

If Used Appropriately, Technology Can Reduce Costs

In the ever-changing world of meeting planning, technology plays a critical role. Quick, accurate and easy-to-use systems lead to satisfied customers, streamlined processes, consolidated data repositories, and overall cost savings.

Consistent among all product types and their own discrete area of expertise is the ability to access the tool, therefore information about the meeting or its attendees, around the clock. Up-to-the-minute tracking allows you to view current information at any time. The back-end management of data is often based on specific customer needs

Here are the first recommendations we are making in our three-part technology series.

Subject: Live Webcast Meetings

Use It:

- ?? When you have a maximum 90 minute message to communicate
- ?? When limited interaction between participants is acceptable
- ?? When you have a short lead time thus making traditional meeting tasks unwieldy and expensive
- ?? When you foresee scheduling conflicts/challenges with a traditional meeting
- ?? When you have limited funds

Don't Use It:

- ?? If your message is longer, more comprehensive or complex



- ?? When you want significant interaction between or feedback from participants
- ?? When you want or need to meet participants face to face
- ?? When you have adequate funding for travel, accommodations, food & beverage as applicable

Future Topics: web based meeting registration and web based attendee registration.

Planners Having Hard Time Finding Space

Compared to a year ago, not only has it become more difficult to book meetings on short notice, but hotel food-and-beverage minimums have increased, according to a majority of the 183 planners who responded to a *MeetingNews* survey.

"Most of the top 25 markets have seen increases in business, so it's getting tougher to find space, and we're becoming more selective on things like guest-meeting room ratios and food-and-beverage minimums," said David Scypinski, Senior Vice President of Industry Relations at Starwood Hotels in Washington.

Fred Shea, Vice President of Sales for Hyatt Hotels, says: "Business we've booked this year that will be held this year is up a record-breaking 20 to 25 percent over all years in the last five-year cycle, throwing out 2001. The increase in short-term business gets better and better every month, with no letup in sight."

So how can planners still find space? Be flexible.

Consider different patterns when talking about shorter time frames. Instead of coming in Tuesday to Thursday, maybe you meet Sunday to Tuesday. That wasn't necessary a year

ago, but it is now if you want to stay within budget and have a quality choice. Ask the hotel what days are best -- they may have a hole or a gap that's not easy to fill.

Added Bob Dirks, Senior Vice President of Sales Strategy and Development at Hilton Hotels, "It really boils down to the maximum revenue that can be achieved. We can determine which groups will deliver for us, and we will pass on those that aren't going to do so."

-excerpted from MeetingNews.com

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Did You Know...

- ??The current US airlines on-time average is 78% - down 4% from last year
- ??Food & beverage spend outpaces guest room costs for most meetings by at least 20%
- ?? Globally, approximately 100 million people participate in some form of Bowling as a sport
- ??Chef Boyardee was a real person. Chef Hector Boiardi (the correct spelling) perfected his spaghetti & meatballs recipe in 1929.



Travel News-bytes

? President Bush's proposed 2006 budget would end over 30 years and billions of dollars in subsidies for Amtrak. According to its president, the passenger railroad company cannot survive without assistance. Federal officials counter that they are proposing a zero budget in order to force the company to address its problems, and they appear prepared to liquidate it if necessary.

? The proposed federal budget would also require Congress to approve a doubling of the federal fees to pay for airline security. The fees would increase from \$2.50 per ticket each way to \$5.50, with a cap of \$8 per ticket for each multi-segment trip instead of the current \$5. This would provide approximately \$1.5 billion in additional revenue. Organizations opposed to this fee hike include the Travel Industry of America, Airline Pilots Association, Air Transport Association, and the National Business Travel Association. These groups contend that the federal government is wasting the money it already receives - in the form of taxes - for airline security.

? US Airways has eliminated hot meals for first-class passengers. The airline says it is because of a change in food vendor but did not say they would be reinstated. Now those flying first class will be given the same box meal that coach travelers pay for.

? Information technology firm SITA is working with Airbus and Tenzing to form a joint venture to begin offering onboard GSM telephony service. The group said there could be 700 million users by 2009. They do recognize that there are two major stumbling blocks: pricing and air rage. A consultant said you could see something like smoking and non-smoking areas on aircraft. The group said it would be offering the technology to both Airbus and Boeing. It would be centrally controlled on the plane. A revenue share will be offered the airlines and users of the technology would be billed as part of their normal billing for using the phone. A recent poll by USA TODAY showed a high percentage of people are against the use of mobile phones on aircraft.

