be developed to create meaningful relationships and meet objectives."*

Role Evolution – More Hats to Wear
The evolving role of the meeting organizer is an important topic. "Meeting designer job evolving" is one of the top ten topics of conversation mentioned by sector stakeholders in survey research regarding the future of meetings.

> *"The changes we have seen in the past three years are clear indications that the meetings industry will never be the same, especially as technology reshapes the design of meetings."*

Each of the three types of meetings of the future, face-to-face, hybrid, and virtual, have their own unique qualities and are best executed by professionals who know why, when and how best to use them. This is where meeting design becomes indispensable. Respondents to the survey and sector commentators and experts agree that the role of organizers will evolve by placing more emphasis on meeting design and that further education and training is required to effectively make use of new meetings technology.

The Meeting Designer

The question of what will make a meeting organizer successful in the future was addressed in research findings. Both study respondents and meetings sector commentators and experts discuss a move away from the sole role of "logistics handler" for meeting organizers.[D13] The role of meeting organizers is said to be evolving from strictly logistical tasks to also include greater involvement in the meeting design process and increased contribution to the participant learning aspect of the meeting.

> *"Currently, many planners are told by the content providers they need a meeting room, set classroom style, and deliver PowerPoint. The meeting planner has so much more to offer than they are given credit for and can truly affect the success of the program in more ways than they previously could. The key is to involve the meeting planner in the whole process, not just the logistics."*

"These designers and architects are leaving the logistical tasks of old-school planners behind—which hotel to book, how to register attendees… Turning meeting professionals into contributors of strategy as opposed to logistical planners makes them more valuable" [D14]

And survey respondents also commented:

> *"The traditional meeting planner has focused mostly on logistics."*

> *"Thought leaders are beginning to identify a separation between the hospitality bodies of knowledge and the bodies of knowledge required to design and create strategy for meetings that drive business results."*

> *"Meeting planners need to be more familiar with meeting content not just basic logistics."*

The Technology Logistics Specialist

The use of new technologies for goal-oriented outcomes (as opposed to their use merely for show) will require considerable expertise. The ability to advise meeting stakeholders before a meeting of why, when, and how a technology solution should be deployed is in the realm of meeting design thinking. The familiarity with the technologies recommended will have to be high – again if the organizer practicing meeting design only has a vague idea of why and how the application of specific technologies would be appropriate for a meeting, it will be difficult to justify its use.

> *"This is where the new grey area is -- how much are meeting planners supposed to know about technology and how to make it work/incorporate it into meetings? A challenge to stay informed and trained on new technology."*

> *"I am trained in operating an audience response system - but is that the best use of my time when I am on site managing a conference? Being tied to a tech table during a conference dilutes my ability to solve other issues while on site. But, I still need to at least be educated about what technology options are available and inform my clients."*

The greater the role in meeting design that technology plays in the future, the less it can be treated as an area that can be outside the expertise of the practitioner of meeting design.

"These designers and architects are leaving the logistical tasks of old-school planners behind—which hotel to book, how to register attendees… Turning meeting professionals into contributors of strategy as opposed to logistical planners makes them more valuable"

To illustrate the point – on the topic of hybrid meetings, Kim Myhre, senior vice president and managing director at George P. Johnson, and experimental marketing agency commented: "it's critical to think about the audience experience first—before you try to determine which technology to throw at it. Technology is the enabler; it's not the experience…Just because something is online doesn't make it a great experience. The questions we ask about engaging the audience at a live event are just as important, if not more important, in digital events." [D15]

Another example of how technology and emerging meeting types require new thinking is found in a recent meetings sector report on technology. "Virtual meetings need additional thinking if coupled with live events, so that break times are well managed and audience participation is maximized."[D30] Survey respondents commented:

> *"Greater expertise in technology and how these tools can enhance the meeting experience; as well as knowing which tools are most suited to an event or organization."*

> *"…many will need to learn virtual meeting skills…. content and graphics will become paramount for virtual."*

> *"Understand web technology, the way the internet works, privacy rights on the web. Compliance and regulatory construction of web sites. Security of web and meeting content is extremely important. Your technology has to work with other technologies."*

It could be argued that the evolving role of organizers as it relates to managing technology for meetings is one for those practicing meeting design and not those considered to be logistics experts. However the discussion addresses the evolving role of logistics specialists also – the future will require that their skills be "further developed." [D16]

An example of what these skills could be places the logistics experts at the heart of managing the completely technology-mediated meeting – one that takes place in a virtual environment.

