

## Top 10 Meeting Trends for 2007

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Benchmark Hospitality announces its annual 'Top 10 Meeting Trends for the Year'

### **Portals to Success, Package Rules, BlackBerries & More**

Benchmark Hospitality International, which manages 31 award-winning resorts, hotels, condominium resorts and conference centers in locations throughout the United States and Asia, announces its annual "Top 10 Meeting Trends for the Year" as observed by its properties.

#### **1. Real-time Hospitality**

More than ever before, the hospitality experience starts at the web address.

What's needed: up-to-the-minute-current information, dazzling photography and graphics, mechanisms for inquiry and immediate response, and ease of discovery and navigation. The opportunity to customize one's stay through online booking enables guests to create their own unique experience.

Whether for the business or leisure guest, a property's website is its portal to success and profitability.

#### **2. BlackBerry ...**

Ahhh, just the word evokes such meaning. Less so in meetings, however, as more companies are forbidding the cute little communications devices in the meeting room, and discouraging them in the conference center.

Meetings are for human contact - for coming together, says corporate America. Email, BlackBerries and other personal digital assistants are best checked at the door ... or at least the guestroom.

#### **3. Customers Sound Off**

The old adage, the customer is king, has never been more on point! Today's consumers have ample opportunity to express praise and vent frustrations.

And properties have never had more at risk. Popular websites and blogs offer a convenient forum for communicating to readers what customers liked, disliked, how they were serviced and what they would rather have avoided. Now they can apprise the world of their preferences with a simple click of the 'enter' button!

#### **4. Work Hard, Play Hard: Meeting Budgets Hold Fast**

Meeting budgets for 2007 are holding steady, however, increasing resources within these budgets are being directed to teambuilding events and leisure opportunities, such as an afternoon of golf or spa treatments. Sort of a 'work hard, play hard' scenario.

As companies demand more and more from their executives and from the corporate meeting experience, they're also recognizing the need to counter balance this by blowing off a little steam on the golf course or rejuvenating on the massage table.

#### **5. Packaging Rules ... Unbundling is 'so last year!'**

Customers see the value of meeting packages and in markets across the country are responding with enthusiasm -- as there are no back-end surprises.

Benchmark's take on the Complete Meeting Package, the Benchmark Conference Plan, is being embraced. Why, because it delivers a consistent experience in diverse markets and over a variety of property types.

Just like in the consumer travel world, customers respond affirmatively to all-in-one-price packaging that they trust and can easily allocate their budget toward.

#### **6. Strong Booking Pace, Stable Meetings, Short Term**

The pace remains positive, meeting size is holding firm, but the Internet is fueling last-minute bookings.

Planners ability to secure space availability quickly and easily, coupled with the need to remain particularly flexible for their organization, is causing meetings to be booked at the 11th hour, much to the chagrin of hospitality executives who struggle with forecasting volume and staffing levels.

#### **7. They're Back!**

Pharmaceuticals, financial, insurance and hi-tech ... they're back, or at least their meetings are. We all know the hits these industries took over the past few years. That's changed and they're holding meetings once again, planning for new growth, reenergizing their executive teams, and preparing for new product launches.

And the meeting industry says, 'Welcome back!'

### **8. Too Many Cooks in the Kitchen is a Good Thing!**

Culinary Teambuilding is hot, hot, hot and companies are requesting this program for meetings across the country. Why? This teambuilding is fun, nearly everyone can relate to the experience, and unless the group is made up entirely of chefs, the playing field is totally level - whether you're an employee in the corporate trenches or in charge of the show.

The outcome is a greater and wiser understanding of the team's dynamic strengths and challenges and how to manage these more effectively. And watch who emerges as the 'executive chef' - the team leader. It may not be who you would expect!

Best of all, the entire experience is sealed with dinner afterwards. Now that's the way to build a team!

### **9. So You Say You're a Meeting Planner?**

Who are we speaking to? That is the question!

The universe of meeting planners is as diverse as the population of New York City. More than ever before, the age old question of 'who are we speaking to' is best answered with 'everyone!'

From Administrative Assistants to CMPs to CEOs ... one message has to communicate to all -- and we get a brief moment of their time to zero in on location, benefits, value, and service positioning.

### **10. Reach Back, Plan Forward**

Call it a lingering turn-of-the-century phenomenon, but more and more groups are seeking a bit of the past as they plan for their future.

Whether by booking their meetings at historic properties, like Benchmark's French Lick Resort Casino, or seeking to discover historic aspects of their chosen venue's location, such as The Alamo when meeting in San Antonio, reconnecting with the past is fast becoming a preferred mind-clearing complement to meetings designed to grow a company's future.

### **Coming Trend ... Green Meetings Anyone ... anyone?**

Across the country, green development is getting more and more ink. In the meeting trenches, no one seems to notice or express too much concern.

No matter, it will come as consumers (both corporate & individual) are swept up in what may become a juggernaut of attention to the greening of hospitality.

Next year, very likely.

For more information on Benchmark's "Top 10 Meeting Trends for 2007," or to speak with a Benchmark Hospitality International professional, contact Ken Ellens, Ken Ellens Communications, at 201-758-2864 or KenEllens@aol.com.

Benchmark Hospitality International, an independent hospitality management company based in The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, operates resorts, conference centers, hotels and condominium resorts both domestically and internationally. For locations of Benchmark Hospitality properties and for additional information, visit Benchmark's Website at [www.benchmarkhospitality.com](http://www.benchmarkhospitality.com).

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