

GLOBAL CONSIDERATIONS: WHAT'S NEXT FOR EVENT PLANNING IN 2008?

INTERPRETING FINDINGS FROM THE PCMA AND MCI FUTUREWATCH

According to the **PCMA** (Professional Convention Management Association, based in Illinois (USA)), more and more organisations are increasing their global presence, creating a demand for more international meetings. At the same time, the need for cost control and budgeting is ever present - and in many cases, ever more stringent.

'International meetings are among the most complex events to plan, but some of the most fun! With extenuating circumstances, planners must take extra care to cross every 't' and dot every 'i,' says the PCMA.

In the US, a major area of concern for international meeting attendees continues to be travel safety. Increasingly, events managers ensure a smooth roll-out of international events by:

- ✦ Staying up-to-date with current events
- ✦ Checking Web sites for additional travel requirements and news
- ✦ Providing attendees and speakers with information such as passport and Visa requirements, baggage restrictions, checklists, and travel tips in advance

Each year, global organisation **MPI** produces its **FutureWatch report** - a key indicator of what the industry is looking at in the short term.

The most recent report - the 5th annual FutureWatch, which appeared at the end of 2007, assesses key trends impacting meeting planning by surveying both meeting planners and suppliers.

The vast survey group included suppliers, corporate and independent meeting planners, association and government planners and academics. Respondents came from the United States, Canada and Europe, with a few respondents from outside Europe.

This analysis predicts that both corporate and association planners expect the industry to grow and for 2008 to see more meetings planned with more attendees and bigger budgets.

Another major trend identified in the report is increased globalisation. *'Globalisation is on the rise in all areas of the meetings industry... Client-side planners, meeting management and services companies and especially hotel and resort companies expect to increase their global presence.'*

One in five respondents expected that the employing organisation would extend its global reach in 2008, compared to only one in 200 who foresaw a decrease.

The report also predicts a rise in outsourcing. *'The largest increases in outsourcing will occur in Canada and Europe, where relatively small respondent groups predicted growth of 40.3% and 26.9%, respectively. Respondents from the United States anticipated (only) an 8.4% increase.'*

'Consistent with past years' results, full-service meeting management firms were the most frequent choice for 2007 and 2008, particularly for corporate and government planners. Site selection companies were the most frequent

choice for association planners and for client-side planners in the United States, while independent planners showed a strong tendency to hire other independents when they outsourced. Full-service vendors were considerably more popular in Europe than in North America.'

And where will delegates be congregating?

City hotels were the most frequent venue choice for all planner categories - particularly in Canada, where planners expect to use them for 50% of their meetings. Interest in resort hotels is driven primarily by corporate and independent planners, predominantly in the United States. Conference centres and university settings are most likely to draw government-hosted events and are most popular in Europe, while convention centres are predicted to draw the largest share of their business from associations and independent planners.

As a group, European planners have shown considerably more interest in conference centres, universities and unique venues, but are less likely to bring their meetings to resorts. Interest in airport and suburban hotels is driven mainly by planners in the United States.

What approach can we take to meet the growing need for top-line events that really deliver to budget, and meet the client's need for efficiency, spark and creativity?

'Planners suggested that suppliers could position themselves more effectively by delivering outstanding service, working through national and global sales offices, responding precisely to RFP requirements, offering free internet at meeting facilities and forming partnerships to 'create actual relationships.' Suppliers emphasise the fact that relationship strategies need to retain a high level of knowledge of the client's needs, as well as more frequent contact with the client and effective use of technology.'

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