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MEETINGS OUTLOOK™



A healthy, stable business landscape sees industry professionals focusing on cultivating the entire meeting experience, with an emphasis on enhancing interaction and immersion.

2018 SPRING EDITION

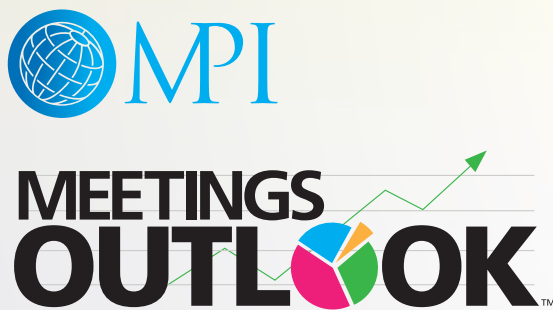
*“We are finding that by creating these experiences **people end up enjoying the event much more** than if you are just doing a simple talking head.”*

KELLY VIAU

Business Development,
Cloud 9 Adventures

PLANNING FOR ENGAGEMENT

Industry professionals in this healthy business landscape are increasingly focusing on the challenge of balancing true, cutting-edge delivery and immersion methods. Here are the top associated trends and stories about their efforts.



No. 1
TREND
33.3% MORE VIRTUAL/HYBRID/
STREAMING

By Elaine Pofeldt

When Jennifer Barron, manager of event planning and sales training at medical device company NuVasive, plans sales training meetings, she's aware that in an age of distraction, the bar has gotten higher for holding attendees' attention. Many are looking for more of an "experience," not hours of sitting in their seats listening to presentations.

"They want to be active and interactive," Barron says.

To make sure they stay engaged, Barron has used approaches such as putting games on attendee's mobile event app to get them to check in at events. She uses gamification to inspire them

to visit certain booths or areas, recording their progress.

"They like to see where they are on the leaderboard," she says, "because it encourages them to do more." Following one sales awards dinner for 1,200 people, Barron enticed attendees to stay later for a fundraising event to celebrate a company milestone. She set up giant-size games such as Connect Four, cornhole and Jenga to make the event engaging. "People stayed," she says. "It's so hard to get people to stay."

Of course, Barron (MPI San Diego Chapter) must balance all of the fun and games against the overarching educational purpose of the gatherings.



 23.3%

NEW EXPERIENCES/MORE EXPERIENTIAL

 23.3%

MORE "OUTSIDE THE BOX"

 23.3%

MORE INTERACTIVE/HANDS-ON

"It's about trying to find a good balance," she says. "Our meetings are sales trainings. They are investments in our sales force's development, their career. It's time for celebration and networking, but there also needs to be time for learning and having such an impact in what they learned that they can walk away from this meeting and apply it."

Barron finds herself with plenty of company as she stretches her creative muscles to keep attendees engaged. More meeting professionals find themselves turning to innovative, creative and out-of-the-box ideas to offer experiences that are increasingly special and immersive—either because they're excited about the

possibilities, attendees expect it or both. As Debbie Reece, CMP (MPI Rocky Mountain Chapter), owner of DLK Marketing and Events in Commerce City, Colo., puts it, her clients—all of them associations—want the "wow" factor.

Among the top 10 trends in the latest *Meetings Outlook* survey are more virtual/hybrid/streaming (cited by 33.3 percent of respondents), more interactive/hands on (23.3 percent), new experiences/more experiential (23.3 percent), more "outside the box" (23.3 percent), more apps (20 percent) and more local flair inside the venue (16.7 percent).

