

Meetings & Expositions - January 2008

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As 18- to 25-year-olds embark on their career tracks, they will decide which organizations best fulfill their professional development needs. "Generation Y," however, is vastly different from those before it, with a unique set of motivators, explains Michael Margolis, president and founder of THIRSTY-FISH. In an interview, Margolis says associations must adopt a different approach to appeal to this digitally mature and culturally savvy generation.

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By Michael Smith, CMP

Meeting growth can be a blessing and a curse. Higher attendance leads to greater networking, more buyers for your exhibitors, and thus more exhibitors for your trade show. But now your meeting is too big for a hotel venue! The transition from a hotel to a convention center can pose a number of challenges, but the first step is to understand the intricate differences in working with each.

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Every meeting planner has a horror story about a speaker's PowerPoint presentation that crashed the onsite computer and had to be reworked at the last minute. In this discussion, your colleagues share their ideas on how to tame unruly PowerPoint presentations that speakers sometimes bring to conferences.

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Participation Key to Engaging Generation Y at Conferences

Interview by Jeff Waddle

If the so-called Generation Y currently is not important to your association, they soon will be. Generally defined as the generation between 18 and 25 years old, Gen Y is conservatively estimated to be 60 million strong, making it almost as large as the massive Baby Boom generation. As Gen Y members embark on their career tracks, they will make decisions on which organizations best fulfill their professional development needs.

But as Michael Margolis explains, this generation is vastly different from other ones, with a unique set of motivators. Margolis presented "The Story Generation—How to Market To and Engage Gen Y" at M&E Days during the ASAE & The Center's 2007 Annual Meeting & Expo in Chicago. As Margolis explains in this interview, associations must adopt a different approach to appeal to this digitally mature and culturally savvy generation.

M&E: What makes Gen Y unique from other generations?

Margolis: They are a complex generation that sees the world through a fresh set of eyes. Where Gen X was the Television Generation—this is the Digital Generation. Just consider all the major technologies embedded in their lives from an early age—the internet, iPods, cell phones, etc. These tools created a generation with an unprecedented sense of information freedom and the empowerment that comes from it. Also, there is a fascinating new [research study](#) published by MTV and the Associated Press which reveals that what makes young people happiest is spending time with family and friends, so they remain very social.

Will Gen Y join associations?

There's good news and bad news. On one hand, this generation is very attuned to what I describe as "tribal identities," which means they are seeking to belong to various groups and communities. There's a sense of freedom when it comes to their identities, so they belong to many different groups based on their interests. As for the bad news, the majority of their memberships are casual and fleeting. There are only a few affinities that they're passionate about. When looking at more traditional trade associations, most groups appear irrelevant and certainly not attuned or communicative to this generation's needs and desires.

So how does an association overcome that?

The first step, which is one of the hardest for any association today, is to give up control. In the world of branding, the most effective brands today are relinquishing control and letting customers find personal expression and meaning through their brands. A great sampling of this phenomenon can be seen at the website [Lovemarks.com](#).

So Gen Y wants to interact with that brand and feel they have some influence?

Exactly, and a lot of older institutions are struggling with a paternalist mindset, and this does not fly for this generation. Gen Y has so many different places to play that if you're not going to give them a platform to tell their story, they'll go play somewhere else. One way to engage Gen Y is to issue them a challenge that is provocative and invites their voices and participation. A great example is a campaign that SEIU (Service Employees Union International) launched a year ago called [Since Sliced Bread](#). It is a web-based campaign that invites anybody to submit a single idea that could improve America. It's done in a very democratic way—anybody can nominate an idea, whether you're a kid in high school or have a Ph.D. Then other visitors vote and select the best ideas in the lot. [Former President Bill] Clinton's Global Initiative recently launched a similar story-driven campaign with [MyCommitment.org](#).

So again, this generation wants their ideas to be considered.

They want a challenge. They're problem solvers and they feel very sophisticated. There is a naïveté to this but there's also a depth of social or cultural maturity. For so many in this generation, there is a role reversal where they have become the technology and pop culture experts in their families. So, they know what's going on and they know that we're living in complex times. They see a lot of the contradictions and it's a real frustration to them. They don't like being patronized; they like to be issued a provocative challenge that says, "You can do something," and then having the tools and the platform to do it.

