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MEETINGS OUTLOOK™

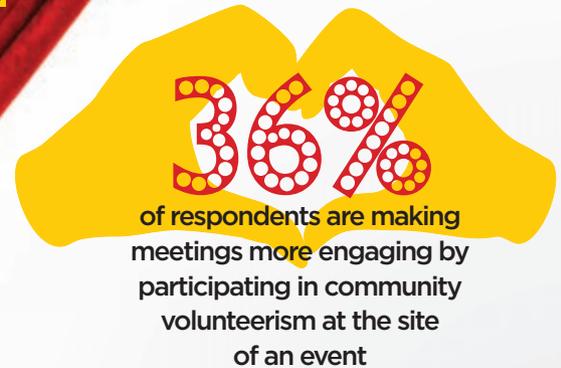


With continued intelligent growth in the industry, meeting professionals are showing a renewed focus on attendee “wants”—big-name speakers, entertainment and shoulder days—and going beyond “needs” as they strive to do much more with just a little more.

2015 SUMMER EDITION

THE PRICE OF ADMISSION

A renewed focus on attendee engagement, based on their “wants,” is emerging at a time when planners are re-experiencing a strong meetings market and facing challenges such as budgets that are disproportionate to costs.



MEETING PROFESSIONALS INTERNATIONAL

MEETINGS OUTLOOK™

By Elaine Pofeldt

If you want to know where meetings are heading, look no further than Vision, Experian’s annual conference. Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright opened as a keynote for the May event at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center in National Harbor, Md., outside of Washington, D.C.; Kool and the Gang provided the entertainment for the crowd of about 650; and basketball legend Magic Johnson closed the conference with a speech, walking down onto the floor to take selfies with attendees.

“This, alone, may have been worth the price of admission—not to mention, oh, by the way, we had some great educational workshops,” says Bob Walker (MPI Dallas/Fort Worth Chapter),

“The sizzle is back. It’s about having meetings—and making them more interesting.”

CHRISTIAN SAVELLI

MPI Carolinas Chapter
Former senior director of business intelligence for MPI





SVP of client solutions at Freeman, a Dallas-based integrator of solutions for live events that planned the gathering.

That conference was not an anomaly. With the industry thriving, meeting professionals are showing a renewed focus on attendee “wants”—big-name speakers, entertainment and shoulder days—and going beyond meeting “needs” such as education.

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BOB WALKER

MPI Dallas/Fort Worth Chapter
SVP of client solutions at Freeman

“The sizzle is back. It’s about having meetings—and making them more interesting,” says Christian Savelli, formerly MPI’s senior director of business intelligence.

The razzle-dazzle element that’s returning to meetings reflects a trend toward intelligent growth that has meeting professionals feeling increasingly optimistic. The majority of survey respondents—72 percent—expect business conditions to improve in the coming year.

“We’re looking at business evolving into a place of prosperity,” says Bill Voegeli (MPI Georgia Chapter), president of Association Insights, the Atlanta-area research firm that conducts the survey.

For professionals who are relatively new to the industry, the welcome uptick may be the first time they have experienced a market like this.

“Maybe 50 percent of people in the marketplace—planners, suppliers and attendees—don’t have a history of understanding what a prosperous meetings market even looks like,” Voegeli says.

FOCUS ON ATTENDEE EXPERIENCE

When the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) was looking for a city to hold its annual meeting this coming November, Ellen Shortill, director, convention and meetings, and her executive director had to make a tough choice. It would be the organization’s 90th anniversary meeting. They could pick Denver, which offered more offsite opportunities for fun and networking, given its active restaurant scene, or another city in a location that promised higher attendance because of its greater concentration of members.

ASHA ultimately chose Denver because of the positive impression the local environment would leave on members—one that its leaders hope will inspire attendees to come to future gatherings.

“It was the walkability of the city, how the space is laid out,” Shortill says.

ASHA will be holding the roughly 13,000-person meeting at the Colorado Convention Center, making it easy for participants to enjoy what the city has to offer.

