



MEETINGS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE:

Low cost ways companies can use
meetings and events to become
better corporate citizens



1212 South Washington Avenue
Royal Oak, MI 48067

p 248.336.8600

f 248.336.8610

www.SpecialDEvents.com



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INTRODUCTION

“Under the shadow of one of the worst economic downturns arguably in history, the meetings and events industry is under fire at a time when it should be looked at as a solution. When done correctly, like most companies do, meetings and events drive business results, build engagement, retain and develop employee talent, generate ideas and share knowledge that leads to growth.” -- ©The

Meetings Initiative

The recent economic recession has been particularly unkind to the meetings and events industry. Given time, however, the economy and this industry will rebound. Corporate America will continue to demonstrate the return on investment (ROI) for the meetings and events it holds, and there will always be value in face-to-face gatherings.

But what if this recession was viewed as an opportunity? What if meeting and event planners inspired corporate America to use its gatherings to improve the “Triple Bottom Line” -- People, Planet and Profit?

This white paper will demonstrate that meetings and events can do the following:

- improve a company’s Triple Bottom Line (TBL) – People, Planet and Profit
- serve as a vehicle for showcasing a company’s efforts to be a responsible corporate citizen (generate positive publicity)
- have a positive impact on the world, both from an environmental and a social perspective



THE MEETING/EVENT INDUSTRY'S IMAGE — THEN AND NOW

Let's face it. Corporate meetings and events have an image problem.

Prior to 2008, corporations held business meetings with little to no fear of public scrutiny. Organizations gathered stakeholders together to train, motivate, network, share ideas and yes, sometimes to schmooze. In the latter case, it's called sales. As long as the event contributed in some way to the company's bottom line, it was rarely challenged.

That changed with the recession that began in 2008. While it's not unusual for special events to decline during an economic downturn, in 2008 and 2009 the decline was exacerbated by media attention surrounding events held by companies that received bailout funds from the U.S. government.

Executives at some organizations that received bailout funds were perceived as showing poor judgment by hosting what appeared to be lavish meetings and events at resort locations. Meeting and hospitality industry professionals know that in most cases, canceling functions that have been booked months or years in advance can result in significant cancellation fees. So, moving ahead with the meeting or event often makes financial sense. Unfortunately, though, perception is reality. So, hosting what appears to be a high-end event at an upscale location while simultaneously holding your hand out for taxpayer funds is just asking for bad publicity.

When those situations made headlines, many Americans were outraged. Suddenly, it seemed as if every business event was in danger of being perceived as a "shrimp and schmooze" boondoggle. The truth is, however, most **meetings mean business**. There is no true substitute for face-to-face interaction.

In fact, according to a 2009 *EventView: North America* survey of Fortune 1,000

Chief Marketing Officers, **meetings and events provide the highest return on investment of any marketing channel.**

Key findings of the survey included:

- 53 percent of respondents chose event marketing as the discipline that best accelerates and deepens relationships with target audiences.
- 26 percent of respondents chose event marketing as the marketing discipline that drives the greatest ROI, a four percent increase over 2008.
- 66 percent of respondents plan on implementing or have already implemented green initiatives within the event function – a 32 percent increase from the 2008 results. Of that 66 percent, 44 percent of those are doing so because of a corporate social responsibility mandate.

By holding meetings and events, a company can not only further its business plan, it also generates economic growth worldwide. For example, in the United States . . .

- Meetings, events and performance travel generate 1 million jobs, \$27 billion in wages, and are responsible for almost 15 percent of all domestic travel.
- Business travel creates 2.4 million jobs nationally.
- Business travel accounts for \$39 billion in tax revenue at the federal, state, and local levels.

Unfortunately, according to the results of a recent *Meetings and Conventions* magazine study, 52 percent of respondents claim that the backlash against meetings has been extremely or moderately influential on their company's decisions to hold events. But, while the number of external meetings or off site events may diminish, a company simply cannot function by eliminating all meetings.

Despite this backlash, companies still need to train, motivate, network and maintain positive relationships with stakeholders. But they will likely proceed with caution. By reevaluating standard procedures companies can not only proceed with meetings, they can pave the way for meeting responsibly on many fronts.



MOVING FORWARD: MEETINGS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Overcoming Challenges vs. Creating Opportunities

To improve the image of the meetings and event industry, companies must work harder than ever to demonstrate the return on investment (ROI). Meeting planners need to continually track “hard ROI” (the number of employees who received training, the number of potential customers who were exposed to a product at an event, or the dollar value of sales made at a trade show.) They also need to gauge the soft ROI (non-monetary benefits such as increased face time and networking opportunities with prospective clients or colleagues, positive goodwill and PR generated, etc.), because it can be just as valuable.