Associations, then, need to find ways to let Gen Y express themselves?

This generation seeks platforms through which to tell their stories. Today, there are countless platforms for getting your story out to the world, whether it's your own blog, posting a video on YouTube, or sharing thoughts on MySpace. This generation is obsessed with sharing their personal stories and life experiences.

An association needs to craft a broader story that is more inclusive of younger people. Why should Gen Y relate and feel comfortable engaging your association? One strategy is to identify peer role models that can have a public presence in the association and can serve as a beacon for others of the same generation. The association needs to demonstrate it really cares about this audience's voice and participation.

Associations traditionally have provided education but you're saying that to engage Gen Y, you should let them teach you. Can you explain that?

Each of these principles in many ways is counterintuitive and even counter-cultural. But the teaching piece gets to the heart of it. Most associations need to stop being in the "expert business" because frankly, our world is so complex that no single organization or individual holds all the answers. Associations should instead try to become the gathering point that frames the larger conversation and facilitates dialogue around issues and

solutions.

What are Gen Y's hot buttons or key motivators?

Surveys consistently reveal that 18- to 25-year-olds seek both riches and fame. It's the hyper-glorification of pop culture. But they also want to help people and make the world a better place. So one of their deepest desires is to resolve the contradiction between financial success and making the world a better place. To them, it shouldn't have to be an either/or. They're looking to create a more integrated lifestyle and a more integrative career. This generation is so much more empowered with so many more tools and expectations. They demand a lot more accountability around having their needs better met from whatever they're being a part of. They can't feel like they're on the sidelines. This is one of the challenges—they want it all and they want it all tomorrow.

Michael Margolis is president and founder of [THIRSTY-FISH Story & Strategy](#), a New York-based consultancy that helps translate new ideas into cultural acceptance. Email: michael@thirsty-fish.com

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Moving Your Meeting from a Hotel to a Convention Center

By Michael Smith, CMP

Congratulations! Your hard work, diligence, and dedication to the job have resulted in increased numbers in all categories for your annual convention—general membership, exhibitors, sponsors, speakers, etc.—and everyone is singing your praises. Higher attendance means not only more networking opportunities for your members, but also more buyers for your exhibitors, resulting in more exhibitors for your trade show, leading to more profit for your organization and so on. There's just one glitch...your meeting is now too big to be accommodated as a self-contained program in a hotel. Now what?

First, you must understand some of the intricacies that differentiate working with a hotel and a convention center.

The Differences

The most obvious difference is that convention centers consist purely of function space; they lack additional profit centers like guest rooms and food and beverage outlets. As a

result, facility rental fees and a long list of potential charges (labor, water service, tables, linens, trash removal, etc.) are a reality. Before signing a lease, make sure you are aware of all fees and their possible impact on your budget.

Also unlike hotels, most convention centers are publicly owned and run by a municipality. They are in existence to support the local economy by drawing tax revenue-generating business to the city's hotels as well as its restaurants, shops, attractions, etc. So, the requirements for booking a convention center are dramatically different than the requirements for booking a hotel. For example, a set minimum number of guest rooms on peak night and/or cumulative totals are often required for your group to even be considered more than 18 months out. This is especially true when booking first-tier cities in peak season.

In addition, many convention centers operate under various types of union labor agreements. They may have agreements with individual unions, for instance, or they may have joint-craft agreements in which all unions work under the same agreement. Find out how this factor may affect your event prior to contracting with the facility.

Certain suppliers also may have exclusive contracts with the center. Typical examples include catering, audiovisual service, security, telecom, and electrical.

Convention centers may have tougher guidelines and restrictions than hotels regarding fire codes (exhibit hall floor plans), security (exhibitor move-in/move-out), utilization of public space (signage), and changes (room turns, last-minute add-ons). Don't assume that any service is free or included in your rental package.

Lastly, convention centers are not open on a 24-hour basis like hotels are, which means you will need to plan ahead for the center locking down for the evening or the utilization of lighting and A/C.

Contracting Issues

Most convention centers are less flexible on their agreements than hotels because most are owned by state or city government, and changing "official" language is difficult. The leases are written with inflexible language to deter litigation and to give the facility more control. This doesn't mean that suggested changes via an addendum are not possible, just limited. Some contract terms are simply untouchable based on the fact that, for various reasons, centers do not carry liability insurance.