The fun factor also helped lure the National Education Association (NEA) to Denver for its annual meeting in the summer of 2014. The city was an obvious choice. Each year, the largest U.S. union attracts about 7,000 delegates. Not only is Denver conveniently located in the middle of the country, with a hub airport, but it also has abundant lodging, notes Kimberly Dominguez, CFM, director of conference and facilities management for the NEA. The city has 8,400 rooms in easy walking distance to the convention center.

“We used about 25 hotels in downtown Denver and the suburban area,” Dominguez says.

It didn’t hurt that the city—home to highly rated restaurants such as The Capital Grille and Palace Arms—offered dining options to please foodies in the crowd.

“The one thing I noticed that stood out was the number of restaurants that are in that downtown metro area,” Dominguez says. “There are a lot of chef-owned restaurants that are very unique.”

That helped make the city appealing for those who wanted to stay in the city longer.

“We don’t have a whole lot of free time, so some people extend the trip,” she says.



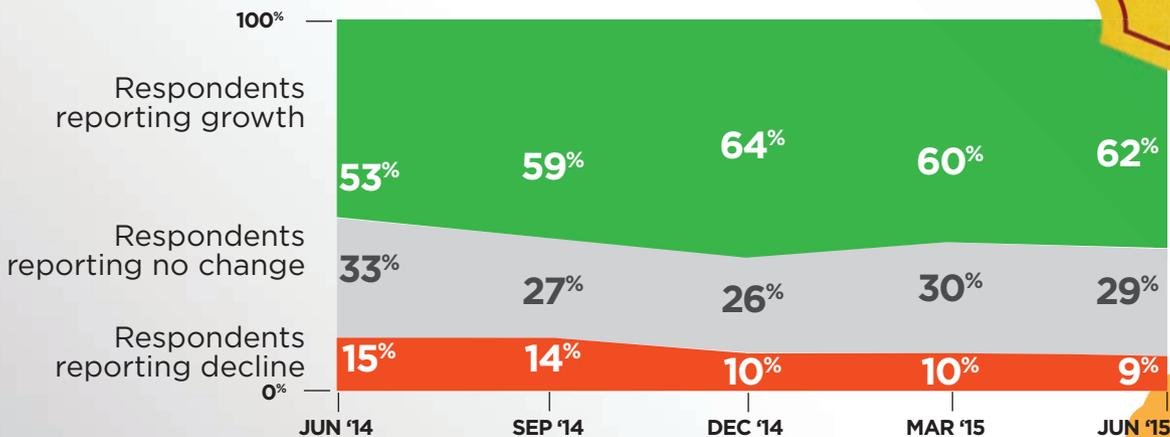
ATTENDANCE GROWTH

ATTENDANCE AT BOTH LIVE AND VIRTUAL MEETINGS AND EVENTS IS STILL EXPECTED TO INCREASE WITH **LIVE ATTENDANCE NUMBERS GROWING AT A FASTER PACE.**

	TODAY	ONE YEAR AGO
LIVE ATTENDANCE		
	62% Predict an increase	53% Predict an increase
	29% Predict no change	33% Predict no change
	9% Predict a decrease	15% Predict a decrease
VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE		
	57% Predict an increase	68% Predict an increase
	39% Predict no change	26% Predict no change
	4% Predict a decrease	7% Predict a decrease



LIVE GROWTH TREND



INTELLIGENT GROWTH CONTINUES

Domestic corporate business is setting the pace for the positive movement in the industry. This sector shows the greatest promise, with 48 percent of respondents saying this is where they have seen the most growth. Many respondents are also seeing an increase in business from domestic associations, with 22 percent reporting that this sector is seeing the largest upswing. This is keeping many meeting professionals busier than they have been in years.