An article discussing these virtual environments quotes a leading researcher, Dr. Mitzi Montoya: "…a new skill set that meeting and event planners need to learn and figure out… There are actually a lot of complications in playing host to a virtual event because you have a lot of people of different skill sets that might want to come. So now, instead of arranging air travel and hotels, you are arranging avatars."[D17]

How Many Hats?

The future of meeting design and the future of meeting logistics converge on the use of technology. The future will determine which specialist [33], the meeting design specialist or the meeting logistics specialist, will be responsible for understanding, explaining, and recommending the use of new technologies to the stakeholders and actively engaging the participants through the use of these technologies.

> *"Understanding learning styles, your audience and their needs. Being able to formulate clear goals and objectives, which then can be communicated or actualized with the assistance of technology, and knowing which method to apply to which scenario is key. Understanding of human psychology, understanding of the demographic of your attendee and client and what they find necessary, easy, accessible or reasonable as it relates to tech, and using what works for them."*

Regardless of which meeting specialist of the future will emerge as the all-around "tech expert," the discussion among both survey respondents and commentators and experts recognizes that meeting organizers of the future will possess more of an expertise in the use of meetings technology and be increasingly involved in the meeting design process.

Additionally, the discussion is clear that the expanding skill-set required for meeting design s pecialists is not limited to technology – as Dalia Fahmy writes: "Forcing (meeting professionals) to figure out ways to add value means that they will always be able to prove that value when asked. Of course, to compete effectively meeting planners will also have to learn a whole new set of skills, ranging from basic psychology… to figuring out the latest social media tool…and try to find ways to insert themselves into the corporate process." [D18]

Don't Forget Your Mortarboard
Survey respondents and sector commentators and experts agree that the future of meeting design is dependent on continuing education.

> *"Planners could benefit from business classes. To understand the business of meetings, you need to first understand business. One of the reasons ROI is difficult to grasp for some planners is they lack a working knowledge of business concepts. They are unable to speak the language of their CEO or CFO."*

The discussion around meeting organizers being lifelong learners addresses the role being played by associations and academic institutions currently and what it will be in the future. "We need recognised and consistent education at the university level as well as professional development by industry organisations in order to realise the full potential…" [D19]

The conversation, which was limited to sector experts regarding what the exact role of academic institutions will be is as of yet uncertain. The move to include a meeting design or meeting architecture specialization in university degree programs, possibly at the post-graduate level, is being discussed. Experts stress that at the current time both the delivery of possible future courses (e.g., full-time, part-time, distant learning options) and the complete curriculum itself are still matters for discussion. [D20]

One reason for the slower than hoped for development of university level courses is a supply and demand issue. There needs to be visible employment opportunities for design specialists before institutions will offer the educational programs needed to prepare students to fill those positions. [D21]

Within the conversation, commentators and experts express different views of the current educational divide between associations and universities.
- On one hand there is the position that many in the sector entered it at a time before meeting organization degree programs existed and that created a demand for the professional certification programs. [D22]
- On the other hand, it is asserted that the associations will be required to provide the education that the schools are currently not providing – in that they are not graduating professionals "ready to lead, organize, or create." [D23]

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The discussion on the future of educational programs re-engages the respondents to the survey research when the role of professional associations is addressed. Survey respondents and those outside the survey research raise two important matters: 1) The need for changes to professional certifications, ones that would incorporate meeting design content, and 2) The fact that conferences and workshops are too general or introductory and are lacking in actual technology training opportunities. [D24]

> *"It is no longer enough to limit your industry education to annual meetings or events. Education needs to be ongoing, daily. It should include achieving advanced certifications, constant reading of both trade publications and leadership/management books, technology training, etc."*

While not directly mentioned by either the respondents or sector commentators, the general discussion regarding future education and meeting design does suggest the emergence of learning modules and the related meeting design requirements for existing certification programs.

