

EXPANDING THE TECHNOLOGY SKILL SET: E-MARKETING,
HAND-HELD TECHNOLOGY, AND AUDIENCE RESPONSE

AUDIENCE COMMUNICATIONS

Meeting technologies can deliver many benefits in terms of cost and time savings. However, the role of the meeting professional will continue to expand, requiring an in-depth knowledge well beyond the skill set of just a few years ago. Knowledge of the available technologies, how to fully optimize their power, and how they can best be applied to meetings management is necessary as we move forward. >>>>>>>

CHAPTER

7

8

1

2

3

4

5

6

E-Marketing

Technology has elevated e-marketing to a necessary feature set for any organization. The ability to reach extended markets within minutes, often for pennies on the dollar, simply makes e-marketing a compelling solution for consideration.

The experience with market-ready, e-marketing tools has proven an overnight success, saving organizations time and money while increasing meeting registration. The industry acceptance also has thrust many meeting professionals into unknown waters — as a marketing manager. The result, in my opinion, is indeed challenging, unless traditional marketing concepts, emerging best practices, and metrics are understood by those so charged with these new responsibilities.

Message design, campaign timing and branding, list development, and testing and measurement cannot be taken lightly. Applying marketing concepts is a true science, requiring more than a tool set and a list of names.

Thankfully, today's online applications provide great fast-track capability for an organization willing to take advantage of e-marketing. All of the major players have incorporated e-marketing as a tool set within their integrated meeting management applications.

The challenge is not so much in finding a solution as it is in deploying it effectively within an organization. To fully appreciate the overall benefit of e-marketing, a successful implementation requires integration of both print and electronic communications. Let's face it, we are still in an age of transition, and our markets still require that communications be sent in a variety of media formats. Marketing copy, promotional offers, pricing, deadlines, and graphic treatment are just a few of the areas requiring review and updating.

Thankfully most of the major industry applications have helped to consolidate these areas.

The great news is that the technology has arrived. The challenge is to adapt processes beyond just meeting management, so that all components can be maintained and continually improved.

WHERE TO START?

Make a self-assessment early on of your department's role in generating marketing materials, so that you can clearly assess what information needs to be shared and updated among meeting management, marketing, and Web development and graphics. Ask yourself these questions:

1 Who develops and maintains meeting and event copy? This could be venue descriptions, speaker information, agendas, or pricing information. Does this responsibility include both print and electronic copy development and placement? Who needs to receive this information? Don't forget about external suppliers, such as Web developers, print vendors, and the housing bureau. How often will the content change, noting special promotions and last-minute updates?

2 Who develops the event's marketing plan? This covers the available budget and its cost centers, marketing channels, list segments to use, lists to purchase, the marketing timeline, and metrics to assess the plan's return on investment. In these tight times, an increase in registration may not be good enough. What you are really after is an increase in revenue per marketing dollar expensed. Registration is just one revenue source. With e-marketing and integrated marketing efforts, many opportunities exist to sell event-related items well beyond mere registration.

3 How do you deploy information on your Web site, and how is your Web site used?

Do you post your entire event there or do events exist on event-only sites? How are the names of past attendees and members integrated on the event site? Will one site link to another or to the member's records database?

These first three questions help to define elements of your organization's marketing process map. The answers, along with added information, should identify key people/contractors or users of the data, costs and budgets, and the time it takes to develop copy, edit copy, and produce final language. Both time savings and a reduced cost-per-marketing piece are important potential gains in adopting an e-marketing strategy.

Determine how long it takes to move from one step to another, along with the production expense of a traditional marketing piece. This data collection will provide you with a baseline to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of e-marketing. The more you can document at this stage, the better.

Chapter 3 on Meeting Management (see page 25) discusses some of the core functions you should look for when reviewing online e-marketing options, such as:

- >> Fastest route option.
- >> Sub-list segmentation.
- >> Template-driven designs.
- >> Timed sequence delivery.
- >> Delivery confirmation.
- >> Survey capability.
- >> Analysis reporting and trending.

