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The Future of Meetings

The Future of Meetings Technology



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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 Meetings Technology***



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Introduction – A Brave New World

Throughout history, meetings have adapted to, and benefited from, advancements in technology. Just as the invention of the telephone did not end meetings, the increasing use of telepresence technology will not end them either. As in the past, the most important meetings technologies of tomorrow will have to provide value before they become the standard. Otherwise, they will fade into obscurity, or at most, isolated use.

The future of meetings technology will be driven by participants, meeting organizers, and other meetings stakeholders in addition to technology suppliers. Each unique constituency will have its own motivations for pushing the boundaries of the traditional face-to-face meeting through the use of new technologies and communication methods. Ultimately, how any specific technology ends up being used will be determined by how it most successfully engages participants and helps realize a meeting's objectives.

Furthermore, the outlook on meetings technology will be dominated by two main concerns: cost and education. Ultimately, the use of cutting-edge meeting technologies will need to provide a true benefit to meetings to overcome these concerns.

The rapid development and emergence of new technologies has created an atmosphere of expectation, and a fascination with the next big thing. However, the use of technology must be balanced by the reasons for meeting--otherwise these meetings will lose their relevance and become broadcast experiences that simply showcase the technology itself and have little impact. There must be balance between this anticipation and true delivery of benefits. Balance will be maintained as long as meetings technology remains understood as a means to an end, and the goals of a meeting are held to be paramount.

The Discussion

Technology was among the most prominent topics for the Maritz Future of Meetings survey respondents when asked to share their vision of the future of meetings. Three of the ten most commonly mentioned phrases associated with this discussion pertained to technology; the most common being "integrating technology" (22% of mentions). Analysis of this aspect of the discussion finds that four factors are impacting the integration of technology into meetings: the persistence of face-to-face meetings, accessibility issues, cost concerns, and sustainability.



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Factors Impacting the Future of Meetings Technology

In Defense of the Live Meeting – The “Both/And” Paradigm

Technology will not replace the need for face-to-face meetings in the future. Survey respondents and sector commentators alike stress the value of face-to-face meetings when talking about the use of technology in meetings. Defense of the “live meeting” against the virtual meeting [T1] is made by many technology experts – even those in the virtual meeting business.

“No one in the e-conferencing business is predicting the end of live meetings.” [T2]

“Meetings provide a vastly richer, more targeted, and more focused learning experience than any virtual meeting.” [T3]

“Virtual technologies are certainly not better than face to face” [T4]

Illustrating the persistence of face-to-face meetings, a Forbes Insights study finds that 84% of business executives prefer face-to-face meetings over virtual meetings and attribute a number of unique values to them. These executives report they believe face-to-face meetings facilitate building stronger, more meaningful relationships (85%), the ability to “read” another person (77%) and greater social interaction (75%). [T5] Survey respondents, as well as sector commentators, agree that the future of meetings will continue to contain face-to-face meetings, which will be supplemented by virtual technology to a greater extent over time. Representative survey responses include:

“While virtual technology has opened up a whole new world, I prefer to think of it in terms of in addition to and not a replacement for physical meetings.”

“Too much technology incorporated in a meeting can eliminate that face-to-face connection/ communication. I think balance is the key.”

As the ease of use and quality associated with virtual meeting technology improves, virtual meetings will grow in popularity. While commentators don’t focus on the difficulties in using technology, or perceived poor quality of virtual meetings at this time, many survey respondents feel that this technology has not yet reached the level of development required for its widespread use.

“As soon as teleconferencing becomes easy and efficient, that will play a much bigger role in meetings. Travel is often inefficient, but not as inefficient as having a tech-controlled meeting that doesn’t work smoothly.”

“Technology helps connect people who are in many different places. It is still daunting for some, and as far as it has come, still not easy to use sometimes.”

The future of technology for meetings is not simply a case of one type of meeting replacing another. As Daniel Burrus, one of the world’s leading technology forecasters and business strategists writes, “Those who believe video conferencing will end face-to-face meetings are using ‘either/or’ thinking, which often occurs when dazzling new technologies first appear... Companies that make visual communications work will have the new and the old coexisting by allowing each to do what it does best... **It’s not either/or anymore. ‘Both/and’ thinking is the new paradigm.**” [T6]

Key Meetings Technology Developments

Discussion of the future of meetings technology focuses on the importance of three technologies in particular: mobile applications, cloud computing and technologies that enhance the virtual meeting experience.