Not discussed in certification programs and related to the blurring and specialization of the meeting organizer's roles when it comes to the deployment of technology solutions is adopting a university degree model by adding specializations to the existing certification programs. Just as a Bachelor's Degree is obtained in a special field of study (a subject major), the future of education related to professional certification could follow that model - an existing certification, with a subject major in meeting design, meeting design technology, or meeting design logistics.

Challenges Associated with the Future of Meeting Design

Specialization and Outsourcing

A trend for the future that is discussed by both respondents and those outside of the survey research is the continued rise in outsourcing to supplier specialists.

> *"One can really only go so far in the meeting industry. Sure you can obtain your CMP, CMM, and other certifications, but I think it is important that a meeting planner not simply just concentrate on meeting certifications but on obtaining knowledge that is outside the meetings industry to diversify their ability to expand meetings to a greater capacity."*

> *"Academic programs are popping up in an effort to capitalize on market interest in meetings as a profession, but there is little work being done to differentiate between excellent programs and mediocre programs. Industry organizations, including MPI, still have little understanding of how academia works and what quality looks like."*

Given the expected continued pressures on resources (i.e., both time and money), the rise of outsourcing can be expected to continue. As a recent meetings sector research report on the future noted, the choices facing organizations that are reducing costs include determining the crucial roles to retain in-house and identifying those which should be outsourced or contracted for as needed. [D25]

Facing ever increasing demands for specialized knowledge, particularly as it relates to the use of emergent technologies and the suggestion that meeting design practitioners align themselves with professionals outside of the meetings sector (i.e. educators, trainers, communication professionals, human resources, marketing and the behavioural sciences) [D26] the future of meeting design may see a team of design specialists working together and supported by a large number of equally specialized outside experts and suppliers. The concern in this model for a practice in its early stages of development is the possible dilution of its cohesion as a discipline on its own and the perception that meeting design is an unwieldy practice.

Survey respondents spoke to the situation:

"Most planners - as well as most suppliers - are not learned in meeting technology and rely too heavily on their outsourced a/v and technology vendors rather than digging in and becoming educated and creative so they can integrate more technology into events."

"Connections are more important than skills. That way if you cannot provide it, you have someone in your back pocket that could."

"Leading third parties are beginning to develop in-house expertise in design and strategy."

"Right now, the meeting planner drives what is needed and wanted from a technology standpoint. However, I see that changing in the future with the tech companies driving the solutions. Lines of responsibility are already starting to intersect with many tech companies driving SMMP and offering consulting services in this area. As corporations continue to outsource, this could be an area that becomes outsourced in the future."

Last-minute Meetings
Survey respondents and sector commentators both speak to the phenomena of "last-minute meetings" – those with shorter lead times - as another issue of the present that will continue into the future.

One report on the future of the sector stated, "Where years ago we used to think shorter lead times were a temporary condition, they're now the standard way of doing business for most." [D27]

While consultations on the objectives of a meeting may occur with short lead times, they can pressure meeting content development into either "cookie cutter" templates or lead to a total abdication of that portion of meeting design.

The hallmarks of meeting design, especially as it relates to content development, require sufficient time to execute. Sacrificing the development of tailored learning with motivational and training experiences that are customized for participants would also go against the reported future trends regarding increased participant demand for these very features in the meetings of the future.

The trend of shorter lead times poses a challenge for the future of meeting design.

"Economics is forcing and technology is allowing decisions to be made on a much shorter term than in the past… (this) often negates efficiencies."

"…meetings are being planned with much shorter notice… what I am seeing is extremely short turnaround time and rigid budgets."

"Lead time will be shorter so more ad hoc decisions."

Conclusion

Meeting design principles provide the blueprint needed to meet the changing demands of meetings in the future. The increasing demand for early content and format input by participants, effective engagement during, continuing engagement after the meeting formally concludes, setting meeting and business objectives for meetings and ROI measurement afterwards all speak to the need to formally plan the meetings of the future – and this is what meeting design offers.

