

MEETINGS TODAY

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Convention Industry Council CEO Karen Kotowski unveils the Economic Significance Study findings.

A landmark study, *The Economic Significance of Meetings to the U.S. Economy*, published by the Convention Industry Council and conducted by Pricewaterhouse Coopers, quantifies for the first time with such scope the economic contributions made by the 1.8 million meetings, trade shows, conventions, congresses and incentive events that take place across the country each year.

Among the most dramatic revelations were those describing the vast impact the meetings industry has on

Perhaps the most dramatic measure of the impact of meetings on American lives are the 1.7 million jobs generated by the meetings industry. This figure is larger than that of many U.S. industries, including broadcasting and communications (1.3 million), truck and rail transportation industries (1.5 million) and computer and electronic product manufacturing (1.1 million). The industry's 1.7 million jobs generate \$60 billion in labor income and support another 4.6 million U.S. workers, including industry suppliers and those who rely on meeting output for sales and revenue.

ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE STUDY QUANTIFIES THE IMPACT OF MEETINGS



the U.S. economy. Highlights include data that the U.S. meetings industry directly supports 1.7 million jobs, \$263 billion in spending, a \$106 billion contribution to GDP, \$60 billion in labor revenue, \$14.3 billion in federal tax revenue and \$11.3 billion in state and local tax revenue.

"While these numbers are impressive, they're not surprising to those of us in the business," says Michael Dominguez, Vice President, Global Sales for Loews Hotels. "We've known for a long time just how important the meetings industry is to our economy, which is why it's so frustrating when meetings are one of the first things to suffer when the economy turns sour. The truth is that meetings and business travel are key to helping us to climb out of recessions. And we're beginning to see that proven once again now that more meetings are taking place and the economy is improving."

"As the nation grapples with effective ways to work its way out of a recession, the meetings industry plays a critical role in supporting jobs in communities across America, creating environments that foster innovation, consensus and business success," said Karen Kotowski, Executive Director of the Convention Industry Council, the trade organization which unites the meetings sector and educates the public on its profound economic impact. "Two years ago, the value of meetings, one of America's top economic and social engines, was misunderstood by governments and the public. This new research quantifies the economic significance of our sector for legislators, regulators and economists alike."

Meetings have an economic impact that extends even further than the direct contributions indicated. In total, including direct, indirect and induced contributions, meetings activity provides \$907 billion in total economic output to the U.S. economy. Total economic output also includes a \$458 billion value-added contribution to GDP, 6.3 million full-time and part-time jobs, \$271 billion in labor income including wages and salaries, benefits and proprietors' income, \$64 billion in federal tax revenue and \$46 billion in state and local tax revenue.

"This study proves just how critical meetings are to our nation's economic health," says Dominguez. "We're just glad that now it can be quantified for everyone to recognize."

Details on the study and the 14 leading membership organizations which formed the research alliance can be found at www.MeetingsMeanBusiness.com.

TIPS & TRENDS

Dr. Lalia Rach, Divisional Dean and HVS Professor at New York University's Preston Robert Tisch Center for Hospitality, Tourism, and Sports Management, is an internationally recognized researcher and speaker on trends, branding and marketing in the global hospitality industry, and advises senior level executives at many of America's leading companies on these topics. In this column, she analyzes the needs of the newest generation of meeting-goers. Dr. Rach can be reached at laliarach@rachenterprises.com.

The Millennial Generation, currently aged 16 to 30, is the first truly global generation. Where previous generations' best friends were in close proximity to home, Millennials often indicate they have good friends in other countries they have never met in person. Because of technology they share favorite books, music, movies, hairdos and clothing

with others in different time zones. Their connections are instantaneous, constant and engaging. More than 75 percent of U.S. Millennials are adults. As a meeting professional this information should resonate as you encounter questions and responses to your offerings from them that are different than what you get from the over-30 attendee. Millennials have had experiences as children that most Xers, Boomers and Matures first had as adults. They've probably never known what it's like to leave the house without a phone or a credit card. "Entitled" best describes their approach while "engaged" describes their attitude. As the first truly connected generation your interac-

tion whether before, during or after the meeting must be on their terms — not yours. Emails are so last century; social media is their current reality. For the moment Facebook and Twitter are useful methods of connection, but be forewarned -- Millennials will migrate as new technology takes hold.