“Apps” is the Word

On the January 7, 2011, the word “Apps” was voted “The Word of 2010” at the American Dialect Society’s annual meeting in Pittsburgh. (It is not known to what extent mobile devices were used at that meeting.)

Survey respondents and sector commentators agree on the emerging importance of mobile phone and device applications; and it is being enthusiastically heralded. Key aspects of this movement for the meetings sector include the use of GPS apps and third-party app loaded devices – and of course, education. The advice to meeting organizers from experts regarding the use of mobile applications is summarized in the following quote:

“Embrace mobile technology: Mobile devices, a huge emerging force for meeting technology change, will be used for registration, micropayments, lead exchange, way-finding, surveys, ticketing, networking, audience polling, and more.” [T17]

The discussion is clear on this point, and the value of widespread use of mobile apps at meetings is also recognized by meeting stakeholders in the survey research:

“We have saved so much paper by going totally electronic with our conferences.”

“Technology will also help these attendees remain more connected to events as they receive reminders via mobile phones, are able to participate in surveys and Q&A with speakers and more.”

“I love phone apps (they are) easier than carrying around an onsite program guide.”

And while mobile applications are already in use, continued growth in use is predicted for the future.

- A research study on the future of meetings found that two-thirds of respondents (64%) believed that in the future, “All presentations, videos, etc... (will be) downloaded to my mobile” [T18].
- A recent meetings sector report noted that, “One area of technology that is set to grow and grow is the meetings applications or apps.” [T19]
- Meetings technology expert Corbin Ball writes, “80% of meeting professionals are using smartphones and other mobile devices in their jobs. Yet, with this high adoption, relatively few have used mobile applications yet for their own meetings. This is about to change.” [T20]

One application in particular received considerable attention from both survey respondents and sector commentators - GPS (geo-location apps). One commentator illustrates this interest in GPS applications when discussing the 2011 DigitalNow conference, which was themed "The Many Faces of Mobile."

"(Last year) saw the event's first attempt at a mobile app...They got a 50 % (usage rate). This year, they redesigned the app and gave it even more interactive features (like the GPS functionality) and the usage rate jumped to 90 %." [T21]

Survey respondents supported this interest in mobile GPS applications for meetings:

"I would like to see them more fully developed, especially in convention centers... have a GPS application so attendees can find their meeting room in a large hotel or convention center or a particular booth simply by typing in their booth number..."

"Regarding new technology, I would like GPS tracking in large hotels and convention centers."

The use of third-party app loaded devices at meetings, rather than participants' personal mobile devices, provides the opportunity to present a level playing field for attendees who do not have a smart mobile device. With third-party devices brought into a meeting, all participants can be equal in their abilities to interact with organizers, speakers and one another. [T22]

"Interaction between generations, level the playing field so that all ages can communicate in one manner."

"We will need to engage all levels and types of learners, which mean new technologies for all of us!"

All the discussion about mobile applications can be a little overwhelming for meeting professionals. As one commentator states:

"But, like all things new, and with so many different channels, mobile can be a scary adventure for meeting professionals. There are apps, SMS, MMS, social media, QR codes, GPS, mobile web, photos, blogs, email—and the gamut begs the question, 'How do I integrate mobile into my next meeting without breaking the bank and scaring away my delegates?'" [T23]

The future use of mobile apps for meetings requires education. With "hundreds, if not thousands, of mobile phone applications" emerging for the meetings sector [T24], the resources the sector requires has to move beyond lists, or merely fragments of news about the latest, or even the "best" apps out there.

"Mobile apps are huge... though expensive and time intensive to implement."

"Resource-wise, sometimes it is not a matter of not being able to afford the software, since it may be free, but that the individuals are not even aware that it exists. With the rapid increase in technology choices, I expect that this will become more common."

While discussions about the future typically provide few absolute certainties, one certainty is that the future of meetings is going to be awash in mobile apps.



The use of third-party app loaded devices at meetings, rather than participants' personal mobile devices, provides the opportunity to present a level playing field for attendees who do not have a smart mobile device.

