

EXTRA TRENDS

EXCLUSIVELY FOR HQ MAGAZINE, MICE REPORTER HARALD ROELOFS LOOKS AT A COUPLE OF EVERYDAY TRENDS WHICH CAN BE ANNOYING OR WHICH CAN SUPPORT PEOPLE AND HELP THEM TO MOVE FORWARD.

TEXT HARALD ROELOFS



SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

A positive trend, which I heard from AIPC president Barbara Maple, is that conferences are becoming more interactive. 'Shorter plenary sessions and more small-group workshops. Problem-identification and case studies in small groups, which allows participants to find solutions that can be discussed later.' According to Barbara Maple there are two main reasons: 'Contact between people is more intensive and more personal; problems are solved together which creates a bond, which in-turn allows people to further discuss - getting to know each at the same time - during breaks. Another reason is that there is a lot more variation in the programme. You no longer have listen passively for a whole day.'

MORE SPECIFIC DESIGNS

The trend for smaller groups for presentations seems to go hand-in-hand with a change in conference design. The following appears to be true: the more specific the design, the more satisfied the participants. Dr. O' Grady, a retired doctor from London, states: 'I am actually a retired doctor and enjoy my retirement. However, I still find it interesting to visit medical conferences and seminars in order to stay in touch with recent events. Recently I have noticed that subjects have become more specific, which is a source for enthusiasm on my part.'

LOCAL CATERING ON THE INCREASE

The influence of catering at a conference is still being underestimated. This could impact the outcome and the success of large international political gatherings.

Barbara Maple admits that 'the influence of catering is underestimated. It can actually impact the success of, for example, political negotiations.' A trend that Maple further confirms is that catering at conferences has become more local. It is often the case that delegates do not have time to look around the city or the immediate environment of the conference. The only buildings they are familiar with are the convention centre and the hotel where they are staying. Thus, a local meal is very welcome.

CONFERENCE COMBINED WITH MINI-FAIR

At long last, the trend of holding a 'conference with mini-fair' has finally caught on. Combining a fair with a conference is of course an exceptional way to make the financial side of the gathering more palatable, and is currently the norm rather than the exception. This allows sponsors to extensively promote their messages without the independent nature of the conference being called into question. It may also make the fair more professional. The timing is better (the fair could be linked to coffee breaks and lunch, but it should not run simultaneously with the conference; this means that neither

event is disadvantaged) and professional stand-builders can be brought in. The foremost development is that features such as computers, cabinets or displays are integrated into the stands. The computers are set on columns which merge perfectly with the rest of the stand.

ANOTHER REVIVAL?

If we are to believe European economists, the economy is picking up once again and a considerable revival can be expected, as in the late nineties of the previous century. Naturally, accommodation owners are hopeful, though they would also treat such an up-turn with a bit of caution. During the nineties, growth in accommodations was unprecedented, but there was also a nasty side-effect. Good personnel were almost impossible to find. Everyone who showed an interest was employed, and it is acknowledged that their lack of hospitality cost many European accommodations and destinations a lot of money. The message for the future is to employ well-trained personnel. Which means that a large part of the revival will be almost guaranteed!