

Top 10 Meeting Trends for 2008

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

Trend #1 Green Meetings, Not So 'Last Year!'

Ok. We're pointing out the obvious. Interest in properties with sustainable hospitality or green programs is huge! But last year when we predicted the advent of green meetings, who knew how on target we'd be? Then no one cared too much, but in less than 12 months, everything has changed.

Today companies within the pharmaceutical, medical, and especially government sectors as well as many others request information on green policies Up Front in their RFP's. This isn't a polite tip-of-the-hat to former Vice President Al Gore. They're really interested and extending a Strong Preference to green certified properties.

Our new prediction ... Go Green ... or Go!

Trend #2 Lightning Speed!

Technological advancements are occurring at lightning speed. Wireless connectivity is way past being a novelty and is now an expectation. And advanced technology like 360-degree cams is being installed in conference rooms to enable meetings to patch in persons from around the globe, and at a moment's notice.

The challenge is staying ahead of the curve at time when it's difficult just to keep up. It's not easy for planners either: Who can project what new technology may emerge as the latest must-have for that executive meeting scheduled six months down the road?

Trend #3 Lap Tops in the Meeting Room? OMG!

They used to be banned. Now companies are starting to encourage the use of lap tops in the meeting room - but only for note-taking or facilitator-directed research! If you must email, or surreptitiously text with that other keyboard, don't get caught! Your penalty may be more severe than just having your toys temporarily taken away.

Blending keyboards and the meeting is about maximizing learning - it's not a 'break' to catch up on email. It's also a nod to going 'green' ... typing notes into a laptop uses zero paper and eliminates waste.

Trend #4 Save a Forest ... Do it by Close of Business Today!

That's right. Everyone wants to save a grove or two of trees by going paperless, and the Internet is the tool to block the buzz saw. More than 80 % of RFPs, proposals and contracts are now delivered and returned online.

The upside is ease of communications and resources conservation. The downside? Response, today, is now expected in Real Time ... or at the very least, by the close of the business day!

Trend #5 They're Back ... and Headed for the Break!

The proverbial Health Police are back. Just when we thought snacking could be fun and maybe a tad bit indulgent again - you know, mini comfort foods and such, the 'health police' storm in to keep us honest.

Choice, variety, selection - it's all still important, but the requests to 'make sure it's healthy' have come back strong and 'low carb' is not the only criterion.

So sorry conferees, no more sneaking out of the meeting to raid the break and load the pockets for that expected Midnight hunger attack. What's waiting for you there will be varied, plentiful, fresh, colorful, loaded with protein and HEALTHY. The silver lining... it's the 21st Century and healthy today is synonymous with flavorful, low fat and low cal.

So load up anyway ... guilt-free.

Trend #6 Teambuilding Has Legs!

Teambuilding is hot, hot, hot. From the traditional to culinary cook offs to white-water rafting, teambuilding activities as part of a meeting are more popular than ever.

These initiatives are now often driven by the destination and the preference is for outdoor, physical activities. Caving, spelunking, rock climbing -- and increasingly group involvement in support of social causes, teambuilding is seen as important learning through doing and resources for this in the meeting budget remain strong.

In an urban setting, teambuilding may turn a bit more cerebral ... Lights, Camera, Action! ... Hollywood anyone? Some teams are discovering that making a group movie awakens the star quality in everyone!

Trend #7 Meeting Package Pricing Solid!

Fewer meetings with a greater number of attendees per meeting, for enhanced cost efficiencies, is the current trend in the marketplace. Meeting package pricing, however, remains solid.

The demand for the meeting packages - and Benchmark's branded meeting product, the Benchmark Conference Plan - is as strong for 2008 as it was throughout 2007. Why, because in times of economic and political uncertainty, the desire for productive all-inclusive meeting experiences with no hidden costs intensifies and interest in value for the meeting dollar escalates.

Trend #8 It's Never Been More Critical to be Current! Here's Why.

Speed, fueled by the global information flow at the push of a button, has made industry information more available than ever before, and the need to remain 'current' never more important -- or easy to achieve. Vigilant monitoring of industry segments delivering business to your property is no longer just 'a good thing' ... it's a necessity!

Here's why. Business is changing by the second. Companies merge or morph overnight, products become obsolete as technology delivers the next generation within the blink of an eye, global competition causes what feels like quarterly paradigm shifts, and social networking systems have revolutionized how information flows from person to person, group to group.

Want to maximize opportunities in this climate? Watch your industry segments. Speak their current language. Stay on top of their product pipeline. 'Listen in' on pertinent blogs and popular social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube and MySpace, which are increasingly being used as communications tools by business. Then leap at opportunities before the competition has even booted up their computer for the day.

Trend #9 What's Hot in Recreation? Look Around You!

Here's a tip - it's not golf. Getting a dose of well-being at the spa is strong for women and growing for men - but it's not the spa either. What seems to be evolving in recreation is a desire to experience all that a destination has to offer. Destination recreation!

Walking & biking through natural forests, touring historic sites, climbing mountains and mesas, descending into canyons, and even shopping - activities once reserved for personal time only are now being encouraged as part of the group experience.

What does this mean for properties ... buyers are looking to purchase a lot more than bricks, mortar, food and service, they're seeking an entire destination meeting experience.

Trend # 10 Interactive Event Websites ... Meeting Blogs taken to the next level?

We're seeing more and more Interactive Event Websites and thought you might like to know about these new Internet-based conference learning tools.

These websites are set up by group leaders for a particular meeting -- and designed for conference attendees to reference before the meeting begins, and throughout conference as a review of the material discussed during the day. Another benefit - the sites enable feedback and continued group interaction after hours by contributing to a dialog - or meeting blog. And they're a terrific 'green' alternative to copious amounts of meeting handouts.

Contributions to the sites are voluntary ... but those contributing might wish to remember their content is not just for their eyes only.

Bonus Trend #1 Latin America Rising!

From the voting booth, to the cuisine we enjoy, to the music we load into our IPODs, to the growing democratization of this massive region of our planet, long ignored Latin America is on the rise and doing so at a much swifter pace than most realize.

Given geographic proximity, growing business climates throughout the region, a ratcheting up in demand for corporate meetings, and the movement toward recognizing all the Americas as One, Latin America represents enormous opportunity for the meetings industry, for planners and suppliers. It's clearly not just for incentive groups anymore.

So brush up on your Spanish ... you'll need it and very soon! Muy buena suerte!

Bonus Trend #2 Japan Also Rises!

Benchmark introduced the Conference Center Concept to Japan 15 years ago. Interest in conference centers is now through the roof and growing at a much swifter pace than in many other established regions in the world. Corporate Japan is actively embracing the meetings concept that Europe and America fell in love with over a quarter century ago.

Proposals for new purpose-built conference centers in Japan are surfacing every day and the country is projected to lead the concept as it migrates throughout Asia. So in addition to that Spanish course you just signed up for, consider adding a second - Japanese!

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

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