Feet on the Ground, Head in the Clouds

Cloud computing is another hot area of technology advancement for meetings. The benefits of this new technology to meeting professionals are many, and once there is greater familiarity with it, cloud computing is predicted to become one of the major meetings technologies of the future.

- As one sector commentator wrote, “These days, cloud computing — the practice of storing data on a network, versus a personal computer so it can be accessed anywhere and from any device — is all the rage.”
- An enterprise advisory report noted, “Cloud computing has been hailed as a paradigm shifter that will help level the competitive landscape between small and big businesses’ IT capabilities.” [T25]

The wide availability of an array of easy-to-use web-based applications provides meetings professionals with a number of benefits, including cost savings and greater data security.

- This ease of access is addressed by Corbin Ball. He reports, “Web-based software is more efficient... It does not require local installation, network configuration, local customization... All that is required by the user is Internet access and a browser --- this makes the programs accessible 24/7 anywhere there is an Internet connection...A PC, a Mac, a Linux operating system, and mobile platforms can access the data.” [T26]

Cloud computing provides a significant cost savings for meetings professionals by eliminating software upgrade costs, investment in infrastructure and capital expenditures, while at the same time providing greater reliability (e.g., no “crashes”). [T27]

- A recent research report for the hospitality industry points out that, “Cloud computing implies renting data servers and software applications over the Internet from vendors... This offers significant potential for greater flexibility in upgrading and changing applications while reducing the costs of the servers on which both the applications and data reside.” [T28]

Cloud computing also addresses a growing concern in the sector regarding data security issues. As survey respondents commented:

“The ability to ensure privacy and security of the meeting materials (is an issue). We need to create and/or start using secure web systems for meetings.”

“Intensifying technology infrastructure (is requiring) high levels of security for electronic data paths.”

Recent advertisements for providers of cloud computing services address the security of the “cloud,” and a commentator points out that web-based computing offers, “...local firewall protection and local backup – everything is stored, backed, virus-protected and updated remotely, usually in highly secure data farms.” [T29]

At this point in time, however, an information gap exists among small businesses in particular regarding the adoption of cloud computing.

- An enterprise advisory report found that the benefits of cloud computing aren’t fully understood by the small business community. It reported, “Research shows that 49% of owners aren’t aware of cloud computing. For those that are aware but haven’t adopted, the leading barrier is, ‘I don’t know enough about it.’” [T30]

This poses a hurdle to the growth of this technology. As with any new technology, a focus on education will be needed. One approach that cloud computing providers are taking to overcome this education barrier to adoption is to offer high-value baseline products or services for free, or as “freemiums.” [T31]

All the Smells & Thistles

The third type of new technology that is popularly discussed as being important to the future of meetings is technology that enhances the meeting experience for virtual participants. While description of some of this technology sounds very futuristic, the discussion starts with the value associated with use of our five senses in face-to-face meetings.

Meetings sector commentators are talking about the fact that the divide between virtual meetings and face-to-face meetings is centered on the unique sensory experiences that are necessary for heightened connection [T32]. Numerous sector reports discuss this concept. In a roundtable interview, Stan Aaronson reported, "All five of the senses need to be stimulated for retrievable memories to be created. Virtual meetings can't do this." Daphne Meyers, managing partner of Red Barn Group, LLC, a firm specializing in strategic meeting, training and event best practices added, "You have to think about things that you can't do on the Web. You can't smell, touch or taste on the Web." [T33]

Sector commentators and experts also predict that the use of technology to stimulate the senses of participants will be an important aspect of meetings in the future. An increase in the development of "alternative reality" technology is anticipated to simulate the sensory experience of face-to-face meetings.

Commentators and sector experts have been discussing a variety of new real-life simulating technologies, including:

- Projecting holographic-type images of "distance" attendees (avatars) at face-to-face meetings and incorporating video transmission of such quality that it will be difficult to decipher if the person is real or "virtual" [T34].
- Virtual environment meetings where participants' avatars can experience everything from bumping into fellow participants, holding private conversations in a group setting, having to leave the meeting "room" to take a phone call, and experiencing an aural depth in which crowds become louder the closer one's avatar gets to them. [T35]