Paramount beyond these features is a clear understanding of how such data as content and graphic files can be exchanged between delivery options and supplemental databases. The degree of data exchange will depend on how and where your organization designs, maintains, and communicates its marketing and promotional content. The more downstream users you have and the

higher the number of delivery channels of your content, the greater the requirement for optimizing data exchange.

WHAT TO ASK

>> **In what delivery channel formats do my messages need to be readied?** Some of the channels might include: the Internet, wireless devices, e-fax, e-mail, traditional print, and phone.

>> **How will you edit information for each channel, and what information needs to be supplied to each channel?** For instance, a phone recording may only mention an opportunity and where to receive updates, and not the finer details of a promotion. Due to screen and memory limitations, PDA content should be a scaled-down version of information found on the Web.

>> **Are there items requiring secured transfer of personal data?** Obviously, credit card data is one of these. However, just as important these days are e-mail addresses, Government ID numbers, and member numbers.

>> **Where are the bottlenecks?** How many transactions are anticipated? Is there a manual step in the process that might become a bottleneck? For instance, how do you authorize a credit card transaction or process a fax when it is received?

>> **Will you personalize print response forms with unique identifiers like a name or membership number?** And how are they processed when received?

METRICS CHECKLIST

The good news ... Now that you've done your homework, you are ready for testing on many levels. As with any marketing effort, be aware of a few important metrics in the following checklist:

>> **What is the total number of your market list with e-mail addresses and/or fax numbers?** Your best list — a house list of current members or members who attend meetings — is always in a state of change, requiring this metric to be polled regularly.

>> **What is your bounce rate?** In other words, of the e-mails sent, how many were not delivered due to bad addresses, mailboxes being full, or out-of-office notices? This metric should also be tracked on each campaign. By the way, don't forget to track down bounced addresses, especially if they are from an active house list! The bounce could have been caused by a data translation or data entry problem, so scrutinize this report carefully.

>> **What is the open rate?** This percentage is calculated by dividing the number of opened mail by the total mail sent. It tells you the percentage of those opening your e-mail.

>> **What is your click-through rate?** The marketing industry calculates this in one of two ways: (1) total clicks divided by total mail sent, or (2) total unique clicks divided by total mail sent. It tells you what percentage of your list reads your mail.

>> **What is your conversion rate?** To calculate this, divide the number of registrations, the number of purchases, or whatever action you are tracking by the number of unique responses.

>> **Finally, what are the return rates for each media channel, and the list changes of those responding?**

The great advantage of e-marketing is that we can quickly develop user profiles. Some members will prefer to register online and will do so. These same people will tend to buy other items online as well. Thus the next time around, offer them conference materials online and don't mail a traditional mailer to these profiles.

If you continue to mail to these profiles as well as e-market to them, then you are not optimizing the process. In addition, since they have been profiled as online buyers, be certain to invite their participation in other online e-commerce opportunities. But always provide them with the ability to opt out.

Each of these metrics should be run and tracked with each cam-

paign, and you should work at improving each of these on an ongoing basis. This is where the real ongoing testing comes, along with marketing know-how.

TEST, TEST, TEST

Remember e-marketing is not just sending an e-mail. To be truly successful, it requires ongoing testing, measurement, and analysis.

Online applications offer tremendous marketing opportunities for our organizations. In the not-so-recent past, many of us would mail two to four waves of high-expense print materials to attract potential attendees. Now, we can test a list, refine a marketing message, and retest within a few days.

For small meetings, by the time an agenda can be entered and the e-mail list selected, we can quickly solicit registrations. The only variable is whether or not the prospective attendee has opened the e-mail or responded to a message sent to a wireless device.