These practices will help sustain the meetings and events industry.

But, what if the current recession was viewed as an opportunity? What if meeting and event planners inspired corporate America to use its gatherings to improve the Triple Bottom Line -- People, Planet and Profit?

The concept is not only exhilarating, it is feasible.

TBL or Triple Bottom Line accounting means expanding the traditional business reporting framework to take into account ecological and social performance in addition to financial performance. The phrase was articulated by John Elkington in his 1998 book *Cannibals with Forks: the Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business*.

Defining the Concept

The TBL concept is often referred to as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Sustainability, or Corporate Citizenship. In general, however, a company applies the concept as follows:

Economic

- Codes of conduct, risk and crisis management, corporate governance

Social

- Philanthropy, labor practices, human capital development

Environment

- Energy consumption, water use, greenhouse gas emissions, waste management

No matter which phrase is used to describe it, the concept and the importance of sustainability has picked up steam over the past decade.

Why Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Makes Sense

In 2006, researchers at the Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative at the Kennedy School of Government came to the conclusion that businesses are completely dependent on the consumer. They reported that “the consumer is impacted by the decisions made by businesses and, over time, consumer choices will be driven by their responses to the way [businesses] run their operations. If businesses are not seen as being committed to the communities in which they are allowed to operate, consumers will make their choices in favor of others.”

The researchers added that, “Leadership that does not recognize the essentials of the consumer/citizen – choice, corporate reputation and the collective commitment of its people – will, sooner or later, fail. That is why the role of business in society is right up there on the agenda and deserves the unstinting attention and support of – the whole board, the CEO, the executive and the non-executive directors too.”

Special D Events supports the Kennedy Center’s findings and would add that the responsibility of CSR extends down the organization, beyond the director level, to anyone involved in planning its meetings and events.

The Kennedy School’s research confirmed that, when a company strives to become a better corporate citizen, it’s not only the right thing to do, it can also make financial sense.

The benefits of a Triple Bottom Line/CSR focus typically fall into three categories:

Human Resources

A strong CSR program can aid in employee recruiting and retention. A June 2009 Corporate Citizenship Study by the market research and consulting firm Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates found that most people prefer to work for a socially responsible company. In fact, even in these troubled economic times, 40% of those surveyed would be willing to take a pay cut to work for a socially responsible company.

Risk Management

Reputations that take decades to build up can be ruined in hours through incidents such as corruption, scandals or environmental accidents. These incidents can also draw unwanted attention from regulators, courts, governments and media. Building a genuine culture of “doing the right thing” within a corporation can offset these risks.

Brand Differentiation

In crowded marketplaces, companies strive for a unique selling proposition that can separate them from the competition in the minds of consumers. The Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates Corporate Citizenship study found that 75% of those people surveyed were willing to pay more for a product from a socially responsible company. However, the study also found that very few companies currently have any real profile as socially responsible. The opportunity to “lead the pack” is up for grabs.





STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

The strategies and tactics for improving CSR represent a new frontier in corporate America. Some companies have already added triple bottom line objectives to their business plan; others are just beginning.

Sample strategies related to meetings and events include . . .

- Utilize our company's meetings and events to enhance our role as a good corporate citizen.
- Utilize our company's meetings and events to improve our financial, environmental and social bottom lines.

There are numerous tactics for improving a company's CSR, and it's important to note that *many are low cost*.

For example, in the spring of 2009, Jennifer Roberts wrote an article for the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* entitled, "What's Next: The Pepsi Spirit of Giving Back." She noted that, "The best things in life are free certainly holds true for love. But as Pepsi Bottling Group (PBG) recently discovered, corporate social responsibility (CSR) doesn't have to cost a cent, either. Last November, PBG enrolled more than 27,000 of its U.S. employees in the Wireless AMBER Alert Program, so that they can receive urgent public bulletins about abducted children—usually the abductor's license plate—via their company-issued cell phones. PBG is the first company to sign up its employees en masse."

The meetings and events industry provides a wealth of opportunities for low cost tactics to improve CSR.

Here are some examples:

A. Making a Social Impact

Connecting interested employees with organizations in need

Surveys have shown that although most people believe it's important to give back to their communities, they often don't know the best ways to go about it, and they feel they just don't have the time. By offering specific opportunities in the workplace, employers can help overcome these objections.

Tactic #1: Use in-house meetings/events to communicate existing company-wide efforts

As previously mentioned, employees value their employers' efforts to be socially responsible. Surprisingly, employers often fail to communicate those efforts. The 2009 study by Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates, for instance, showed that more than 70% of employees are unaware of any social responsible practices their own employer is taking.