"I travel extensively around the country," says Julie Walker (MPI Middle Pennsylvania Chapter), managing partner at Choice Meetings in Harrisburg, Pa., who often works with pharmaceutical companies. "At every hotel I utilize, every

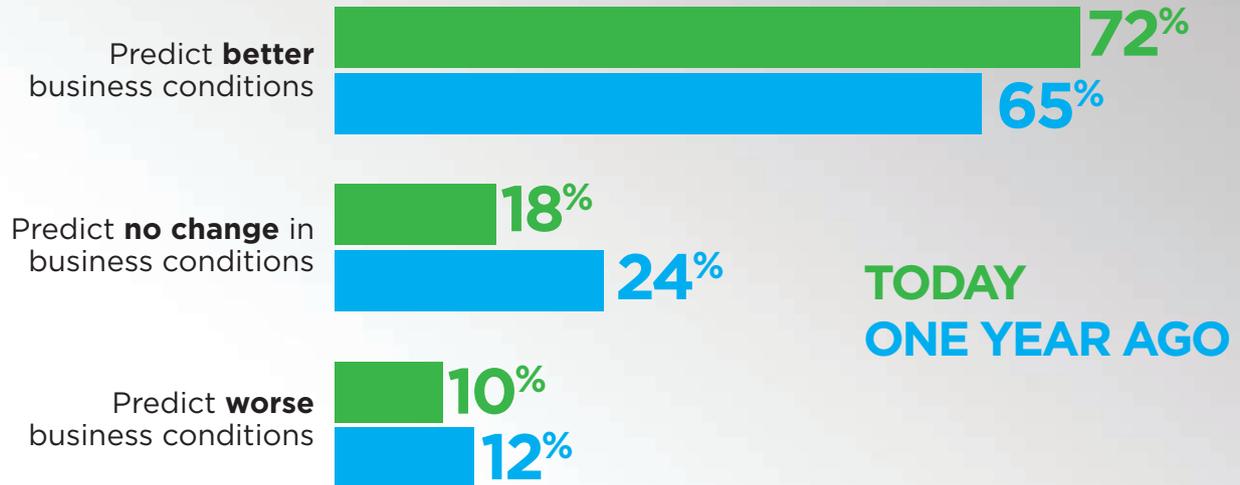
"Every sales manager I speak with has commented they are setting record numbers for sales. It is the best quarter they've ever had. That seems to be replicated across the U.S."

JULIE WALKER

MPI Middle Pennsylvania Chapter
Managing partner at Choice Meetings

BUSINESS CONDITIONS

PREDICTED BUSINESS CONDITIONS REMAIN VERY STRONG, EVEN MORE POSITIVE THAN A YEAR AGO.



sales manager I speak with has commented they are setting record numbers for sales. It is the best quarter they've ever had. That seems to be replicated across the U.S. It's just crazy."

Still, this isn't 2007. The trend toward intelligent growth—one that first emerged in the 2015 spring edition of *Meetings Outlook*—is continuing. Meeting professionals are doing more, but many must be creative in stretching budgets that haven't yet returned to levels that would offset rising costs for F&B and guest rooms. As the latest survey found, 33 percent of respondents expect their budget to remain flat for the next year, while 39 percent expect only a small increase (1 percent to 5 percent).

"They are not being asked to do more with less," Voegli says. "They're being asked to do much more with a little more."

Against this backdrop, many organizers are proceeding cautiously and giving the green light to meetings only when they are certain their budget has come through or the meeting is absolutely essential. Ask Walker. She had only two weeks' lead time to put together an advisory board meeting of 15 to 30 people in June for a pharmaceutical company that was getting ready to launch a new product. What made the gathering manageable was her network.

"We have a great relationship with the Grand Hyatt at DFW airport," she says.

She is not alone in finding that good relationships are critical to getting things done in the current environment. In June, Colleen McQuone (MPI Georgia Chapter), president of meeting and event services for McQ1 Meetings in Atlanta, got a call from a pharmaceutical client that had postponed a meeting in January.

"He was all excited and said the meeting was back on," she says. "It's going to happen in October."

The client asked for a statement of work, budget and hotel availability—by the end of the next day.