When contracting, try to do so as far out as possible and be cognizant of competing or conflicting organizations' site selection process as well. With whom you begin negotiations depends on the timeframe of your initial lead. Many facilities will have the local convention and visitors bureau (CVB), not convention center sales, get involved during a certain booking window. Ask the CVBs what services they can provide and how they might partner with you for site inspections, collateral material, attendance

promotion, housing, and so forth.

When securing a location, especially five years out and beyond, do not expect to receive a contract from the center, but rather a Letter of Intent or Letter of Agreement outlining your space agreement and applicable rates in some capacity. Many facilities will issue a contract 18 to 11 months prior to your event. If this is the case, ask for a sample lease in advance so that you can begin negotiating terms and conditions that might be deal breakers. Also, make sure you have a copy of the current policies and procedures along with current labor rates for reference.

Understanding the Impact

Considering today's travel-savvy meeting attendee and the accessibility of a plethora of hotel reservation streams, it's important to examine how your move to a convention center might add to your liability exposure. By moving your event to a center, you lose one of the best incentives for attendees to stay in your contracted hotel—unmatched convenience to events and ease of networking.

Know that unless you provide real incentives and benefits to your attendees—above and beyond just a nice group rate—that "shopping" and booking outside the block is likely to occur. This will have a direct effect on hotel performance and could cause serious financial setbacks to your organization in the form of hefty attrition fees. Be sure to take the time to develop an effective strategy and take charge of your room block.

Transitioning from a hotel to a convention center should not be viewed as a necessary evil, but rather a symbol of growth, success, and a real opportunity to improve your organization. Taking the time to understand the process will allow you to make a seamless transition and inspire everyone to continue to sing your praises (even louder).

Michael Smith, CMP, is a strategic account manager at [Experient](#), a meeting management firm based in Twinsburg, Ohio. Email: michael.smith@experient-inc.com

[Editor's Note: If you're looking for more in-depth information on working with convention centers, check out ASAE & The Center's [Convention Center Operations Program](#), taking place on May 8-9, 2008 in New Orleans.]

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Latest from the Listserver: Speaker PowerPoints

Association meeting planners can find themselves in a difficult position if a speaker arrives at their conference with an oversized or incompatible PowerPoint presentation.

Your colleagues offer possible solutions to the dilemma.

Question: Does anyone have any tips for speakers on how to create good PowerPoint presentations? We're not looking for how to make a pretty slide or even how to communicate with PowerPoint. What we're looking for is how to put together a presentation that doesn't crash the computer or our network.

Unfortunately at our meetings, some of the speakers show up with extremely oversized files that cause serious problems. When we get the files early we can shrink them down to size. But that effort goes out the window when they appear on the meeting site with their updated presentation on a flash drive.

—*Diyana Hrzic, web site manager, The Association For Manufacturing Technology. Email: dhrzic@amtonline.org*

Response: I just read a posting titled "Really Bad PowerPoint" that you might find useful. There is a section where the writer lists components that make a great presentation.

http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2007/01/really_bad_powe.html

—*Tamara Coombs, senior web associate, American Chemical Society. Email: t_coombs@acs.org*

Response: That's going to be sort of difficult. The guidelines you create to avoid crashing your system are, by definition, going to be specific to your system. After-all, their presentations likely work fine on THEIR machines.

There **are** general guidelines for creating things that work consistently on a wide variety of PCs...and we all know what they are already...KISS (Keep It Simple, Sister).

The problem with PowerPoint is that people try to do too much with it to the detriment of their presentation. But that's only my professional bias talking.

I'd start with setting maximums on some things:

- Max number of slides
- Max size of final file

And then get more specific:

- What types of movies can be inserted
- What fonts can you use

- What type of images can you import
- What version of PowerPoint must you use

I think the MAIN constraint is the size of the final file. I could be wrong.

—Peter de Jager, de Jager & Company Ltd. Email: pdejager@technobility.com

Response: A quick fix is to compress all of the pictures in the presentation.

1. Right click on any picture in the presentation
2. Select format picture
3. Select the picture, then compress
4. Apply to all pictures in document and change the resolution to web/screen (96 dpi)
5. Click OK, then OK again.

This has helped me reduce file size drastically.