MILLENNIALS AND MEETINGS: HERE TODAY AND TOMORROW

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So what can you do to capture their attention? First, they expect to be welcomed, to be respected and to be mentored. But they are willing to serve as mentors so use them to help you understand their needs and wants, their expectations. Second, they believe learning should be fun. Third, they blend activities seamlessly. Millennials are masters of combining thought and action, listening and doing, so do not think for a minute that they will just sit in the audience. Engagement is a basic expectation. They will not 'wait their turn; their life has always been a full contact sport so why should the meeting and conference experience be any different?



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Jim Spellos is an author, speaker and technology trainer. He can be reached at jspellos@meeting-u.com

TO GEEK OR NOT TO GEEK

The most frequent question being asked by planners today (after "can attrition charges be negotiated?") deals with which technologies should be embraced.

Suffice to say, that question is more loaded than it may first appear to be.

The easy answer is that you should be racing to integrate all technologies: Interactive polling, social media, smartphone event apps...everything possible. After all, shouldn't a thoroughly modern planner be using the most up-to-date of everything?

Well, yes...sort of. Today's industry professional needs to be aware of the various tools available to them. The planner unaware of the latest tools may be missing the one that makes most sense for their group. But as much as I love the new tech, I don't support planners just jumping in, especially as new tools are first coming to market.

In order to use technology successfully in your meetings, the tech-savvy planner must first intimately know

the needs of their own group. What's the age demographic? How active are they in social media (and in which ones)? The balance the planner must strike is in pushing the envelope so that their meeting is always breaking new ground, while not completely diminishing the needs of their core constituents.

Here are a few basic rules to live by:

Version 1 of any new tool is typically fraught with bugs and glitches. Does your group want to be the ones to work through these issues?

Ask your membership/attendee base. We are in the age of Web 2.0, where interactivity is everything. Discuss with your audience which technologies would improve the meetings.

Don't be afraid to push the envelope. Trying one or two new technological approaches in a meeting allows you to spotlight them and get some good feedback.

Finally, it is your responsibility to learn about the tools. Our industry has great resources. Two places to check out are the Social Media Headquarters in Facebook, as well as following Twitter conversations such as the #eventprofs hashtag.

You shouldn't feel guilty about not using every technology right away. Remember, understanding your group is far more of a critical tool than is implementing every new technology.

PERFECT PARTNERS

"For many years, AAMC has had an excellent partnership with Loews. The portfolio of hotels offers us the right destinations, the right-sized properties, and the right caliber of hotels to satisfy our meeting attendees. Quality and service is consistent across the brand, so you know what you are getting when you book a Loews property. That is important. The portfolio is also a very manageable size, so every Loews salesperson is familiar with not only their property,

but all the properties. I once attended a Loews event where we were challenged to name every property based on a thumbnail picture. I was able to name every one – that's impressive brand recognition."

"I often refer to our Loews salespersons as the 'Loews family.' By family, I refer to not only their

relationship with our organization, but their relationship with each other, as well. Turnover of the property-level sales team is very low, and the representatives for the DC market in many cases have been the same for years. This has enabled me to develop true partnerships with these people, and they are clearly a very close-knit group themselves. When there is a new salesperson in the mix, I'm always impressed at how easily the veterans bring that person into the fold. When the Loews team is in town, I always make room on my calendar for them, because it is a chance to spend time with sales partners that I also call my friends.

Kirsten Olean, CMP, CAE
Director of Meetings, Association of American Medical Colleges, Washington, DC

- Family plan: With husband, Rich, new (sleep-deprived) parents to three-month old Nate.
- Spare time: Big fan of the Red Sox, Patriots and Flyers ("hockey is my "sports sacrifice" for the marriage so we cheer for the same team in at least one sport").
- Guilty pleasure: Glee. "I was a show choir girl myself in high school!"



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Now entering its fourth month, the Loews "Summer of Fun" program has been inspiring meeting-goers and other guests with its liberating concept of "Come Invent Your Day."

Until September 9, Loews concierges are serving as personal counselors, guides and gurus to help custom-craft summer experiences that are as unique as each

Guests have been beating the heat and "skinny dipping" with skinny cocktails like the low-calorie Cruzan Blueberry Mojito and healthy dips such as homemade hummus dip with pita chips. More indulgent guests have been treating themselves to a classic summer dish of a lobster roll and a cold beer. Summer of Loews also features complimentary signature (non-alcoholic) cocktails such as the Agave Margarita served daily in the lobby.