The key to the future of virtual environment meetings is the mimicking of reality. Dr. Mitzi Montoya, a leading researcher in computer-based virtual environments, commented, "So if you are going to have to listen to an event by teleconference, it is death by PowerPoint... It is definitely more engaging if I can go into a virtual world and there are things for me to do and not just sit and listen. I can interact with other people or objects." [T36]

This sentiment regarding the overuse of particular technologies in current day presentations (e.g., PowerPoint) is where survey respondents are in agreement with sector commentators. Both groups predict a decline in the use of PowerPoint at meetings in the future. As one commentator wrote, "...the traditional meeting, with PowerPoint presenters talking in front of a passive audience, has reached its end." [T37] In fact, the negative reaction to our overreliance on the slide show presentation recently spawned a worldwide political party called the "Anti-PowerPoint Party" and was announced in one news story headline as, "Dull meetings under attack." [T38]



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Challenges Associated with New Meetings Technology

While this discussion stresses that education is the overarching challenge for the development of new meetings technology, another, more specific, challenge that goes hand in hand with the use of these new technologies is the engagement of virtual meeting participants. Additional challenges include the “shopping” of online meeting content and the need to keep technology in a supporting role.

Learning Together

Respondents to the survey research were very vocal in expressing concern about their current limited knowledge of meetings technology and the vulnerability associated with this lack of knowledge.

“Meeting planners today do not have the knowledge or foundation to grasp the amount of technology that can be used to benefit organizations.”

“I think that there is a really good knowledge but unfortunately it is limited to only a few people. That makes a huge gap between suppliers and organizers, talking about technology.”

“Far too many planners rely on the (tech) staff at hotels and conference centers to run their meetings technology. If they do not start learning it soon, they will be out of a job soon.”

Meetings professionals recognize that, to not be aware of the technology being developed, brings with it a certain peril. Those who do not keep up with meetings technology will need to rely to a greater extent on technology suppliers and venue technology staff, while those who do keep up will be able to differentiate themselves in the market.

“If the person does not continue to educate themselves... there is a good chance that they will be left behind.”

“I believe most planners learn about technology from a broad-based perspective rather than having a true understanding of how it works. I think this is a mistake and that planners must understand how (it) works, how it is set up, the process behind the technology. Knowing this makes us smarter consumers, helps us to ask for what we really need and want, and allows us to help trouble shoot when problems arise, rather than to be at the mercy of our vendor.”

Sector commentators also discuss how a grasp of the new meetings technology will set some apart.

- One commentator stated, “Digital Darwinism is alive and well and the ‘race’ for meetings and tradeshow business will often go to those who use technology to be nimble, reduce cost and provide superior customer service.” [T39]
- A meetings sector report on the future states, “There is a growing recognition of the need to recruit and develop professionalized skill sets, advanced strategic thinking capabilities, creativity and a deeper appreciation of technology.” [T40]

Survey respondents spoke at length about the need for technology suppliers and meeting organizers to develop stronger relationships in order to make the meetings of the future successful. The meetings sector will benefit from these stronger relationships.

Technology suppliers will educate organizers, which will lead to greater independence from suppliers as organizers develop more technical expertise.

“The meeting planner will have to rely on the technology provider to produce a successful meeting.”

“It will definitely be a collaborative role. The meeting planner will rely heavily on technology provider for keeping up with trends and best practices in meetings/technology.”

“The technology provider will become the planner’s best friend. Initially the provider will be providing the advice on what and how - but the roles will shift as planners become more adept and knowledgeable.”

While at the same time meeting organizers will educate technology suppliers about meetings and the bond that develops between the two will allow for true communication resulting in the development of better technology offerings designed for meetings.

“Technology experts will become more knowledgeable about the meetings industry and can help demonstrate how their tools can support a customer need,”

“The technology provider must listen to the needs of the planner. Focus groups between them will be essential to ensure the correct products are created for meetings. The planner will help the tech provider develop their ideas into usable products and services.”

The future will require cooperation between suppliers and users of meetings technology. As Greg Van Dyke, senior vice president, global sales and marketing for PSAV, a meetings technology firm commented, “The best we can do is prepare ourselves with the skill sets and the capacity to deal with that change and exploit it as it develops – that will be the key to success for the future.” [T41]

Sorry: What did you say?

The discussion on the future of meetings technology is quite exact on one point - attention spans are getting shorter. Sector commentators and survey research respondents both point out, repeatedly, that a major consideration in understanding the future of meetings is that meeting formats and presentations have to change to keep the attention of audiences with shortened attention spans.