Stars & Diamonds—What Do They Mean?

First, let's clarify who does what: Mobil awards stars and AAA uses diamonds. Many reservations websites, which accounted for 14% of total hotel bookings in 2004, award their own 1 - 5 star ratings. These include Expedia, Orbitz, Hotels.com, Priceline, and Hotwire. Travelocity relies on AAA ratings. Additionally, web savvy travelers are increasingly turning to guest reviews on sites such as TripAdvisor (Fodor's online travel forum) and HotelShark.

Now, the criteria: At the 1 - 3 diamond/star levels both AAA and Mobil make evaluations based solely on the lodging facilities physical amenities. Checklist wielding inspectors arrive unannounced, identify themselves, and tally the results.

At the luxury level, both groups

send inspectors for overnight visits to anonymously assess service standards in addition to the physical amenities.

Specific examples:

- ?? Room Service should be delivered within 30 minutes; 40 at a resort
- ?? Wake-up calls should be delivered by a person and not a machine
- ?? Employee's should use the guest's name when interacting
- ?? In the bar, another round of drinks should be offered within a minute of the glass being emptied

The Results: Of the 7,315 hotels Mobil inspected in the US and Canada for 2004, only 31 were deemed worthy of the 5-star rating. AAA examined more than four times that number of properties in a broader territory that included Mexico and the Caribbean. They awarded 85 hotels 5-diamond status.

- excerpted from [USA Today](#)

"When you're paying \$500 or \$600 a night for a room, you have a right to have expectations, but it's more about the staff being thoughtful and genuine"

- anonymous Mobil Inspector

Ten Steps To A Better Conference Call

The success of the conference call is the responsibility of the meeting owner. Here are ways to make the best use of this time:

- Step 1: include a list of rules for your call along with your agenda. These may include: being on time, using a land line, being in a quiet location, using the mute button, deactivate call waiting, don't use the hold button.
- Step 2: Prior to the meeting, ask an attendee to take notes.
- Step 3: Be the first to arrive on the call so you can take attendance.
- Step 4: Don't wait for latecomers. Wait for a break in conversation and ask the new arrivals to introduce themselves.
- Step 5: Ask attendees to identify themselves before they speak.
- Step 6: Don't allow the topic to wander. If someone rambles, summarize for them and move on.
- Step 7: Include a short break if the call is planned for more than 1 hour.
- Step 8: Be firm about your rules. Politely remind people to stop disruptive actions or obtrusive noise—like shuffling papers or typing.
- Step 9: Use the medium appropriately. A brand new project start-up is probably best face to face.
- Step 10: Close the meeting on time with a summary of items covered and thank attendees.

- excerpted from [Meeting News](#)

Keeping Online Data Safe From Prying Eyes

The more functions you perform online, the more opportunities there are for sensitive information to be accessed and abused by unauthorized personnel. Whether you rely on an in-house department for web services or outsource these functions to a third party supplier or use a shared online ASP (Application Service Provider), you are responsible for your data.

Data security is maintained by enforcing security procedures. ASPs and third party suppliers should be able to explain these procedures and provide them in writing to you.

Security procedures are implemented at four points in the process of delivering web-based applications: software engineering (applications that perform functions), database administration (stored data), web administration (delivery of the application via the internet, and systems administration (management of

the operating systems that run the computers).

ASPs should have several safeguards in place to manage and protect data during transmission and storage. During transmission, sensitive data should be encrypted. The web server should support secure protocols (such as http and SSL - secure socket layer) which use public key encryption to scramble data. Look for the lock in the lower corner of your browser window to verify that the web server is secure. The server should have the latest security patches and updates, plus a current digital certificate that verifies the owner's identity, which is indicated by a "Verisign Secure Site" seal.

Data should be stored behind a firewall on a separate database server. Sensitive data, such as credit card or social security numbers, should be encrypted in the database. Access to data should be con-

trolled by complex passwords - a combination of at least eight alphanumeric and special characters. User privileges should be assigned on a need-to-know basis.

An intrusion detection system should alert the system administrator to unusual activity that indicates a possible security breach. Security procedures then should cover what to do in case of a breach including locating and plugging the hole, assessing the damage, and notifying anyone whose data was compromised.