—Alyse Kittner, American Hospital Association. Email: akittner@aha.org

Response: I agree with Alyse that high res photos are the usual culprit. Compress them and if the presentation is still a memory gobble, consider changing a fancy background to something more basic.

—Shawn Beyer, Beyer Publishing. Email: beyerpublishing@verizon.net

Response: Below are guidelines we give our speakers. This helps cut down for a lot of speakers; others, we set up a FTP site on our web for them to upload to.

Presentations: ACCC requires that all presentations use ACCC's PowerPoint template. This template is available from the www.accc-cancer.org Annual Economics Meeting site (look for Speaker Information). The template includes ACCC's logo in the lower left corner, first page only. Our accreditation provider does not permit the presenter to use his or her own logo or watermark backgrounds. However, presenters may select their own colors, fonts, and slide style.

Format Recommendations:

- No backgrounds/logos on vendor/supplier presentations (accreditation requirement)
- Spell out acronyms the first time used (accreditation requirement)
- Try not to exceed 10 pages (30 slides) in length (page numbers are not necessary)
- Limit each slide to 7 lines and 6 words per line
- Colors: Dark blue or black backgrounds with white or yellow lettering; white backgrounds with black lettering

- Font size: 18-point size preferred, bold, readable fonts
- Sources should be cited on your slide or a separate sheet
- Include a glossary of terms (especially acronyms) that may not be understood by everyone. This is a multidisciplinary audience.

—*Lu Anne Bankert, senior director programs and meetings, Association of Community Cancer Centers. Email: Labankert@acc-cancer.org*

Response: We had the same problem and developed a PowerPoint Presentation to illustrate what we wanted. You're welcome to take a look at it here: <http://www.asrm.org/Professionals/Meetings/PreparationOfEffectivePowerPointPresentations.ppt>

—*Angelia Pitman, web site manager, American Society for Reproductive Medicine. Email: apitman@ASRM.org*

Response: I know we're off topic but as long as we're talking about PowerPoint, I thought I'd share one of my favorite books on it: [How to Wow with PowerPoint](#). You should be able to find it pretty easily from whichever book seller you prefer.

—*Dave Coriale, president, DelCor. Email: DCoriale@delcortech.com*

Response: Another great book is [Beyond Bullet Points](#) by Cliff Atkinson.

—*Pat Lewis, communications director, American Association for Public Opinion Research. Email: plewis@aapor.org.*

Visit the [Meetings & Expositions section listserver](#) online to take part in this discussion and many others with your colleagues in the meetings and expositions field.

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Exciting M&E Programs on Tap for '08

ASAE & The Center have an exceptional slate of educational opportunities throughout 2008 for association meetings professionals at any career level. Here's a sampling of the upcoming events that you'll want to note on your calendar:

- [International Conference](#), March 6-7, Marriott Learning Center, Washington, DC. This is a can't-miss conference for meetings management staff of any association considering international expansion, with in-depth sessions on trends, developments, and proven strategies for successful operations abroad.

- [M&E Idea Swap](#), March 11, Marriott Learning Center, Washington, D.C. Sponsored by the Greater Washington Network, this complimentary program for M&E professionals is available exclusively for ASAE & The Center members. You're bound to come away from the Swap's lively discussions with lots of useful information and valuable ideas.
- Business of Meetings Program, April 1-2, ASAE & The Center Building, Washington, DC. Two of the Program's four courses—[Leadership & Communication](#) and [Meeting & Exposition Excellence](#)—will be conducted. Complete all four courses and receive the Business of Meetings Program Certificate. Plus, earn CAE and CMP hours.
- [Springtime](#), April 3, Washington Convention Center, Washington, D.C. Network with your colleagues and attend sessions designed exclusively for M&E professionals at one of the industry's largest expositions with more than 800 exhibitors.
- [Convention Center Operations Program](#), May 8-9, Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, New Orleans, LA. Similar to the Hotel Operations Program, you'll come away from this in-depth session with everything you'll need to know to work effectively with convention centers.

Of course, it's not too early to begin planning to attend ASAE & The Center's [2008 Annual Meeting & Exposition](#), August 16-19 in San Diego, California. Registration and housing begin in February.

More information on all of these events is available by visiting ASAE & The Center's [online event calendar](#). Also, check out future issues of this newsletter for updates on educational opportunities designed specifically for you.

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