This trend is reported to be the result of advances in communication technology. As one sector commentator wrote, “Average attention spans... are ever decreasing because many technologies now allow for near instant feedback.” [T42] Others echo this sentiment - “Because of technology... attention spans are much shorter...” [T43]



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The real culprit in “attention theft” are not the tools that are used however, rather it is the decisions made by those using them – and the decisions are linked to the modern lifestyle trait of “multitasking.”

“The younger generation...(does) not pay attention as it is in meetings. All they are interested in is texting!”

A sector report on the value of face-to-face meetings draws on the neuroscience of learning and notes that multitasking is an inefficient process. The report goes on to draw the conclusion that, “The bottom line is that learning that happens when someone is multitasking cannot be extrapolated and applied back at the job.” [T44] Survey respondents support the findings of this report:

“If technology takes over for the planner, it is a short bell curve before their value is also called into question. The retention on content delivered via technology is less than face to face.”

“Holding someone’s attention in person is much easier than keeping them engaged online”

This is a concern for future meetings, especially for hybrid and virtual meetings. Remote participants of hybrid and virtual meetings commonly admit to multitasking. When discussing attending teleconferences, one participant said, “Personally, I put my phone on mute and focus on other things.” [T45] Two studies of participants at virtual meetings support this picture of virtual participants.

- A study of business executives found that 58% admitted “they ‘frequently’ surf the web, check their email, read unrelated materials and handle other ancillary work during digital meetings” and 64% of those who prefer technology-enabled business meetings like them because “they allow them to multitask.” [T46]
- Another study conducted by a company hosting virtual meetings reported, “Participants stated that the significant temptation to multitask during virtual meetings was distracting and had an impact on the meeting objectives being achieved.” [T47]

Meeting planners will need to acknowledge the existence of the virtual participant and take advantage of new methods to keep the attention of everyone.

“If you’re conducting a meeting that includes remote attendees you cannot treat them as an afterthought. You have to have a plan to engage the remote attendee.”

“Virtual audiences require more frequent interactions including polls, exercises, games and more to remain fully engaged in meetings.”

“To keep them engaged you are going to need to kick things up a notch and make session more interactive.”

Shop 'til you Drop

Meeting professionals in the survey spoke about the rise of the “shopped” meeting. That is, shopping for the specific content of a meeting that is of importance to an individual.

This practice is driven by pressures for cost reduction. It is being facilitated by richer content capture at meetings and web-based broadcasting of this content to the larger world outside of individual meetings. An additional factor along these same lines is the practice of participants capturing content at meetings using increasingly advanced personal electronics (e.g., smartphones with video recording capabilities) for their own further use and distribution.

The future of meetings will see an increase in virtual content consumers who will pick and choose only the content of particular interest to them. Since this new web-based phenomenon points to a possible decline in attendance at meetings, the sector has to be prepared to deal with it.

“With costs continually rising, a key concern will be who can afford to attend a conference versus those who simply shop a meeting for content via technological tools such as webcasts, blog casts and other live / archived methods.”

“The gradual integration of technology at meetings is key to long-term attendance growth. But, this is a double-edged sword if people can learn it all online, then decision-makers will start to ask the question, ‘spend time and travel dollars to go to a meeting?’ So, a balance is required.”

Of Tails, Dogs, and Wagging

Regardless of the technology used to enhance the meetings in years to come, meetings professionals stress that it will be important to consider meeting design first. Both study respondents and sector commentators agree that, whether virtual meetings technologies are used or not, the central role of a meeting organizer is to design the experience to engage participants and is the essential feature of meetings, both now and in the future.

“I believe technology will continue to be an enabler...not the solution. Technology connects stores and expedites people, data and process. However, if the basic process and content is poor, and we do not know our attendees’ goals, the outcome will not be improved through the introduction of technology.”

The focus for the future of meetings has to be on the unique talents that meeting organizers possess.

“Well, I hope the tail will not wag the dog. The goal(s) of the meeting must still be king. Technology and its providers are still tools to help us achieve better outcomes.”



The future of meetings will see an increase in virtual content consumers who will pick and choose only the content of particular interest to them.