Clearly, the larger the meeting and the higher the quantity of traditional mailings that can be replaced with e-marketing distribution, the greater the potential savings. However, a few organizations, while grasping onto e-marketing over the past few months, need to carefully balance the amount of e-mail used to "entice" a potential attendee. Just because we *can* doesn't mean we *should* distribute weekly e-mails with attendance updates or one last offer to accept a registration.

Instead of overdoing it with e-mail blitzing, consider taking advantage of other e-commerce opportunities offered to those who have opted in. For instance, once a confirmed registration is received, consider offering pre- and post-meeting tours, site visits, discounted session tapes for pre-conference orders, popular books, or convention branded items. ■

Audience Response Technology



One great advantage of current technology is that it provides several options for querying your attendees. These include integrated surveying tools found in Web-based industry applications, stand-alone PC-based and Web-based survey applications, and on-site audience response systems.

Web-based applications allow you to either pre-poll registrants in order to set expectations or give a speaker an added outlet for gathering audience specific information. These utilities can also be used to distribute post-meeting evaluations.

Since Web-based surveying tools are often integrated with online registration applications, as a meeting professional you can quickly assess — almost in real-time — what program features are attractive to the attendee.

Thanks to robust application design — apart from the actual survey design — no other work by the meeting planner is required, since data gathering and analysis are also integrated into these useful applications.

The only disadvantage in using Web-based utilities is that you lose the spontaneity of gathering real-time feedback while on site. However, the gains achieved by targeting market surveys can't be ignored. If anything, modern-day meeting professionals should incorporate pre-event, "on-site," and post-event surveys into their meeting strategy.

Stand-alone applications, such as Zoomerang, as opposed to integrated Web-based applications, require that you import or directly enter the distribution list of those to be surveyed. However, once this simple task is completed, much of the surveying functionality is similar to an integrated solution.

Most stand-alone applications provide a robust reporting and graphing capability, beyond the capabilities offered in industry-

designed, Web-based utilities.

On-site audience response systems have evolved greatly, thanks to use of radio frequency technology. The earlier days of requiring line of sight from transmitter to receiver have all but vanished.

While wired systems are still in use and often less expensive, the flexibility and speed of installation of wireless systems give them an advantage. The benefit of using an on-site system is that polling analysis is virtually in real-time and can be used to steer the agenda, to set the tone of a meeting, or for voting purposes.

On-site use also provides a level of audience interaction not possible with other polling techniques. The keypad entry will vary from system to system, yet it provides tremendous flexibility in polling variety and reporting detail.

OPTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

>> Wired or wireless? This is really budget-dependent. Wired systems are less expensive and take a considerable amount of time to set up on site. If your audiovisual staging uses other radio-based technology, a wired system may be best to avoid interference.

>>> Do you use infrared (IR) or radio-based technology? Radio-based technology is more reliable than infrared systems, which can miss a response due to line-of-sight barriers, or the proximity of a keypad to a collector and repeater used to electronically gather responses. IR has a range of only 30 feet and may be best for small meetings, while radio-based systems process responses from a distance of 150 to 500 feet, depending on the location of the base station — ideal for large groups.

>>> Do you select a keypad or a dial on the transmitting unit? Units are usually found in one of three configurations: a calculator-style keypad, a keyboard style, or a dial. Keypads are more user-friendly of the three and offer greater flexibility for the type of response. However, dials are excellent to use with

focus groups or in gauging reactions to speeches or promotional ads.

>>> Do you use a unit with unique IDs? These keypads units can provide the answer of who voted which way. Use of these is obviously mandatory whenever a binding vote is required and a record of the vote maintained.

>>> Take time in preparing your questions. All questions must be clear and simple. The best are declarative and use words like has, will, is, should, might, and have, to solicit a fact or an evaluation. Always keep questions positive.

Options for displaying results range from pie charts, horizontal and vertical bars, matrix diagrams for two-dimensional questions, and scatter diagrams for mapping out responses. It is important to select a display style and maintain it throughout the presentation of results.