McQuone was in Washington, D.C., at another event and had no time to do the work, but she didn't want to delay responding at the moment the client had re-engaged. So she got creative and called on a colleague who is transitioning from a corporate job to his own business to see if he could take it on. His expertise was site selection and, she says, the work he did was "perfect." She submitted the paperwork on time and kept the project in motion.

"You need to have all your contacts in place and a really good base of people you trust," McQuone says. "That is why MPI has become my No. 1 networking resource. The minute I go to a meeting I just connect with people and I always keep that Rolodex full."

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COLLEEN MCQUONE

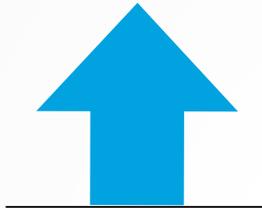
MPI Georgia Chapter
President of meeting and event services
for McQ1 Meetings

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

JOBS ARE COMING BACK TO THE MEETING AND EVENT INDUSTRY, BUT ORGANIZATIONS ARE INCREASINGLY BRINGING ON PERSONNEL IN A CONTRACT OR PART-TIME ROLE TO START.

FULL-TIME

33%
INCREASE



PART-TIME

30%
INCREASE



CONTRACT

44%
INCREASE



56%
FLAT



12%
DECREASE

62%
FLAT



8%
DECREASE

48%
FLAT



8%
DECREASE

RE-EXPERIENCING A STRONG MEETINGS MARKET

For experienced meeting professionals, the current climate of growth is a blast from the past, but for younger peers, it is bringing unfamiliar challenges. Ellen Shortill, director, convention and meetings for the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) in Rockville, Md., has found herself mentoring such colleagues.

Recently, when one such planner sent ASHA's specs and budget to a venue, the venue responded with a menu that was three times the amount the group planned to spend. Shortill's colleague was not sure how to respond. "Don't even look at that offer," Shortill told her. She advised her

"Maybe 50 percent of people in the marketplace don't have a history of understanding what a prosperous meetings market even looks like."

colleague to write back and say, "I told you what my budget is. I need to see what you can do with it—not just upsell me."

In a different case, another more junior planner pointed out that a hotel was trying to charge more than what was specified in an existing rate agreement. Shortill commended the planner for catching the discrepancy, and then suggested going back to the hotel, pointing out that the association did US\$400,000 to \$500,000 worth of business there annually and saying, "Those kinds of mistakes are not acceptable."

With the current market conditions such conversations are likely to become more common.

BILL VOEGELI

MPI Georgia Chapter
President of Association Insights

KEYNOTE OR ROCK STAR?

Epic conventions start by setting the right stage. Not only does Denver boast a world-class convention center in the heart of the city, we have plenty of unconventional venues like Red Rocks to make your event legendary.

EXTRAORDINARY IDEAS. REMARKABLE PLACES. UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES.