In this environment, many aspects of events are being made

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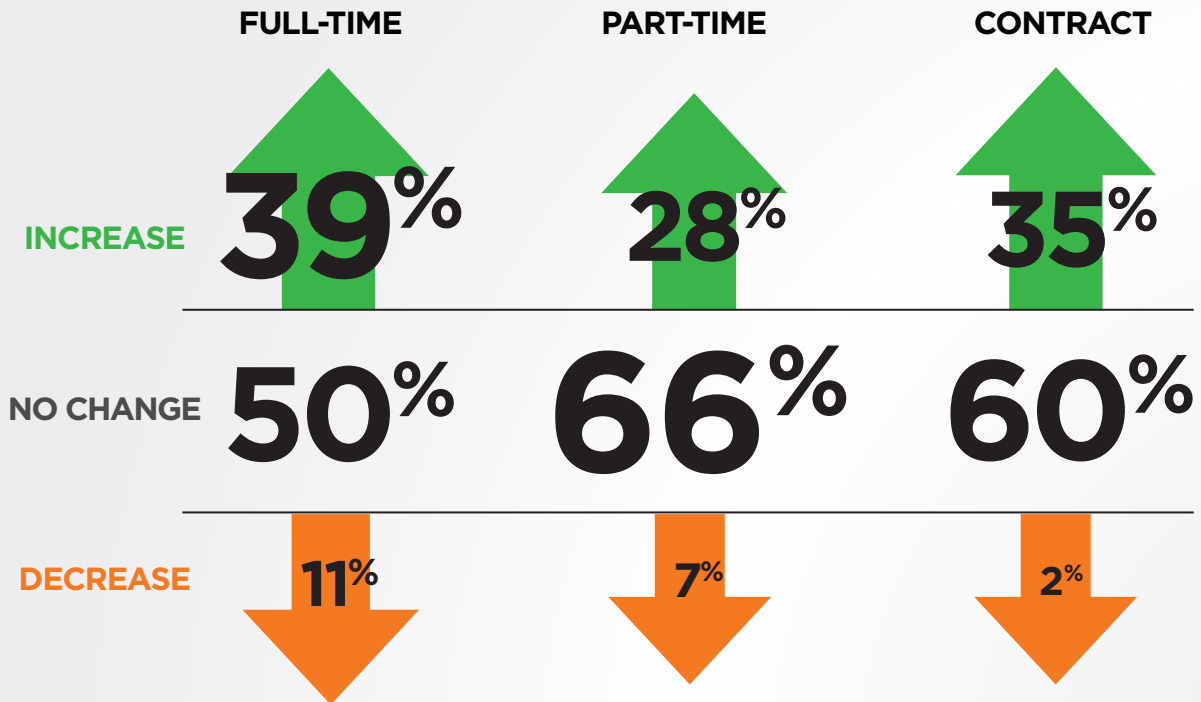


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GLIMPSE AT CURRENT EMPLOYMENT TRENDS



more interactive and hands-on to create a stronger relationship between attendees and the event or session.

Andrea Tilley, CMP (MPI Texas Hill Country Chapter), an event planner for the Texas Aggregates and Concrete Association (TACA), finds that one of the most popular elements of its TACamp—an event for people who have just joined the industry—is a tour of three concrete aggregate and cement plants that are all within 30 minutes of the hotel where the gathering is held. One day of the event is spent on the tours, while another is spent in a classroom.

Based on the reviews from the 25- to 30-person event, “they get so much more from the plant tours,” she says. “They’re interacting.”

Kelly Viau, who works in business development for Cloud 9 Adventures in Delray Beach, Fla., finds that the desire for “more experience” is shaping her work, too. Cloud 9 Adventures charters events, such as concerts, on cruise lines and at resorts. With many clients’ attendees’ craving a feeling of community once

they get to an event, Cloud 9 has found that events that bring attendees together around a common interest—such as a “jam cruise” with funk and reggae acts or electronic dance music—are in-demand.

“We are finding that by creating these experiences people end up enjoying the event much more than if you are just doing a simple talking head,” she says.

Some planners find that bringing in a concierge to help attendees enjoy more of what is planned can enhance the experience. Jennifer Lutz, an independent event planner in Atlanta, found that to be true when she planned a high-level incentive trip in Cancun for several hundred people in February.

“We wanted someone who could offer both a local purview and custom references for the guests’ requests, but we also wanted someone who knew a bit about the programming happening during this incentive trip,” Lutz says. “We thought, ‘Let’s bring in someone specifically who is local and can offer that concierge support but also let’s keep them updated on everything that is happening programmatically for this event, so they can say, ‘You want to do dinner here,

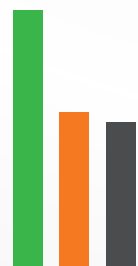
THIRD-PARTY COMMISSION CUTS

Although the majority of respondents across the spectrum of meeting and event roles do not expect the recent hotel commission cuts to third-party planners to affect their business, the percentage indicating an impact from this change is significantly greater than the percentage of third-party planner MPI members. This suggests concern from numerous parts of the industry—beyond just third-party planners.

53.8% NO

22.2% YES

23.9% SOMEWHAT



but you have a reception later that night so I'm going to help you coordinate a great taxi service to get back and forth."

Lutz found attendees were very satisfied and she later used the same idea at a conference.

"Every conference should have this," she says. "It's such a huge lift from the event staff. It's a centralized location you can send attendees to."

Bringing special and immersive elements to events can be challenging, however, if budgets are tight. When working with nonprofit clients on a tight budget, Lutz has found that onsite engraving events are a big hit that don't exceed their budget. At a Dallas sales incentive event for 1,600 people last summer, she arranged for an onsite engraver to monogram aluminum water bottles handed out as swag. Attendees received a text message when their bottle was ready.