To help guests chill out, ice cream is served from a roving cart, plus restaurant menus feature a variety of dessert delights including the option to 'Invent Your Sundae' with many toppings to choose from.

"SUMMER OF FUN" A BLAZING SUCCESS

and every guest. "Resort or city, land or sea, jam-packed or laid-back, everything there is to offer in and around all Loews Hotels is there for the choosing," said Nancy Mendelson, Senior Vice President, Branding & Communication. "Guests can chill out in a lounge chair, at the bar, or with a complimentary ice cream snack when the bell rings in the afternoon...that's what Summer of Loews is all about – freedom and fun!"

To nourish their free-spirited guests, the chefs at Loews have created special menus that capture all the flavors of summer, like BBQs with all the fixings to Haute Dogs that elevate the casual dining experience. Some uniquely local inventions include the Sonoran Haute Hot Dog with bacon, guacamole and pinto beans served at Loews Ventana Canyon in Tucson, or a true New York classic, the Coney Island Haute Dog with chili, yellow mustard and Vidalia onion, served at the Loews Regency Hotel.



POWER NUMBERS

205

million people attend

1.8

million meetings in the United States each year

Source: The Economic Significance of Meetings to the U.S. Economy Convention Industry Council, 2011



Betsy Bondurant is the president of Bondurant Consulting, which specializes in simplifying the development and implementation of Strategic Meetings Management Programs for meeting and travel managers. Here, she explains what SMMP means and its importance for meeting planners. Bondurant can be reached at betsy@bondurantconsulting.com

In my previous strategic meetings management (SMM) article we discussed the who, what, where, why, when and how of SMM. For this edition, I thought it would be helpful to share some of the best practices I have found in place at a variety of corporations in recent years.

SMM BEST PRACTICES

Reach out to your suppliers for data and information. Some of the following group meeting data would be of interest to the owner of the SMM program: number of meetings, room night production, dollar value of meetings, who has signed contracts, top ten cities, cancelled contracts, and business travel (transient) production room nights and dollar volume.

Organize annual supplier forums to educate meeting suppliers and hoteliers on new processes and procedures, updates in the business, products and services for the upcoming year, and sharing of best practices.

Conduct "Lunch and learn" sessions for the occasional planners in the organization in order to educate them on the

importance of the strategic meetings management program for your company and how it will make things easier for them. With an SMM, occasional planners will no longer have to deal with complex contract negotiations and will be able to focus on the planning for their meetings. Most important, they will help save the company at least 12 to 15 percent on the annual meeting expenditures.

Develop a communication plan. Identify what should be communicated to whom: CFO, CEO, clients, planners, suppliers, travel department, etc. Determine by what method you will communicate to the various stakeholders: e-mail, voicemail, face-to-face meeting, dashboard. And clarify the frequency of the communications: monthly, quarterly, annually, and as needed.

Additionally, communicate, communicate, communicate! One annual, corporate-wide communication regarding your strategic meetings management program will not suffice. Employees come and go, roles change and priorities shift. Keep the dialogue going through a variety of means as indicated in the communication plan best practice.

Develop metrics with your finance or procurement department. Agree on the definitions of savings and cost avoidance. Identify annual savings, efficiency and adoption targets.

Engage the travel department to share and leverage your organization's group and transient hotel spend. Most likely there is a lot of overlap with the hotels that are being used in both the group and transient programs. It is important to combine spending so that you can have a consolidated view of the amount of business you are giving to specific hotels so that you can leverage future savings.

Ask for feedback. Don't assume everything is going along smoothly with your new SMM program. Ask for feedback from those who are using the tools: is it easy or hard for them; what could you do to make it better; what is keeping them from using it? You can get feedback in one-on-one conversation, through on-line surveys, or in focus group settings.

Identify one person on your team to be responsible for supplier communications. By having a single person in charge of updating and training suppliers on program and process changes, you can be sure that the same information is getting out to all of the suppliers at the same time.

Celebrate your successes! When you have achieved certain volume, adoption or savings milestones, be sure to publicize them so that people can see that their compliance and support of your SMM really is making a difference!

“Publicize your results so people can see the difference an SMM really makes!”



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