Commentators and experts speak to this point repeatedly:

- Debi Scholar, industry expert on both strategic meetings and virtual meetings points out that, "Virtual meetings are not about the technology, but rather about bringing together virtual attendees to accomplish a goal...All of the creativity that meeting planners bring to a face-to-face meeting can be repackaged in a virtual environment." [T48].
- Daniel Burrus, technology trends and business strategy speaker writes, "The cornerstone of your business is still the art, science, and magic of relationships.... No amount of high tech gadgetry is going to change that in a fundamental way." [T49].
- Mark Yeager, vice president of marketing at iLinc, a leading developer of Web conferencing software said in an interview, "Running an effective face-to-face meeting is an art and a science, and it's the same online. There are best practices." [T50]

The meetings professionals in the study take the discussion further to stress that focusing on meeting objectives, and how to use technology to support these objectives, will help guide its use.

"Much of what passes for "virtual" is merely broadcasting. If a meeting is to be virtual, it should be designed as such from the ground up."

"Running good virtual events requires significant education... facilitating connections between local and remote attendees is an art not a science."

"Everyone can be sensitive to the character of their participants to determine which programs are going to be worthwhile. The ability to discern what will work best for a particular group is going to be key in effectively incorporating technology into meeting initiatives."

A danger is that a disconnect will be allowed to develop where meeting organizers are isolated from meetings technology, either through lack of understanding or through the rise of IT departments or technology suppliers as the "virtual meeting organizers." Such a disconnect will result in a separation of means and ends and be a disservice to meetings. As one commentator noted, "Matching the tools used to the meeting type is critical to the success of any meeting... Disconnecting the tools from the meeting type can lead to a poor meeting." [T51]

Education, cooperation, and appreciating the roles played by all concerned in the development of meetings will be instrumental in the success of meetings during this period of rapid technological development. This is illustrated by the following representative quote from the survey of meeting professionals:

"Meeting planning still needs to be in charge and offer technology... this area could be a loose cannon as many technology providers are way ahead... but that does not mean they always know the best way to work with the client and attendees. The knowledge factor will become a big issue and an agreement must be worked out between them with the meeting planner (having) the final say on how and where it should work but the technology provider needs to (explain) everything and I mean everything that they will provide and how."


"The meeting planner will need to understand how to work with the technology provider based on the needs of the event and goals of the organization."

Conclusion

The exciting advancements in meetings technology in recent years, from webinars and live video streaming to the use of virtual environments including holographic participants at face-to-face meetings, only foreshadow what is possible in the near future. New technological developments will continue to push the boundaries of the traditional meeting in ways unimagined – and the pace of the developments will continue to increase. The cliché that the only constant is change is applicable when discussing the future of meetings technology.

However, the future success of meetings will be determined by how meetings professionals choose to use these new technologies, not by the mere existence of the technologies alone. Technological advancement without the corresponding knowledge of ‘why’ to use the technology has the potential to sabotage the success of meetings in the future, rather than provide benefits.

Education and costs will be the watchwords for the future of meetings technology. The role of members of the meetings sector – not only meeting organizers – must be one of putting a meetings’ goals before all other considerations. The temptation to embrace the new only for the sake of change will not serve the sector.



For more information
visit Maritz Research at
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The Future of Meetings Horizon Watch:

- Technology mediated meetings will grow in numbers:
- The cost-benefits (ROI) of adopting new meetings technologies will become a major focus.
- The costs associated with adopting new technology will decline.
- The use of mobile devices and meetings specific applications designed for them will increase, however the use of non-personal electronic devices for participant interaction will have to continue to ensure a level playing field for all meeting participants.
- Use of technology to enhance the sensory experience of face-to-face meetings will increase.
- Advances in virtual environment meetings technology will seek to narrow the “sensory” experience gap between virtual meetings and face-to-face meetings.
- The main technology tool for presentations at meetings will no longer be PowerPoint/ slideshows.
- Web-based delivery of meeting content and cloud computing for meeting management will become widespread.
- Meetings will utilize technology based on the unique characteristics of participants – earning styles, age groups, and technological usage preferences of participants will inform the decision to use technology for a specific meeting.
- Meetings technology education becomes a priority for all members of the sector.
- Specialization of educational offers and meeting organization practices will come to maturity.
- New and closer relationships between technology suppliers and meeting organizers will develop.
- The maturing of the practice of meeting design will ensure meetings technology is used effectively to engage participants, deliver content, and realize business objectives in the goals of meetings.