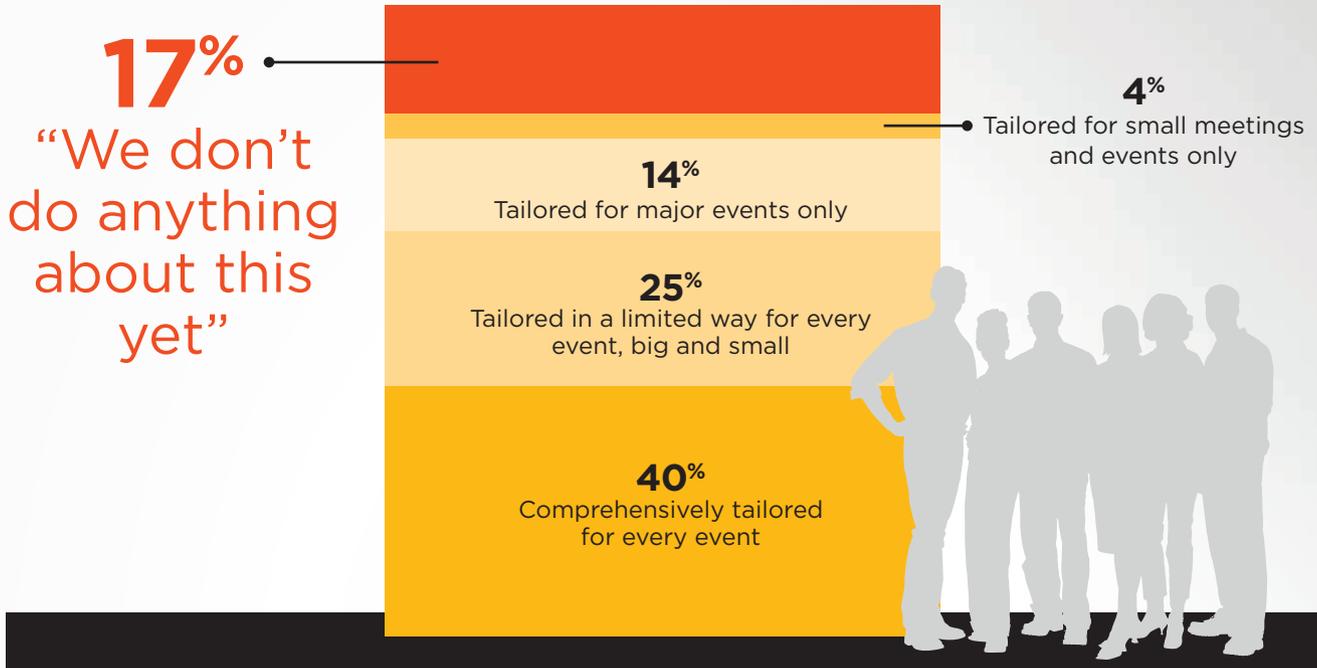
CONVENTIONS ELEVATED

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Named top U.S. amphitheater by Rolling Stone

PLANNING FOR MULTIPLE GENERATIONS

HOW YOUR COLLEAGUES ARE HANDLING PLANNING FOR THE **COMMUNICATION STYLES OF VARIOUS GENERATIONS** EXPERIENCING MEETINGS AND EVENTS.



THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

To meet attendees' "wants" for engaging meetings that go beyond bread-and-butter needs, some planners are adding fun, charitable activities. Thirty-six percent of respondents report their organizations have participated in community volunteerism at the site of an event.

Facilitating such events is CultureShoc, a culture-development firm that offers services such as team-building and engagement programs. Pete Honsberger (MPI Ohio Chapter) has seen high demand for a hands-on charitable component to meetings as the company's director of client services.

"We've been finding over the last couple of years that corporate social responsibility is very popular," Honsberger says. "Every organization, especially the larger ones, wants their employees to do service projects. They want to be seen as an organization that supports the community."

One example of how CultureShoc has pulled this off was a three-hour-long team-building session for about 90 executives from a large bank in the Charlotte, N.C., area in May. After forming small groups, the executives tackled challenges such as flipping a large tarp they were standing on without exchanging a word.

When they completed each challenge successfully, they got to pick an item to put in a "success package" for a military veteran who was entering the job market. These items ranged from a high-quality pen to gas cards. The bank distributed the success packages through Charlotte Bridge Home, a local nonprofit that helps veterans transition from the military.

For another recent meeting of about 40 financial-services executives at Punderson Manor Lodge and Conference Center in Ohio State Park, CultureShoc ordered unassembled kitchen islands from IKEA. The attendees divided into small groups and built the islands.

"We threw in blindfolds," Honsberger adds mischievously.

The islands were then donated to Habitat for Humanity of Summit County, Ohio, for use in eight houses it's building this year. Beyond giving back, many clients find meetings like this can be very engaging, Honsberger says.

"It's pretty cool to see what people can do when they buy into the cause," he says. "It's very hard to be a skeptic when you are buying a brand new bike for a child or putting together a care package for veterans." ■



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