Employee meetings and events are excellent vehicles for communicating a company's CSR. There is no cost, but considerable value, to having a senior manager step in front of a room full of employees and share his/her passion for supporting the community. In-house meetings and events can introduce attendees to organizations that need support and provide specific examples of ways they can give back to their communities. In addition, those individuals who feel a small contribution is insignificant can join with their company and be part of a larger effort.

Tactic #2: Select a Nonprofit Meeting/Event "Partner"

Another low cost way to improve CSR is to adopt a nonprofit "partner" for in-house meetings, training sessions or incentive programs. Companies identify one or more nonprofit organizations to support, and then communicate these intentions in meeting/event invitations.

For example, employees often have access to items such as:

- Old, unused cell phones
- Suits or business attire they no longer wear
- Toys that are no longer used or were never used

These items may be gathering dust in people's homes, but many nonprofits could put them to good use.

Consequently, the meeting announcement could invite employees to bring unused cell phones, clothing and/or unused office equipment to the meeting for donation to the nonprofit. Employees could be invited (but not required) to participate.

In addition (or as an alternative) to donations, companies can connect employees with nonprofit(s) by incorporating information about the nonprofit partner in the meeting/event design.

For example:

- A company representative could share facts about the nonprofit(s) in his/her remarks
- Representatives of the nonprofit(s) could be invited to make a presentation to the employees
- If audio/visual is being used for a meeting, facts and photos about the nonprofit(s) could be shown on a PowerPoint slide during meeting breaks
- Fact sheets/photos can be posted at the registration desk and/or included with attendee handouts
- Information shared with attendees could include suggestions on how they can stay engaged with the nonprofit after the event

Tactic #3: Incorporate Volunteer Service into Meeting Design

Companies willing to take the next step can set aside time for a group volunteer project as part of their employee meeting, event or incentive program. For instance, Texas Roadhouse, the Louisville, Ky.-based restaurant chain, included one full day of community service as part of its 2009 five-day incentive trip in San Francisco.

CEO G.J. Hart strongly supports his company's efforts to give back to the community.

"This year, we built Habitat for Humanity homes for injured war veterans, we stuffed 15,000 [care] packages for United Service Organizations, and we helped the Glide Foundation [a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization dedicated to helping the area's poorest residents] by serving food and painting their building, as well as participating in various other projects," he said.

"Between the labor and materials, we usually give about \$1 million back to the community we are in. Most important, we do that because, in my mind, it changes people's hearts."

How to Choose a Nonprofit Partner

- Consider the pros and cons for your organization to support a large, established well known nonprofit vs. a smaller nonprofit based in a community where your organization has a presence.
- If possible, select a nonprofit whose values align with your organization, and/or whose benefactors are related to your organization's products or services. For instance, a grocery store chain may choose to support a local food bank, or a women's clothing manufacturer may opt for a women's shelter.
- Conduct research on potential nonprofits before making a decision. Guidestar (www.guidestar.org) and Charity Navigator (www.charitynavigator.org) are useful resources for this purpose.
- Before making a final selection, contact the nonprofit and to learn how your organization can best support their mission and how donations will be used.

B. Making an Environmental Impact

A green meeting incorporates environmental considerations throughout all stages of the meeting/event in order to minimize the negative impact on the environment.

By striving to reduce, reuse and recycle, the meetings and event industry can make a tremendous positive impact on the world. Consider this: According to the Convention Liaison Council, during a typical five-day conference, 2,500 attendees will use 62,500

plates, 87,500 napkins, 75,000 cups or glasses and 90,000 cans or bottles. With green practices put into place, it is easily possible to recycle, compost and donate several tons of food and waste that would normally end up in landfills.

There are many, many ways to make meetings and events more eco-friendly, but the first step is to determine what is feasible for the host organization in the short and long term, and develop policies and procedures that can be adopted company-wide.

Tactic: Establish Environmentally Conscious Standard Operating Procedures for Meetings & Events

In 2010, the Convention Industry Council's (CIC) Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX) Panel on Green Meeting and Event Practices is expected to release its final standards for green meetings and events. Two years in the making, the APEX standards include nine individual topic areas, including: Accommodations, Audio/Visual, Communication, Exhibits, Food and Beverage, On-site Office, Destinations, Meeting Venue and Transportation.

In the meantime, there are multiple resources for developing standard operating procedures (SOPs) that are relevant to your organization. They include the following:

**Green Meetings Report
Convention Industry Council**

http://www.conventionindustry.org/projects/green_meetings_report.pdf

700 N. Fairfax Street, Suite 510
Alexandria, VA 22314
(571) 527-3116

Green Meetings Website

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.epa.gov/oppt/greenmeetings/>

1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Mail code 7409-M
Washington, DC 20460-0001

Green Meetings Industry Council (GMIC)

www.greenmeetings.info

207 Third Avenue
Hattiesburg, MS 39401-3868
(888) 450-2098
(601) 582-3354

For academic institutions:

Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)

www.aashe.org

213 ½ N. Limestone
Lexington, KY 40507
(859) 258-2551

In addition, Special D Events has written a set of standard operating procedures which can be adapted by most organizations. Complimentary copies are available upon request.