"It was a phenomenal hit," Lutz says. By bringing in an engraver who already had his own equipment, the organizer—an association—was able to keep the cost of this meeting element to US\$1,500 a day, covering the three staff using the machinery.

"We planned it for the first day of the three-day event," Lutz says. "We extended it into the second day as well because it was so popular. Next time we're doing it for all three days."

There was even a side benefit of reduced waste: "Very few people lost water bottles," she says.

Lutz has also found that offering a spot for a relaxing break from the hubbub of a conference can be a welcome and low-cost addition. At a conference in Atlanta, she arranged for a "decompression lounge" with dim lighting. Attendees were asked to maintain the silence upon entering. "Taking a moment of silence can revive and refresh you," Lutz adds.

Creative use of lighting can also make a difference without costing a lot. When Reece, at DLK Marketing and Events, for instance, works with the Colorado chapter of an association for financial planners on its annual conference, the nonprofit's budget for special audiovisual elements is \$3,000 for the 150- to 200-person event. In cases like this, Reece will often turn to outside vendors with whom she has a good relationship, such as a "meeting planner for meeting planners" she knows. Sometimes he'll offer interesting lighting ideas that look like they cost far more than they do. "He has contacts he'll share with me to get it at a discount," she says. "Just knowing your vendors and suppliers is what really helps me."

Bringing the flair of a particular destination into an event is another popular way to make it more experiential without spending a fortune, respondents said.

Shannon Yeater (MPI Tennessee Chapter), a Nashville-based conference services and events manager for law firm Butler Snow, likes to bring the city's flavor to events the firm organizes for clients and members of the firm to make them more engaging. For one conference—themed as a "boots and blue jeans bash"—the firm served hot chicken and GooGoo clusters, a candy made in Nashville by Standard Candy Co. "The décor was pretty country and rustic," she says.

But that only works if the location is one the attendees are interested in visiting. Reece, for instance, found that when she booked an event center in Denver for the financial planning association, some younger financial planners were not excited about the location, a historic destination. "Other people think it's great; it's got culture," she adds.

Business Conditions

A prediction of 3.9% business growth over the next year is **THE LARGEST ANTICIPATED GROWTH FOUND IN THIS SURVEY SINCE SPRING 2015.**

75%

of respondents predict **FAVORABLE** business conditions

14%

of respondents predict **NEUTRAL** business conditions

10%

of respondents predict **NEGATIVE** business conditions

Projected Budget/Spend Over the Next Year

BUDGET OUTLOOKS APPEAR TO BE STABLE, MINOR INCREASES EXPECTED. However, the estimated percentage increase in actual budgets is only 1.8%—a rate that still doesn't match rising costs.

56%

of respondents predict **FAVORABLE** budget/spend

28%

of respondents predict **FLAT** budget/spend

16%

of respondents predict **NEGATIVE** budget/spend

ATTENDANCE FORECASTS

LIVE AND VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE FIGURES ARE **EXPECTED TO GROW 2.3% AND 2.7% RESPECTIVELY**, WITH BOTH LIVE AND VIRTUAL EVENT EXPECTATIONS UP SLIGHTLY OVER LAST QUARTER.



Nonetheless, she's now considering the possibility of moving to a new space, further south, that offers more active entertainment such as a museum and wildlife attraction. There's also an outdoor patio, where she envisions serving popsicles or ice cream on a warm summer night, instead of the standard cocktail reception.

NuVasive's Barron has also tried to bring a more active element to her meetings. Sometimes, she'll work with a venue's fitness staff to have a bootcamp challenge or 5K run or walk. In other cases, she's rented out the hotel's gym for spin or yoga classes.

"If they'd rather do a run, I work with the in-house physical trainers," Barron says. "Early in the morning, everyone meets up and goes for their run. Everyone appreciates the fitness aspect. I don't care where you fall on the age or gender spectrum."

She has been experimenting with longer breaks between meetings (1.5 to 2 hours), listing them on the agenda as opportunities for networking or to get their portraits taken.

"We try to find a balance with how long the educational ses-

"Our meetings are sales trainings. They are investments in our sales force's development, their career."

JENNIFER BARRON

MPI San Diego Chapter
Manager of Event Planning and
Sales Training, NuVasive

sions should be," she says.