With the rise of highly specialized suppliers, outsourcing and involvement of professionals outside of the sector in the organization of meetings, there is a danger that the meeting organizer, in the future, could be marginalized in their own profession. The blurring of organizers' roles – be t discussed as the logistics of meeting design or the meeting design of logistics – is crucial to k eeping organizers at the center of meetings activity. As the profession moves forward, an increase in educational standards and programs will help assure its relevance to the future of meetings.

The Future of Meeting Design Horizon Watch:

- Attitudinal changes on the part of meeting organizers and meeting owners regarding the necessity for practicing meeting design as a requirement for successful meetings
- Adoption of the practice of defining aligned meeting and organizational (business) objectives before a meeting to ensure measurable ROI after a meeting
- Continued growth of the trend for participant design input before a meeting
- The rise of "meeting design logistics" (specifically the application of technology solutions for participant engagement)
- Educational (professional certification programs) meeting design specialization adopted
- Academic institutions teach meeting design/meeting architecture as part of existing meeting organizer degree programs

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Endnotes and References

1 - A statistical measure was calculated (a z-test) to measure the extent to which survey responses were similar among comparison groups. The frequency with which phrases generally occurred in descriptions provided by all the respondents in the survey was established. These counts may be understood as the average (or expected) rate that respondents mentioned a specific topic. Individual groups of respondents werethen reviewed – these were the breakout groups (e.g. male, female) -- and the phrases in only their responses were examined. A comparison was made of the breakout group rates of use of a phrase to the average word rate use of the same phrase that we found for all survey respondents. If it was observed that the breakout groups were using specific phrases more frequently than the all respondents, the difference was reported. In the end, this allowed for identification of what was catching the attention of specific groups of respondents compared to all survey respondents.

In brief, the statistical z-tests ensured that differences were not occurring just by chance -- any rate or number will have a tendency to fluctuate up and down randomly -- and that the differences did in fact represent meaningful findings. These statistical tests took into account the fact that some breakout groups had smaller samples than others, and that between-group differences are harder to detect accurately with small samples.

2 – UNWTO definition of meeting: 10 or more people, meeting in a commercial venue, for four hours or more in length. Pages19-22 Measuring the Economic Importance of the Meetings Industry - Developing a Tourism Satellite Account Extension (English version) 2006, World Tourism Organization, Madrid, Spain. ISBN 978-92-844-1195-5.

D1 –"Convention 2020 – The Future of Exhibitions, Meetings, and Events" (Phase 1 Survey Findings March 5th, 2010) ByRohitTalwar and Tim Hancock – page 17 (Source: convention2020.com)

D2 – Future of Meetings: Rethinking the strategy of learning (video) (Source: mpiweb.org) interview with Dr. James Canton

D3 –"Design for the Future" by Dalia Fahmy, One+, 07/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.org)

D4–"Focus On Results" (Produced by George P. Johnson) Vol.1 Spring 2010, - An example of why there iscontinued concern over the potential marginalization of meeting organizers in the emerging hybrid model, and a clear statement that runs counter to meeting design goals, is found in the following comments regarding hybrid meetings: "The ideal scenario may be having a single department responsible for delivering the real and virtual elements of a hybrid event." And"Thephysical and virtual components won't alwayshave the same objectives, but they need towork together."!

D5 –Debi Scholar quoted in "The Future Is Virtual" by Alison Hall, Corporate Meetings & Incentives, Vol.27; Number 8; ISSN Number 07451636

D6 –"The Future of Meetings The Search for Solutions" (Summary of participant input)
Source: http://www.mpiweb.org/Archive?id=22492

& "Meetings of Tomorrow: Flexible, adaptable and dynamic" By Bob Parker
Source: http://www.speakingofimpact.ca/?p=486

D7 –"2010: The Meetings Technology Revolution Are We There Yet?" By Corbin Ball
Source: http://www.corbinball.com/art/

