

Technology a challenge – but also opportunity

By AIPC president Edgar Hirt.

With the scare of the global financial crisis, the debate heightened over whether or not evolving communications technology would see the demise of face-to-face meetings.

On one hand, supporters pointed to the cost savings and elimination of the inconvenience of travel by having participants on a video link, while critics aver that such an arrangement could never replicate the benefits of personal interaction.

In the end, it seems, the personal element has won out with most people believing that nothing can replace the benefits of face-to-face meetings. But two elements have been quietly nudging the odds in a new direction.

Firstly, technology has been improving. Tiny, fuzzy images with startling time lags have given way to crisper, larger images with real-time interaction, leading to a much greater sense of reality. Costs have become more manageable with web-based options.

This trend will only continue, and most observers feel that communications technology is on the brink of quantum leaps forward propelled by greater storage and transmission capacities and better software.

Secondly, concerns around sustainability have intensified, in

particular the carbon impacts of long-distance travel. This issue reached the point of calls by many governments, NGOs and international organisations for new limits on business travel. And while convention centres and other industry suppliers have made huge efforts to reduce the impacts of meetings, there is little anyone can do on the travel side.

In practice, it is the combination of several factors that poses the greatest risk. The synergy among corporations and governments keen to achieve cost savings and the ability of the same groups to reference environmental responsibility as the reasoning behind their decisions is irresistible.

At the same time, many of people with influence in the technology arena are only too happy to encourage a move toward virtual meetings.

What to do? I think we need to look at three areas...

1 We need to document the benefits we have been claiming for face-to-face meetings rather than relying on tired, old adages. It will not be easy, but anything that is real – such as personal interaction – lends itself to some form of measurement. It is just a matter of figuring out how this can

best be done.

2 We need to organise our counter arguments about the efficiency of collective meetings and their much greater overall value than any sustainability costs involved. Again, this has been taken for granted and little work has been done to actually organise more persuasive arguments.

3 We need to ensure we are doing our best to incorporate the new technologies into existing meeting formats to make them even more effective. These technologies are not going away. The challenge is to make them work for us instead of seeing them as a threat. If we can harness their power to make face-to-face meetings more powerful and broadly useful, they will become more of a force for meetings than a threat – and delegates will gain even more benefits. In some cases, this may mean remote components for organised events, which is already happening.

For many years we have got by with saying that nothing can replace personal interaction. However, we are facing a future where we are going to have to do far better than that in the face of better technology and stronger counter arguments.

● AIPC, www.aipc.org

EYE ON EXHIBITIONS

exhibition & event
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Rolling out the red carpet

If we don't take care of our customers, someone else will.

This age-old statement still rings true, and many companies like to make all their clients feel like a VIP. But in the event and exhibition industry there are often genuine VIP guests who should be treated appropriately. They include speakers, clients, managers, prominent industry members and parliamentarians, and should all receive a degree of "special" treatment to ensure their experience at an event becomes a lasting memory.

Exhibitions are competitive by nature, with business competitors often neighbours on the floor. Savvy exhibitors usually include VIP programs, product reviews and benefits in their marketing budgets to ensure they offer a point of difference from their competitors. Networking events and exclusive offers, invitations and giveaways all help exhibitors develop stronger relationships with VIP clients. There are now also more options in stand design, such as two-storey stands with hospitality areas on the top level. VIPs invited to visit such "elite" areas are made to feel even more "special".

A comprehensive VIP program should comply with company objectives and key messages. Incentivising VIPs to generate business is not just about offering them special offers and gifts – they must leave wanting more from your company. The VIP program will be worthless if it does not produce sales leads. VIPs should leave your stand with a level of respect and interest for your company and its products. But while reflecting exclusivity for VIP, it is important to refrain from going over the top. This could backfire and lead clients to believe your company is desperate for business.



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Interpoint Events won the Best Australian Show title for its Splash! event, which also took the Best Trade Show less than 10,000sq.m. at the EEAA 2010 Awards for Excellence, presented in Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre.

Diversified Exhibitions Australia won three categories, including Best Trade Show more than 10,000sq.m. for the second year in a row for its Australian Oil & Gas event.

Reed Exhibitions took out a new award, Best Safety Initiative, while an employee, Veronica Ling, won the Richard Geddes Young Achiever Award.

New Zealand's North Port Events took two categories with its Fine Food New Zealand, and Single Market Events had Best Consumer Show less than

Double win for trade show

10,000sq.m. for The Baby Show.

Results

Consumer Show – less than 10,000sq.m.: The Baby Show Melbourne (Single Market Events); more than 10,000sq.m.: Good Food & Wine Show Perth (Diversified Exhibitions Australia).

Trade Show – less than 10,000sq.m.: Splash! (Interpoint Events); more than 10,000sq.m.: Australasian Oil & Gas (Diversified Exhibitions Australia).

Best Show – Australia: Splash!; New Zealand: Fine Food New Zealand (North Port Events).

Custom Stand: Bacardi Lion Sensology (Decorative Events & Exhibitions).

Most Innovative Promotional Campaign: Franchising Expo (Diversified Exhibitions Australia).

Best Green Initiative: Ecowise (Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre).

Best New Product or Service: X-Board Structures (Expo Direct).

Best Team – Venue: Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre; Show: LNG 16 (Exhibitions & Trade Fairs); Supplier: ExpoNet.

Best New Show: Fine Food New Zealand.

Best Safety Initiative: Reed Gift Fairs Safety Audit.

● See pg. 10 for more industry awards. 📄