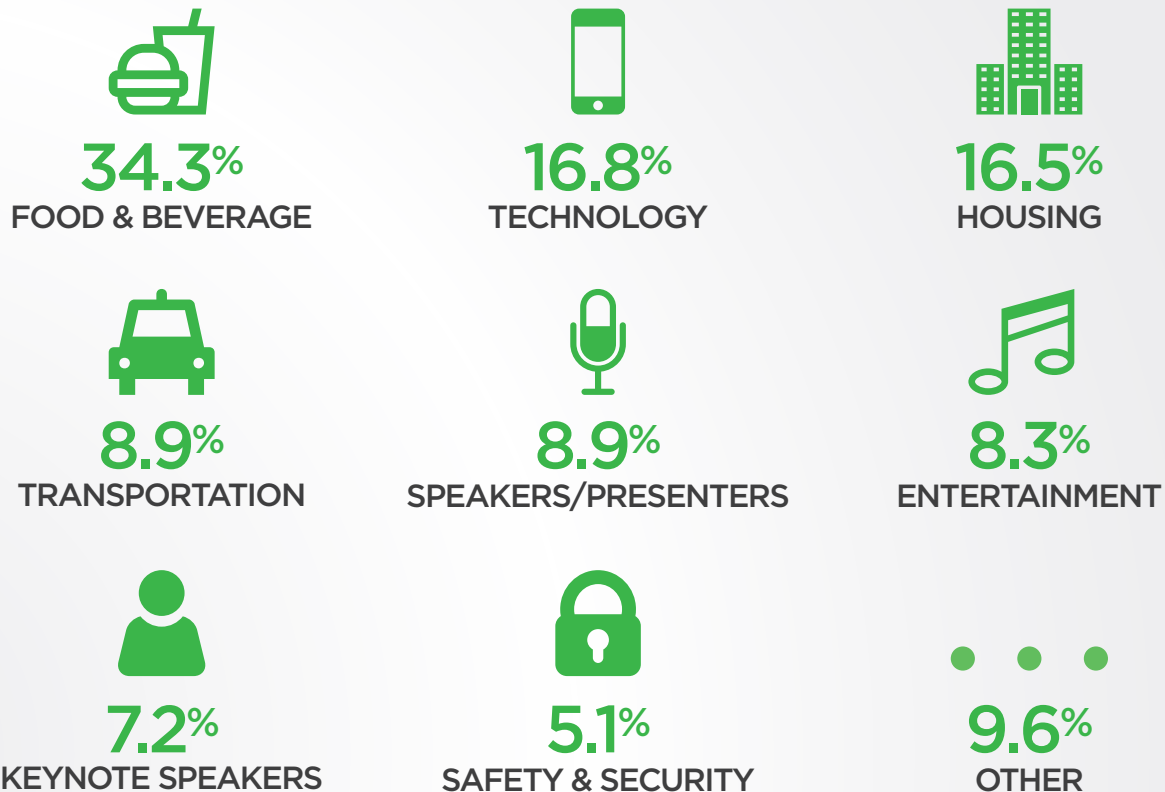
This call for more special and interactive elements in some cases also connects to the demand for/expectation of more virtual events and virtual attendees. Virtual event components are more expected now than ever. When asked what current and future technology is most important to their meetings moving forward, 64.8 percent said easy virtual streaming services. That was followed by beacon services (13.6 percent), augmented reality (12.5 percent) and virtual reality (9.1 percent).

For many respondents, the integration of technology into event experiences—to enhance the immersive feel—is growing



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Watch an MPI TV video in our digital edition as we dig deeper into the *Meetings Outlook* data.

APPROXIMATELY WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR BUDGET IS ALLOCATED TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING COMPONENTS, ON AVERAGE?



with each meeting.

One of Lutz's clients, a big technology company, recently opted to create a highlight reel of its conference and a video of all the sessions with attendees every day.

"You had this on-tap review of the conference," Lutz says. "You were sent the reel every evening with links to all the break-out sessions so you could watch them and watch sessions you may not have attended."

This, of course, required some advance planning with the videography team.

"They needed to do a quick edit at the end of the day," Lutz says. "They put that together and were also videotaping each session. They would take that material and upload it, and we would also send out an email blast"

With audio and visual elements more important, planners are even looking to details like how the microphones are passed to add interactive elements to meetings.

To avoid "death by Powerpoint," Barron might liven up Q&A sessions with presenters by giving them a microphone for the audience inside of a CatchBox branded with her company's logo, which they can toss to each individual with a question. "It livens up the standard Q&A," she says.

Some planners are finding the lounge space outside of their meetings can be an ideal setting to add interactive video elements to their meetings. In addition to the media room

at a recent, 4,000-person anti-poverty conference in Atlanta, for instance, Lutz brought in a social media team to run a Facebook Live lounge, complete with tripods for attendees' cameras, so they could do interviews for live streams in the room.

"That really was a draw," Lutz says. "People really wanted to learn how to do a Facebook Live [stream] and wanted the space to be able to do that."

The content the attendees shared on social media turned out to be a gift that keeps on giving. "Now we can use that content to promote next year's event, as well," Lutz says. ■

Explore and compare the latest and all archived editions of *Meetings Outlook* at www.mpiweb.org/MeetingsOutlook.



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