>>> A session recorder is useful to document spoken feedback, since polling cannot capture audience comments.

>>> When conducting a live, real-time survey, keep slide branding simple by using your organization's logo or conference theme.

>>> Start out slowly. Explain to the audience why you are using the system and start out with simple, warm-up questions that allow attendees to get used to their input device. The warm-up period also allows technicians to re-distribute devices to audience members, as needed.

>>> Display the results of your warm-up questions to illustrate the reporting features and to keep the audience engaged.

>>> As you move into the heart of your questioning, make certain that the facilitator is prepared to discuss the responses — whether the results are expected or not expected. The audience will remain engaged throughout, as all share in the discussion.

PDA OR PHONE AS TRANSMITTER

With the advances of wireless technologies, along with hardware

convergence, could devices such as personal digital assistants (PDAs) and cell phones be used as transmitters for collecting audience response? We asked Jeff Burns, president of MERIDIA Audience Response for his perspective.

His response: Maintaining the pace of a business meeting is one of the biggest challenges that face an audience response supplier. The systems that are specifically dedicated to audience response respond to the user instantaneously. Cell phones and PDA-type devices require handshaking and other protocols to establish communications, which take a few seconds to many seconds — far too long for the typical meeting. And the more of these devices in one area, the longer it takes for them to transmit their data. Their effectiveness as a means of polling in a business meeting is still hindered by some basic obstacles:

1 *Very limited networking capabilities in medium-to-large audience situations.*

Specifically, the number of devices capable of co-existing on the same local network is severely limited, compared to the needs of the average business meeting. It's a simple problem of proximity. Most networking solutions (such as Bluetooth) seem to be aimed at popular, everyday uses — travel terminals, street corners, cafes. The tolerance for concurrent bandwidth allows for only a

small number of devices transmitting information over the proposed network technology at any one time.

Until that challenge is overcome, it will not be optimum in a close-proximity, high-volume business meeting.

2 *Lack of standardization for networking topology, protocol, bandwidth usage.*

Another hurdle is standardization. Although the dominant interconnectivity solution is arguably Bluetooth, a lack of standards for networking connections, hardware interfacing, and protocols will slow the development (and with it the assimilation) of widespread proliferation of a common network solution — something that must exist before any synchronous audience use can be attempted. Before you can use PDAs to poll an audience, you must know that your audience will not only own PDAs, but own PDAs with a common network solution for navigating the polling questions.

3 *Limited (though growing) acceptance.*

While these devices are fast becoming an expected accessory to the modern businessperson, acceptance must grow to a tolerable level before they can be viewed as fundamentally necessary ways to exchange information during a business meeting.

4 *Functional challenges in providing easy navigation through polling solutions.*

Call it a generational challenge, call it technophobia — the mere ownership

of a PDA does not imply that it is being used properly. Many times the most intelligent, progressive, and successful businesspeople find themselves at odds with supposedly simple technology solutions, preventing their use as a means of collecting opinions and responses.

5 *Poor visibility in meeting environment*

One last obstacle, although minor, is the physical display's visibility in a typical meeting environment. How many meetings are held in a low-lighting atmosphere, which — although great for your PowerPoint presentation on the screen at the front of the room — all but defeats the use of your PDA's LCD screen? Even with the backlit feature enabled on these devices, the eyestrain from prolonged use (particularly when reading the small text of a PDA-enabled presentation) will prove undesirable to the meeting attendees of the future.

What is clear is that both gathering audience response and conducting marketing surveys continue to grow in popularity. Utilizing these useful tools, we can help our organizations save money on marketing expenses by applying and assessing real-time market feedback. At the same time, we can provide a highly interactive experience for meeting attendees — in physical or virtual attendance. ■

Hand-held Options for Audience Response <

Do you need to connect while away from the office? For meeting professionals and conference organizers, the explosion of hand-held devices is making for creative site planning considerations. Do you have to take measures so that attendees can stay in touch while at your event?