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 were then 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. Pages 19-22 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.

Technology

T1 – “Virtual meeting” is a term used by commentators, sector experts and survey respondents to include all meetings where participants “attend” through the use of some form of telecommunication. The most common type of technology referred to as “virtual” is a webinar [see: “The Future Is Virtual” by Alison Hall, Corporate Meetings & Incentives, Vol.27; Number 8; ISSN Number 07451636] other types include “telepresence”, webcasts, and truly “virtual” meetings where a person attending is represented by an avatar that “attends” a meeting in a virtual reality space.

T2 – “The Future Is Virtual” by Alison Hall, Corporate Meetings & Incentives, Vol.27; Number 8; ISSN Number 07451636

T3 – “Eleven Meetings Technology Trends to Watch for 2011” By Corbin Ball
Source: <http://www.corbinball.com/art/>

T4 - Dr. Mitzi Montoya quoted in “Divining Value” By Patrick Jones, One+, 03/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.org)

T5 – “Forbes Insights Study: Business Execs Prefer Face-to-Face Meetings Over Virtual” Wireless News, September 7, 2009

T6 – “The Future of Meetings” By Daniel Burrus
Source: <http://www.myarticlearchive.com/articles/8/180.htm>

T7 – “2010: The Meetings Technology Revolution Are We There Yet?” By Corbin Ball
Source: <http://www.corbinball.com/art/>

T8 – “Convention 2020 – The Future of Exhibitions, Meetings, and Events” (Phase 1 Survey Findings March 5th, 2010) By Rohit Talwar and Tim Hancock – page 37 (Source: convention2020.com)

T9 – “Testing Times 2: Technology and the global meetings industry” By Grass Roots
Source: <http://meetingsreview.com/news/view/62850>

T10 – “The Business Value of Mobile Apps for Meetings” By Corbin Ball
Source: <http://www.corbinball.com/art/>

T11 – “The Mobile Revolution is Here” By David Basler, One+ 05/09/11 (Source: mpiweb.org)

T12 - The Business of meetings: Battle of the Generations (audio) (Source: mpiweb.org). In this humour-injected session an illustration of the barrier to limiting interaction to personal mobile devices is found when voting on a “judgement” was conducted via texting from one’s personal mobile device – and one moderator made the comment “if there is a (Baby) Boomer next to you who does not how to text...help them out”; followed by the same moderator having to mention that “I can’t help with texting issues, I know some people might have plans that don’t work...” and adding humorously: “If you are having an issue use someone else’s phone that way their standard messaging rates will apply and not yours!” While this session was a humorous one it does point out the playfield is not level when participant interaction is dependent on their personal mobile devices.

T13 – “The Mobile Revolution is Here” By David Basler, One+ 05/09/11 (Source: mpiweb.org)

T14 – “2010: The Meetings Technology Revolution Are We There Yet?” By Corbin Ball
Source: <http://www.corbinball.com/art/>

T15 – “ECsb Insights: Acclimatizing Owners to the Cloud” Enterprise Council on Small Business, Corporate Executive Board.
Source: <http://ecsb.exbdblogs.com/2011/06/29/acclimatizing-owners-to-the-cloud/>

T16 – “Freeconomics’ – The Rise of Free or Very Low Cost Meetings and Tradeshow Software” By Corbin Ball
Source: <http://www.corbinball.com/art/>

T17 – “How Cloud Computing Will Change The Meetings Industry” A presentation by Pat Pathade, Fantail Consulting & Technologies and Robert Roan, Knowledge Flows At the MTO Summit, Escape the Technology Maze, October 21-22, 2009

T18 – “Hotels 2020: Beyond Segmentation” Amadeus – page 43
www.amadeus.com/hotelit

T19 – “Freeconomics’ – The Rise of Free or Very Low Cost Meetings and Tradeshow Software” By Corbin Ball
Source: <http://www.corbinball.com/art/>

T20 – “ECSB Insights: Acclimatizing Owners to the Cloud” Enterprise Council on Small Business, Corporate Executive Board.
Source: <http://ecsb.exbdblogs.com/2011/06/29/acclimatizing-owners-to-the-cloud/>

