

Euro-meetings trends and irritations revealed in IMEX poll

A twice-yearly pan-European 'Meetings Industry Outlook' survey focuses on decision-making factors, forecasts, and buyer challenges.

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Expectations for the MICE sector remain extremely positive according to the detailed results of the latest 'Meetings Industry Outlook' research by IMEX. The findings (July 2007) represent the views of approximately 100 buyers and agents in 12 European and Scandinavian countries, and point to considerable optimism for up to two years ahead. Subject only to uncertainties arising from possible terrorism, extreme weather or health scares, respondents highlight rapidly improving economic circumstances, increased corporate budgets, a buoyant market generally, and a growing appreciation of the value of meetings in corporate communication.

Asked to rank those factors that influence venue selection (**Table 1**), the poll participants place good value for money and fitting within the agreed budget as key considerations, followed by a venue with ideal facilities. Currently rising in importance is the factor of a 'safe and secure location'.

Table 1: Selecting a Venue: ranking of relevant factors

| | March '06 | Sept.'06 | July '07 |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|
| <i>Good value for money that fits within the necessary budget</i> | 1st | 2nd | 1st |
| <i>A venue where the facilities are most ideal for the event concerned</i> | 4th | 3rd | 2nd |
| <i>A safe and secure venue</i> | 5th | 5th | 3rd |
| <i>Ease of access for delegates/away least time from work</i> | 2nd | 1st | 4th |
| <i>A venue that offers a price that is too good to resist</i> | 6th | 6th | 5th |
| <i>Well-known venue that adds status and desirability to the event</i> | 3rd | 4th | 6th |

Respondents additionally ranked those factors (**Table 2**) which they considered mattered most to delegates when experiencing a venue.

Table 2. Experiencing a Venue: ranking of relevant factors

| | March '06 | Sept.'06 | July '07 |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|
| <i>A venue that achieves high standards of service</i> | 1st | 1st | 1st |
| <i>A relaxed, comfortable setting that is conducive to hard work</i> | 2nd | 2nd | 2nd |
| <i>High-technology presentation equipment</i> | 4th | 4th | 3rd |
| <i>Excellent facilities for dining and drinking</i> | 3rd | 3rd | 4th |
| <i>A venue with a reputation to boast about afterwards</i> | 5th | 5th | 5th |
| <i>The availability of a leisure club/pool/spa</i> | 6th | 6th | 6th |

Whilst these findings continue to show remarkable continuity, there is a hint that the use of high-tech communication amenities is mattering more.

In **Table 3**, buyers were asked to appraise their events in terms of intended objectives.

Table 3. Assessing an event: ranking of positive outcomes

| | March '06 | Sept. '06 | July '07 |
|--|-----------|-----------|----------|
| <i>Delegates leave better informed</i> | 1st | 1st | 1st= |
| <i>Delegates leave better motivated</i> | 2nd | 2nd= | 1st= |
| <i>Delegates leave having acquired a new skill</i> | 3rd | 2nd= | 3rd |
| <i>Delegates leave having enjoyed themselves</i> | 6th | 5th | 4th |
| <i>Delegates leave feeling more bonded as a team</i> | 4th | 4th | 5th |
| <i>Delegates leave with a better opinion of their leaders and organisation</i> | 5th | 6th | 6th |

trends

Asked to identify those trends now affecting their planning, the 10 most frequently mentioned are (verbatim comments):

- * *'demand for airport venues to reduce travelling times'*
- * *'short-notice bookings and last-minute changes of plan'*
- * *'security and safe destinations'*
- * *'an increasing recognition that motivational programmes are important to staff retention'*
- * *'the surging demand to find unspoiled and unvisited destinations'*
- * *'a move towards shorter, more focused, better value meetings'*
- * *'increased stress levels throughout the industry as we all experience competitive pressures to reduce costs and speed-up planning, and still have to enhance the overall experience and results'*
- * *'more competing events in the association meetings sector that can dilute*

numbers for all of us'

** 'the use of e-meetings technology to make the educational programme more*

inspiring, notably through video-conferencing'

** 'more rigid government rules affecting the pharmaceutical sector and more bureaucracy generally'*

ROI

The 'Return on Investment dimension to meetings planning is mattering more. On the one hand, additional cases are being offered of how ROI is now routinely considered (e.g. 'measuring sales results and orders'; 'post-event evaluation surveys'; 'internal satisfaction polls'; 'the bottom line'). New, however, is a strengthening acknowledgement of the real costs of an event (i.e. allowing for travel time, salaries, planning resources) and a figure last year of around 20% saying that this factor is taken into account has nearly doubled (38%). One practical example of this is the proposal that day-only meetings which require travel would represent better use of flight or rail costs if the attendees stayed overnight and became involved in more discussion and networking options. One highlighted consideration that makes such real ROI appraisal more difficult is that different corporate budgets are involved, i.e. both local and central, and sourced from both administration and marketing departments.

challenges

A hallmark of this 'outlook' research is the identification of issues, or challenges that buyers say they want the industry to discuss and (ideally) resolve. The 10 most commonly highlighted are (verbatim comments):

** 'venues not up to the standards they promise'*

** 'client companies that try to cut out agencies and book direct'*

** 'the problems of short-notice booking: finding availability and being quoted unreasonable prices'*

** 'getting airline seats, long airport check-ins and delayed flights'*

** 'procurement departments'*

** 'trying to satisfy delegates of all ages and backgrounds at one association conference'*

** 'having constantly to be innovative and original'*

- * *'getting venues to reply quickly to RFPs'*
- * *'the problems associated with a sellers' market in many locations: blocked-out space in hotels; excessive cancellation charges; full pre-payment requests; take-it-or-leave-it attitudes amongst hotel revenue managers; lack of gratitude for my business'*
- * *'inattentive and inaccurate billing by venues'*

wider concerns

Despite widespread media coverage for the wider concerns of the environment and corporate social responsibility, still fewer than half of buyers admit their full engagement with these topics. Supporters stress that they pre-check destinations and venues for their sustainability initiatives; aim to recycle; undertake carbon offsetting; try to reduce international travel; and 'work alongside local charities'. In contrast are opinions which argue that it is more of a public issue, not that of the meetings industry, and that it is the remit of governments to tackle, not specific sectors or individual businesses.

- Ends.