

## Meeting Planners Could Paint The Destination Landscape Green!! - By J. Ragsdale Hendrie

2008-05-19

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Yes, Meeting/Convention Planners, you can, for you have the economic clout.

If trends are any indicator, the State of Hospitality, having undergone a recent boom, now approaches a trough. Standards, whether in quality or performance, are low, the product has significant highs, a modest middle ground, and a disappointing base. Service delivery is spotty, the attitude is careless, and the reception is disinterested. And, now we layer another Consumer expectation - Green. Enter the Meeting/Convention Planner, who must navigate the unsure landscape, further exacerbated by the down economy.

We will see new momentum and demand for change through the efforts of these agents who dictate the most traffic - the meeting and convention planners. They receive, immediately, the reports of Destination performance or lack thereof, whether it be the hotels, which house their constituents, or the area businesses, which support the Visitor, where they may also stay, dine, transit, entertain themselves and shop.

These planners represent huge clout, and Destination past history and current status will impact more so the decisions on where to hold meetings and conventions. They are powerful and ever more circumspect about where to "book" their business. It is about the Visitor Experience, which now dictates a Green sensibility.

The Meeting/Convention Planner agenda has been transformed. Of course, they still look for prime location, reasonable price, capacity, logistics and support services. Planners are increasingly tasking the CVB community, and the Destination leadership must be better prepared to address several pressing concerns:

**Safety and Security.** We live a dangerous world. Planners will demand to know what the Emergency Preparedness strategies are in place.

**Track Record.** In researching potential Destinations, astute Meeting Planners require data on prior visiting groups/conventions to an area, contact names, and the "Report Card" for their experience. Large Convention Hotels and some CVB leaders tend to be myopic on the question of Destination Performance, not fully appreciating that Guests do leave the host hotel(s) and partake of activities within the community. Poor service at Guiseppe's Bistro or a rude ticket taker or cab driver will nullify an otherwise wonderful stay at the Grande X Hotel. Any business which "touches the Visitor" is either a partner or a suspect.

**Issues of Quality/Lack of Standards.** Fundamental delivery on product, service and facility varies greatly. Successful Meeting Planners are not "dumbed down" with low expectations.

**And, now Green!** The world is onboard, addressing sustainability, moving towards the restorative, driving the Green Mantra of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rethink and Redesign. The movement is global in nature - embraced politically, Consumer supported, supply chain pressured, technologically advanced, and just plain good business practice.

Meeting/Convention Planners control the destiny for many Destination areas around the world with the business they represent. They have the ability to recognize and reward environmentally conscientious Hospitality facilities. In the United States, the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) changed its acquisition rules in 2007 to give preference to facilities which consume less and manage their resources in environmentally positive ways. Many States, like Florida, Associations and Corporations have similar provisions. But, beware the pretenders, those who 'Green wash' with their cursory commitment to Green.

Meeting/Convention Planners have their Site planning matrixes at hand, as they consider suitable Destinations for their gathering(s). Here is another helpful Template, some Green Guidelines as promulgated by the USEPA, to facilitate your ultimate Destination decisions. These considerations should be reflected in your provider conversations and RFP's:

1. Efforts to reduce waste through recycling
2. Linen and Towel Reuse Program
3. Easy access to greener transportation options
4. Power-down of unoccupied rooms
5. Bulk purchasing
6. Reusable Service ware (china, coffee cups and bottles and biodegradable disposables)
7. Energy Efficiency programs - coordinated for their meetings, lighting choices (fluorescent, LEDs)
8. Water Conservation Programs: specific fixtures, such as sink aerators, showerheads, and dual flush toilets

9. Paper minimization

10. Use of recycled or recyclable products, use of biodegradable or bio-based products

11. Eat Green - vegetarian, organic, seasonal and local food and beverages

12. Employees trained on Green sensibilities

13. Environmental Certification and Participation

A carefully crafted RFP will establish for your potential Providers:

Existence of a comprehensive Environmental Policy, and Programs to

recycle and otherwise reduce solid waste,

conserve of energy and water,

reduce the use of harmful chemicals, and

improve indoor air quality.

Your on-site visit will substantiate claims of the Destination's environmental awareness and commitment.

So, "wine and dine me", amaze me "with smoke and mirrors", but understand that it is all about the Visitor Experience and their expectations, which include Green. Meeting Planners deliver big time, the competition is intense, and the dynamics are changing. Rightfully, they are becoming more demanding. A Destination's Brand promise will need to adapt, and Hospitality Businesses will be forced to elevate their Green performance, as well!

The author believes that Remarkable Hospitality is the portal for the Visitor Experience.

Seek solutions at: [www.hospitalityperformance.com](http://www.hospitalityperformance.com)

Colleague, Ray Burger, President of Pineapple Hospitality, was very instrumental in providing a cogent approach to Green Meeting/Convention Planning. [www.PineappleHospitality.net](http://www.PineappleHospitality.net), [www.FreshStay.com](http://www.FreshStay.com), [www.EcoRooms.com](http://www.EcoRooms.com).

This article comes from Hotel News Resource

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