The answer will be based completely on your market, your organi-

zation, and the pace of technology. Obviously, if you expect to provide wireless services on site, specific accommodations need to be addressed at the site planning stage. Chapter 5 on exhibition technologies (see page 41) provides some helpful guidelines.

The devices and their considerations:

>> *Personal Digital Assistants or PDAs.*

>> *Cell Phones.*

>> *Pocket PCs.*

These represent the majority of devices on the market today. Unfortunately, the options, operating platforms, and connectivity requirements vary. However, all of these are changing!

As third-generation phones become accepted in the marketplace, technology convergence will have developed a powerful and highly mobile device for audience communications. These new

devices will blend the functions of the PDA, cell phone, data management, and Internet access.

Highly popular in Europe and now being introduced in the United States, these devices have been developed with three underlying objectives:

- 1 **Continual global connection** — no signal interruptions, dropped calls, or other annoying hand-shaking hassles.
- 2 **A fast transfer rate** — which makes these devices ideal for data transfer.
- 3 **Multimedia capabilities** — the ability to stream video, or to use the device as a videophone or even as a TV.

As we move through the next 18 months, the market acceptance rate

will determine how fast secondary applications are developed.

The Pocket PC will also gather market acceptance as we move forward. These pocket-sized computers, predict developers, will replace in due time the laptop. Admittedly, these devices are lighter, faster, and packed with power.

For meeting professionals, the impact of these devices will expand the range of applications to consider. It will also force decisions on electronic content design requirements. For instance, will your attendee base require that streaming audio and video be made available? Or will handouts need to exist in an electronic format for “beaming” to session

attendees? And to what platform?

It is too early to forecast market penetration, yet technology providers will continue to be pressured on standards development. Thankfully, a core of online providers — along with convention centers and facilities — is already testing this exciting new breed of technology.

Connectivity on site will not be the issue. Our core challenge as conference providers will be the design and mix of marketing channels we use to promote and deliver marketing material and content. Will the need to stay connected compete with educational and content delivery? ■

SAN DIEGO TECH

The Web Link

The Web is fast becoming the most significant tool for all participants involved in meeting planning, for both information gathering and communication. It is quickly replacing every other communication avenue for planners who demand instantaneous responsiveness from destinations, convention centers, and hotel properties.

At the San Diego CVB, Web tools speed communications in this “I need it now” world, enabling continuous contact between bureau and planner, marketing support for the meeting, and quality improvement of the entire meeting management process.

Ease of maneuvering around a facility’s entire Web site is key, but the meeting planning area is especially critical, noted James Oddo, vice president-marketing, Atlas Hotels and Town & Country Resort & Convention Center, where 85 percent of its business is convention and meeting-related. “Get them to the meeting specs right away, give them accurate diagrams, realistic square footage, and the RFP process online,” he said.

Also important for hotel properties is a link to the CVB site, so they’re visible in many places. “We have to be like an octopus with all tentacles out there, so that when the planner needs us, the information is there,” Oddo added.

Technology is now the preferred way to answer extensive logistics questions before planners even decide on a site. “The interactivity of our site allows planners to view what an exhibit hall looks like with 120 10x10s, download, and copy. This takes away some of the guesswork from the planners’ side, knowledge flows faster, and they’re better informed,” said Rob Cameron, director of sales and marketing, Manchester

Grand Hyatt San Diego.

Technology truly has changed the RFP process. “We’re no longer dialoguing for months,” said Joseph Terzi, Starwood’s regional vice president, operations, Southern California, Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina, “and with third-party providers, we may not even get a chance to talk with the planner.” In these cases, speed of response and completeness and accuracy of information back to the planner become very important.

This property, like others, no longer prints thousands of major presentation kits. “We can change material quickly online, so nothing is outdated,” Terzi explained. “Sometimes planners will do all their homework navigating through all the data available on our Web site and elsewhere, without even talking to a destination or hotel.”