T21 – “ECSB Insights: Acclimatizing Owners to the Cloud” Enterprise Council on Small Business, Corporate Executive Board.
Source: <http://ecsb.exbdblogs.com/2011/06/29/acclimatizing-owners-to-the-cloud/>

& “Freeconomics’ – The Rise of Free or Very Low Cost Meetings and Tradeshow Software” By Corbin Ball
Source: <http://www.corbinball.com/art/>

T22 – “The Future of Meetings” By Daniel Burrus
Source: <http://www.myarticlearchive.com/articles/8/180.htm>

& “5 Future Jobs” by Jason Hensel, One+ 12/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.org) - Where James L. Creighton, Ph.D. is quoted: “ ‘In the future, as various kinds of collaborative technologies become common, defining the meeting purpose will be a prelude to the question: ‘How many senses does this meeting require?’ Creighton wrote in Using Group Process Techniques to Improve Meeting Effectiveness on the Web site Effective Meetings. ‘If the purpose of the meeting is trust building, you probably need a face-to-face meeting with everybody present in the room (all five senses).’ ”

T23 – Stan Aaronson and Daphne Meyers in “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

T24 – “The Future of Meeting Places” By James P. Cramer, Design Intelligence
Source: <http://www.di.net/articles/archive/2100/>

T25 – “Design for the Future” by Dalia Fahmy, One+, 07/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.org)

T26 – “Divining Value” By Patrick Jones, One+, 03/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.org)

T27 – “The end of meetings (part 5) and the rise of web 2.0 and social media” by NicolaasPereboom
Source: <http://www.crossmint.com/web-2.0-branding-2.0/authors/nicolaas>

T28 – While seemingly a “joke” political party the founder of the party Matthias Pohm (a Swiss public speaking coach) very seriously estimates that the worldwide lost productivity of ineffective presentations is \$488 billion.
Source:
<http://www.thestar.com/business/article/1019437--workers-of-the-world-unite>

T29 – “2010: The Meetings Technology Revolution Are We There Yet?” By Corbin Ball
Source: <http://www.corbinball.com/art/>

T30 – “Convention 2020 – The Future of Exhibitions, Meetings and Events (Phase 1 – Pathfinder Report Key Drivers and Strategic Challenges)” By RohitTalwar, Tim Hancock, Guy Yeomans, and George Padgett, (Source: convention2020.com), page 10

T31 – Events mean technology (video) (Source: mpiweb.com) – quote of Greg Van Dyke

T32 – “Meetings of Tomorrow: Flexible, adaptable and dynamic” By Bob Parker
Source: <http://www.speakingofimpact.ca/?p=486>

T33 – “Design for the Future” by Dalia Fahmy, One+, 07/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.org)

T34 – “The Future of Meetings: The Case for Face-to-Face” By Christine Duffy and Mary Beth McEuen, Cornell Hospitality Perspective No.6, September 2010 – page 9 - The report pointed out that “attention is a limited resource” and addresses the attention-killing habit of multitasking. The report states: “We need to dispel the widespread myth that humans are capable of multitasking—a term that has entered the common vernacular as shorthand for our attempts to do as many things as possible, as quickly as possible, all at the same time (preferably marshalling the power of as many technologies as possible, as well).”

T35 – “Divining Value” By Patrick Jones, One+, 03/01/09 (Source: mpiweb.org)

T36 – “Forbes Insights Study: Business Execs Prefer Face-to-Face Meetings Over Virtual” Wireless News, September 7, 2009

T37 – “The Future of Meetings: The Case for Face-to-Face” By Christine Duffy and Mary Beth McEuen, Cornell Hospitality Perspective No.6, September 2010 – page 8

T38 –“The Future Is Virtual” by Alison Hall, Corporate Meetings & Incentives, Vol.27; Number 8; ISSN Number 07451636

T39 –“The Future of Meetings” by Daniel Burrus
Source: <http://www.promenadespeakers.com/id166.html>

T40 –“The Future Is Virtual” by Alison Hall, Corporate Meetings & Incentives, Vol.27; Number 8; ISSN Number 07451636

T41 –“The Future of Meeting Places” By James P. Cramer, Design Intelligence
Source: <http://www.di.net/articles/archive/2100/>