

Changes in decision-making

Apart from megatrends the industry wants to know the medium-term developments like: Who will make decisions in future? Relationships between suppliers, organisers and attendees are changing.

Responding to the question, "What will be the three most significant trends for corporate planners in the US and Europe?" Betsy Bondurant answered: First, involvement of procurement organizations in the purchasing process. Second, Involvement of travel managers in the meetings process and third, government and industry regulations such as Sarbanes-Oxley and the Pharma code. In this she hardly distinguishes – except for the laws – between Europe and the USA. By the way, Bondurant is not just Associate Director, Meeting Planning and Trade Shows, for Amgen, but also Co-chair of MPI's Global Corporate Circle of Excellence, GCCOE.

Founded in 1999, the Global Corporate Circle of Excellence defines itself as a "source for recognizing and communicating corporate trends and best practices to increase a corporation's strategic success". And in order to become more global last year the GCCOE took on European planners such as Luca Favetta

from SAP or Elizabeth Brouwer from Nike Europe. "We must demonstrate the expertise that we add to the meeting management process, and prove the strategic value meetings bring to the organization", announced GCCOE member Sharon Marsh, Event Marketing, PeopleSoft, Inc., speaking for all.

This was confirmed by meetings expert Roger Tondeur, MCI Group. Particularly since "we are moving away from a personal relationship. The decision making process is changing", declared the CEO. "The decision makers are no longer the product but the purchasing managers. Our clients go today after the price". IT companies choose "preferred" or "approved suppliers", with whom the product managers have to work with.

Other trends and developments on the corporate meetings market are described by MPI's annual "FutureWatch 2005", which will come out in mid January (www.mpiweb.org). Its basis is a survey of buyers and suppliers. In 2004

there were 2,075. That return on investment (ROI) is one issue for meetings planners – and will remain so – is also confirmed by the 2004 Global Event Trends Survey from MPI Foundation (www.mpifoundation.org). For 37 percent of the 600 marketing managers surveyed in the USA, Europe and Asia/Pacific, event marketing has the highest ROI compared with other marketing tools.

Event marketing is also rated among the five most important marketing concepts for the next three years, according to the results of the recent Marketing Trends study from Advanced Innovation (www.mkt-trends.com). 546 executives were questioned in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Investing in a sense of well-being

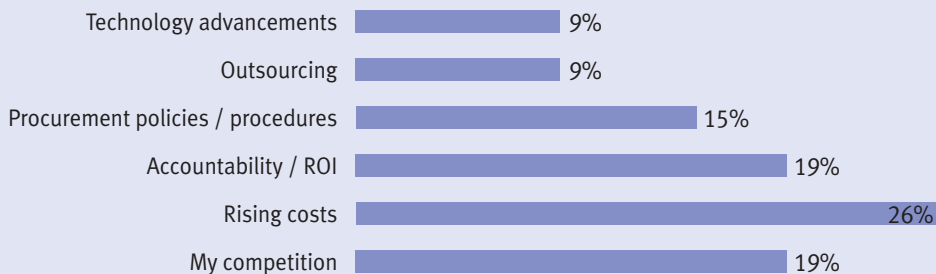
The ROI was also part of the scenario "The Convention Centre 2010" at this year's ICCA conference in Cape Town. Here the conference centres were less concerned with the return on their own investment. In-

stead the question was: How can I help my customers to prove and increase the ROI of their conferences? Further challenges in the next years are security, technology and training – as well as dealing with older employees, organisers and participants in the next decades.

All the more so, since the needs of delegates in the future will play a key role: "It's the delegates! They must be at the focus", claims Lars Christensen. The Manager of ICS A/S International Conference Services observes: "They are brought up in a democratic way, they will decide". With growing amounts of work and pressure they will search for ways of bridging the gap between job and family. For example, by travelling to conferences with accompaniment. Undoubtedly, the destination Cape Town was also a reason, but never before were there so many partners, spouses and children at an ICCA meeting like this year. And not just at fringe programme events: In the seminar "Disaster Recovery Strategies" (of all seminars) a blond nipper sat beside his father. Lars Christensen declares: "People want to feel good".

This is also increasingly recognised by conference centre managers. "Dare to have more wellness", advised Hilmar Guckert, Managing Director of DüsseldorfCongress. Event Company Ltd. in his newsletter's editorial. The occasion was "Operation W": "Warm, soft and agreeable is how Room 1 in CCD.South should appear," explained Guckert. This is accomplished not least by the changing lighting matched to the interior and to the time of day. "Move away from the heavy work atmosphere, to a positive meeting ambience with a touch of wellness." After eight months of renovation and a five million Euro investment the auditorium will open with space for 1,028 people on 10 January 2005. It seems that such investments will earn their return in a sense of well-being. KHO

MPI online-poll: What is the biggest challenge you will face during the next three years? (Number of votes: 166, 17 August 2004)



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