D8 – "The Meeting of the Future" – a roundtable discussion May, 2010
Source: http://www.meetingsfocus.com/Topics/ArticleDetails/tabid/162/ArticleID/13998/Default.aspx?utm_source=MagnetMail&utm_medium=eNewsletters&utm_term=air-n-sun@juno.com&utm_content=Meetings%20Hot%20Topic%2005-25-10&utm_campaign=The%20Meeting%20of%20the%20Future#continue

D9 – "The Business Value of Mobile Apps for Meetings" By Corbin Ball
Source: http://www.corbinball.com/art/

D10–"Meeting Rxcitement" By Elaine Pofeldt, One+, 06/03/11 (Source: mpiweb.org) - On the importance of vetting questions (specifically at a pharmaceutical meeting);

& "Social Media" By Michael Pinchera, One+ magazine 11/12/10 – pages 34-35(Source: mpiweb.org) – On the transmittal of content deemed inappropriate;

&"The end of meetings (part 5) and the rise of web 2.0 and social media" by Nicolaas Pereboom
Source: http://www.crossmint.com/web-2.0-branding-2.0/authors/nicolaas
 - On meeting organizers and speakers and immediate feedback;

D11 –"Re-inventing Incentives" By Dalia Fahmy, One+, 06/01/10 (Source: mpiweb.org)

D12 –"Shift Happens… Even to Us" By Bruce MacMillan, One+, 07/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.com)

D13 –"5 Future Jobs"by Jason Hensel, One+ 12/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.org)

In his article Hensel makes the matter of distinguishing between those meeting organizers practicing logistics and others with "leadership" skills a wide ranging discussion on the importance of titles:"In 10 years, the term "meeting professional" will no longer be sufficient in describing what meeting or event planners and suppliers do. There will be logistical aspects of the job, sure, and those people who do the buying and selling will be called planners and suppliers.

But the people really creating the meetings and events, the ones with the leadership skills, resources and know-how, will go by a different name… CEOs, CFOs and COOs focus on strategy primarily. The word meeting is too narrow for their broad view. Our future fails or succeeds on what we call ourselves, so let's propose a new C acronym: CCO (chief connecting officer)."

D14 -"Design for the Future" by Dalia Fahmy, One+, 07/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.org)

D15 -"Focus On Results" (Produced by George P. Johnson) Vol.1 Spring 2010, page 3

D16 -"The Meeting Architecture Manifesto" Maarten Vanneste, May 4, 2009 (Source: meetingarchitecture.org) page 5

D17–"Divining Value" By Patrick Jones, One+, 03/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.org)

D18 –"Design for the Future" by Dalia Fahmy, One+, 07/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.org)

D19–"The Meeting Architecture Manifesto" Maarten Vanneste, May 4, 2009 (Source: meetingarchitecture.org) page 5

D20– Paul Bridle about Meeting Architecture and why it is important (video) - An interview with Paul Bridle.

D21 - Tyra Hillard on the educational future of Meeting Architecture (video) - An interview with Tyra Hillard.

D22 – Tyra Hillard on the educational future of Meeting Architecture (video) - An interview with Tyra Hillard.

D23 –"Future of Meetings – New Opportunities For Learning" By David Mcknight
Source: http://blog.omnipress.com/2010/09/future-of-meetings-new-opportunities-for-learning/

D24 –"Design for the Future" by Dalia Fahmy, One+, 07/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.org)

& FutureWatch 2011 report (Source: mpiweb.org) page15

D25 –"Convention 2020 – The Future of Exhibitions, Meetings and Events (Phase 1 – Pathfinder Report Key Drivers and Strategic Challenges)" By Rohit Talwar, Tim Hancock, Guy Yeomans, and George Padgett, (Source: convention2020.com), page 10

D26 –"Shift Happens… Even to Us" By Bruce MacMillan, One+, 07/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.com)

& "Thinking About How Conference Meeting Design Impacts The Brain"
By Jeff Hurt (Source: http://jeffhurtblog.com/category/event-meeting-planning/)

&"The Meeting Architecture Manifesto" Maarten Vanneste, May 4, 2009 (Source: meetingarchitecture.org) pages 7, 9

D27 –"2010: Looking Ahead" Source: http://meetingsnet.com/corporatemeetingsincentives/new/2010:LookingAhead