Periodic back-ups - several times a day even - ensure that data won't be lost in the event of a system failure.

A security audit will test whether your security procedures work and should be routinely completed in order to patch holes.

An ASP's best security practices won't safeguard information you access from your own computer. What should you do at the most basic level: protect your username(s) and password(s). Don't keep it on a post-it, "lend" it to anyone, or save it in a file labeled "passwords". Make sure to specifically log out when you are done with a session. Don't walk away with an application open. Don't leave paperwork with proprietary information on your desk.

-excerpted from MeetingNews.com

Associate News....

Lisa Blandford and Megan McNeill have joined GCI as On-Site Customer Liaisons. Their roles are in support of the vendor management function within a key customer's meetings services division.

Lisa Zidow joins GCI as an Accounts Payable Coordinator. Lisa started with GCI as a temp back in November and came on board full time in February.

Our Personal Notes From Afghanistan

A neighbor of Scott's who is a physician temporarily stationed in Afghanistan sends us regular installments of life there for our troops:

Many of the missions my medical company is assigned require us to drive through downtown Kabul. To describe that part of Afghanistan's capital city, start with the lower east side of Manhattan during the height of the pushcart era, add a goodly amount of Hollywood Casablanca and mix in a sizable dollop of bombed out post war Berlin. Then throw in traffic that consists of pedestrians, autos, buses, bicycles, horse drawn and hand drawn carts all on narrow, dusty streets, traveling in different directions without traffic lights, identifiable lanes or street signs. What you end up with gives chaos a good name.

"From a distance the houses on the hillside resemble San Francisco but up close they are mostly rundown dwellings"

It also makes it very difficult to adhere to Army doctrine regarding convoys: never stop and never get separated. The larger buildings are almost always mosques but there are a few government buildings that would remind one of official Washington, DC. In one place there is a wall built straight up the side of the mountain-almost a miniature Great Wall of China, and an engineering marvel in its own right. I have tried, without success, to learn who built it and why.

We always keep our windows down so we can quickly toss out anything that is thrown in and to allow rapid return fire should the situation require. It also allows us to have our weapons extend-

ing out from the vehicle which is usually enough to discourage bad behavior. One necessity of being in a combat zone.





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*Exceeding the
customer's expectation
of value and service*

On Our Website....

On the Meetings Services page, you can click a link near the bottom to read our "White Paper" detailing our philosophy in developing a Strategic Meeting Management initiative for your company.

The Speaker Program Services page shows a process flow chart for dinner meetings and speaker programs management.

Lastly, look to the Contact Information page for an archive of our newsletters. They are available there in pdf if you'd like to print one or forward the link to a colleague.

Do It Now

There is a method of improving personal efficiency that is somewhat contrarian to the beliefs of time management gurus, but for many of us, this "DO IT NOW" philosophy works. This article is the first in a series of three describing a new way to think about getting your world in a little better order.

The first rule: act on an item the first time you touch it or read it. Of course you need to use some common sense and prioritizing, but we're talking about routine paperwork and tasks that are a part of every day. Acting on a voice mail as you are listening to it, returning a phone call right away, answering a complaint, providing a copy of something, things you can just bang out and not have to revisit.

Kerry Gleason is the founder of the Institute for Business Technology, a consulting firm specializing in white-collar efficiency and production improvement, and creator of DO IT NOW. She often

works with people in a very hands-on way to prove this methodology works.

She starts by going through a personal desk cleaning with her "student", questions why papers are where they are, what they are, and repeats her mantra - just DO IT NOW. She will wait while each task is completed and finds that many take just a few minutes. A loaded inbox, a collage of voice mail notes, replying to other correspondence, projects with open due dates.

Don't reshuffle the piles on your desk with new mental timelines, just DO IT NOW.

DO IT NOW means do it regularly, consistently, day after day. Not doing it now is what made all the piles on your desk and got you into trouble in the first place. Your "pending" basket needs to be used only for things you cannot do now for reasons out of your control - like someone you can't call back until next

week because they are on vacation.

Grasping the concept of DO IT NOW and functioning accordingly each and every day will change the way you approach your work and your life.

Look for our next issue where we address "Six Ways To Stop Procrastinating - NOW".



By choosing DO IT NOW, you make "now" your ally, not your enemy.