The San Diego Marriott is one of 51 properties within Marriott’s convention network and resort hotels; planners can connect to any of them through a single site: www.marriott.coolmeetings.com. This further supports the planners’ call for easy access to information, availability of dates, and capabilities of the individual properties.

However, of all types of technology applications, e-mail marketing ultimately may have the greatest impact on all partners in meeting planning. One quick example from PGI’s integrated housing, registration, and travel system: fast and immediate data access enables planners to send customized marketing messages (by e-mail or fax) to specific breakout lists.

The San Diego Guide to Meeting Technology Resources

A2Z, Inc.

NeoTech Center
9250 Bendix Road North
Columbia, MD 21045
Phone: (410) 480-7220
Fax: (410) 480-7227
E-mail: info@a2zinc.net
Web site: www.a2zincc.net
See ad, page 12

Audio Visual Headquarters

10540 North Stemmons Freeway
Dallas, TX 75220
Toll-free: (888) 369-9761
Phone: (214) 210-8000
Fax: (214) 210-8152
E-mail: mmcilhaney@avhq.com
Web site: www.avhq.com
See ad, page 62

FLASHpoint Technologies

156 Chestnut Ridge Road
Bethel, CT 06801
Phone: (203) 207-5454
Fax: (203) 207-5455
E-mail: info@flashpointtech.com
Web site: www.flashpointtech.com
See ad, page 30

Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego

One Market Place
San Diego, CA 92101
Toll-free: (800) 233-1234
Phone: (619) 232-1234
Fax: (619) 239-5678
Web site:
http://manchestergrand.hyatt.com
See ad, page 5

PC/Nametag

124 Horizon Drive
Verona, WI 53593
Toll-free: (877) 626-3824
Phone: (608) 845-1870
Fax: (608) 845-1860
E-mail: sales@pcnametag.com
Web site: www.pcnametag.com
See ad, page 19

PGI

2200 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201
Toll Free: (888) PGI-TEAM
Phone: (703) 528-8484
Fax: (703) 528-1724
E-mail: pgiinfo@pgi.com
Web site: www.pgi.com
See ad, page 14

San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau

401 B St., Suite 1400
San Diego, CA 92101-4237
Phone: (619) 232-3101
Fax: (619) 231-9783
Web site: www.sandiego.org
See ad, page 2

San Diego Convention Center Corporation

111 W. Harbor Drive
San Diego, CA 92101
Phone: (619) 525-5000
Fax: (619) 525-5005
Web site: www.sdccc.org
See ad, pages 34-35

San Diego Marriott Hotel & Marina

333 West Harbor Drive
San Diego, CA 92101
Phone: (619) 234-1500
Fax: (619) 234-8678
Web site: www.marriott.com
See ad, page 7

San Diego Sheraton Hotel & Marina

1380 Harbor Island Drive
San Diego, CA 92101
Toll-free: (877) SD-HARBOR
Phone: (619) 291-2900
Fax: (619) 692-2363
E-mail:
sheraton_san_diego@sheraton.com
Web site:
www.sheraton.com/sandiegomarina
See ad, page 8

San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation

401 B St., Suite 1100
San Diego, CA 92101
Toll-free: (888) 886-TEAM
Phone: (619) 234-8484
Fax: (619) 234-1935
E-mail: info@sandiegobusiness.org
Web site: www.sandiegobusiness.org
See ad, back cover

Town & Country Resort & Convention Center

500 Hotel Circle North
San Diego, CA 92108
Toll-free: (800) 445-2324
Phone: (619) 297-6006
Fax: (619) 294-5957
E-mail: consales@towncountry.com
Web site: www.towncountry.com
See ad, page 24

CONVENE

The San Diego Guide to Meeting Technology can be accessed through the *Convene* library at www.pcma.org/convene.