

Online Exclusive: 10 Things Industry Leaders Are Saying About 2010

A Better Year Ahead: Among those who are forecasting that 2010 will be a stronger year in the meetings industry is Fay Beauchine, CITE, SITE (Society of Incentive Travel Executives) International Foundation incoming president and president of engagement and events for Carlson Marketing. In response to the most recent SITE index survey, Beauchine said, “It is encouraging to note that half the respondents believe that the worst has passed and that the industry will recover within two years. Similarly, 87 percent of the survey participants believe cancellations will decrease or stay the same within the first half of 2010.”

Meetings Do Matter: While Dr. Martin Asher, adjunct professor of finance at the Wharton School of Business, notes that in tough economic times, many business executives have an “understandable short-run focus on managing costs,” he points out that there is “less visible—but significant—long-term benefits” of business-related travel such as partnership building and new business opportunities. “Increased business travel in this economy can actually increase sales and reduce the financial decline companies might otherwise suffer,” Martin said.

The Buyer’s Market Continues: Robert Mandlebaum, director of research information services for PKF’s Hospitality Research sector, said the buyer’s market will continue in 2010. “In order to live within the restrictions of the lower budgets, planners are looking for hotel room rate concessions, and hotel managers appear to be negotiating and discounting.” PKF’s Mark Woodworth, added, “The practice of price discounting has firmly taken hold, and as a result, room rates are expected to decline once again in 2010. In an environment with all-time record low occupancy levels, the pressure on hotel operators to discount their room rates is significant.”

Be Ready For Criticism Through A PR Strategy: The AIG effect on the meetings industry and especially the scrutiny that gatherings have faced has made the need for a public relations strategy ever more important. “Public relations is more important than ever before, given the explosion of consumer engagement through new and social media, the collapse of reputation and trust in major institutions and the evolving needs and concerns of corporate CEOs,” said Michael G. Cherson, APR, 2009 chair and CEO of the Public Relations Society of America.

Thinking Strategically Gets Results: Craig Banikowski, CCTE, C.P.M., CMM, president/CEO of the National Business Travel Association, said, “Travel management is once again quickly responding to shifting business cycles to help companies optimize their travel investments to maximize profits. As the economic recovery begins taking hold in 2010, companies will take advantage of low travel costs to send employees on the road in greater volumes, thus fueling the recovery. The up tick in business travel in 2010 will take place within the framework of a new corporate culture in terms of travel. In the 'new normal,' we see stronger travel mandates, greater use of pre-trip approval and audits, tighter restrictions on premium class travel, more focus on travel ROI (return on investment), and enterprise-wide strategic meetings management.”

Taking Procurement Strategies Seriously: Reporting from the 2009 Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) Global, American Express Business Travel released the findings of the 2009 Procurement Practices Survey. In the face of economic uncertainty, procurement strategies are playing an important role for respondents' travel programs as companies seek opportunities to increase savings and cut costs without sacrificing the value created by business travel, said Frank Schnur, vice president of Global Advisory Services for American Express Business Travel. “Procurement practices, which now include compliance and demand management, are an effective complement to traditional savings efforts. The survey results underscore the continued success of these tactics at maximizing the return generated by travel investments.”

The Wiser, The Better: After announcing, in 2009, that Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and the Convention Industry Council joined together to enhance the relevance of the Certified Meeting Planner accreditation, MPI President/CEO Bruce MacMillan, said, “As meeting and event professionals face increasing challenges to deliver elevated performance results, MPI believes it is imperative to invest in the future of our professionals and the contribution they make to global business with the CMP positioned as a major element in our knowledge plan. In the current economic environment, expectations on the core skills of meeting and event professionals are elevating, with more emphasis placed on meeting effectiveness and return on objectives and investments. MPI's investment will support CIC's efforts to enhance the existing

CMP curriculum to reflect the heightened business expectations now thrust on business and meeting professionals.”

Marketing Leans Digital: According to the “2010 Marketing Trends Survey” by StrongMail, 89 percent of respondents plan to increase or maintain marketing spend in e-mail marketing and social media budgets in the New Year. “As businesses are developing their marketing plans for 2010, this survey reveals a strong focus on high ROI (return on investment) channels like e-mail and emerging ones like social media,” said Bill Wagner, executive vice president of business operations at StrongMail.

The New Medium Of Social Media: Twitter.com, Facebook.com, Crowdvine.com and many more social media websites and services are evolving as a tool to generate momentum behind meetings. Recognizing the widespread relevance of social media for their clients across multiple industries, The Speakers Group began establishing a niche of social media speakers on their roster in 2009. “There’s no shortage of businesses and more specifically, the individuals who represent them, seeking insight, answers and direction to simplify, organize, and elucidate the intimidating and confusing social media landscape,” said Brian Solis, respected authority on social media and author of “Putting the Public Back in Public Relations.” Likewise, he said, “social media experts are seemingly ubiquitous. Working with an organization that can effectively connect precise expertise to the forums where they can be fully assimilated, appreciated, and effectively practiced is invaluable to all parties involved.”

Sustainability Is Smart: “Green meetings are not a brand new concept but are increasingly important as clients want to make events more resource-efficient,” said Allyson Wagner, project manager for Meeting Consultants. “Our focus on sustainability of events is a natural extension of Meeting Consultant’s strategy of providing excellent return on investment for any event we manage.”