When developing SOPs, companies should:

- Consult the resources mentioned above, then research what other organizations are doing, what's possible, and what is *feasible* for your company in the short and long term.
- Establish priorities. First consider environmental initiatives that will be the least disruptive or controversial, but will yield the highest payback, and start there. For instance, providing recycling bins on site at an event costs very little and inconveniences no one, yet makes an immediate impact.
- Consider existing green strengths and weaknesses. For instance, what are in-house facilities or building management teams doing to encourage an environmentally friendly workplace? Are there programs that can be carried over to the company's events?
- Gain management support. Armed with research and recommendations, communicate the opportunities and benefits to senior management. Clear up any misconceptions and be prepared to project the return on investment.

- Involve the event venues and company suppliers. In addition to specifying what your company plans to do, the SOP can also specify standards for venues and event planning suppliers. Suppliers often can recommend environmentally-friendly solutions specific to your company, many of which are low cost, no cost or even represent a cost savings.
- Communicate. Event attendees may notice some of the changes you make, so be sure to share what your company is doing to help the environment. Chances are, they will support the efforts and walk away with a positive impression of the company.

Tactic: Utilize technology to expand the reach of meetings and events,

There have been considerable advancements in meeting technology that allow organizations to reach a larger audience without incurring additional travel, thus reducing carbon emissions.

A product called Zentation, for instance, does an excellent job of combining video and slides to create online presentations that simulate the live experience.

The Zentation player provides the audience with a simple outline of the meeting content so they can access any part of it without having to wait for it to download completely. Viewers can even use the comment section to blog about a specific presentation. They can watch the presentation at a time when it is convenient for them, or they can be invited to participate at a set time when the presenter is also available to chat on line with viewers.

In general, the use of video is increasing. Speakers, exhibitors and meeting planners are uploading videos of events and tradeshows to YouTube and other video sharing sites. Remote speakers are presenting to their audiences via Skype. Interviews of speakers and meetings attendees and presentations themselves are available via web video.

By using video, organizations can extend the reach of their face-to-face meetings without increasing their carbon footprint



CONCLUSION

The strategies and tactics described in the foregoing pages only scratch the surface, but for those business leaders who recognize the value of corporate citizenship, they represent an affordable place to start.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the world experienced major events that alternatively isolated and connected us. Many Americans continue to feel helpless in the wake of 9/11, Katrina, Haiti, and the worldwide economic recession. But, these events have also caused many of those same people to feel more connected to the “rest of the world.” The number of people seeking ways to give back to their communities, and valuing organizations that do so, has increased.

Special D Events believes now is the time to turn challenge into opportunity.

“Businesses, coevolving with a vibrant civil society, are the most dynamic force we know,” said Amory Lovins, Chairman and Chief Scientist of the Rocky Mountain Institute, a sustainability research and consulting organization.

“They have the resources, skills, speed, leadership, and motivation to solve big problems quickly and to take those solutions to scale. How they innovate and lead will determine whether their successes will bring benefit or harm to others and to the Earth.”

For meeting and event planners who are constantly focused on the details, this is an opportunity to prove that, not only are meetings one of the most valuable marketing tools available to companies, they can affect and inspire positive change in the world. You have an opportunity to prove that *Meetings Can Make a Difference*.



ABOUT SPECIAL D EVENTS

Special D Events' vision is to organize meetings and events which make a difference to clients, to the community, and to the world. Our mission is to be the premier provider of meeting/event planning services for mid to large-size companies and nonprofit organizations nationwide, while focusing on the triple bottom line: People, Planet and Profit.

Founded in 1992, Special D Events serves a diverse group of clients ranging from small, local nonprofits to nationwide Fortune 500 companies. We are based in Metro Detroit, but our company has managed events in each of the 50 states, Canada, Mexico, Europe and Asia.

Our services include: consulting, site research, event marketing, registration, logistics (transportation, entertainment, food/beverage, security etc.), exhibit and sponsorship sales, on site management and more.

The Special D Events' team is convinced that it's possible to use meetings and events to bring about positive global change. If one good thing can come from this recent recession, it's the ability to harness the power of meetings and events for long term good.

For meeting and event support, or to obtain a complimentary copy of our green meeting standard operating procedures, contact Carol Galle at carol.galle@specialdevents.com, or 248.336.8600.



WORKS CITED & EXPERT CONTRIBUTORS

Special D Events would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions:

- Tanya Hayes Bolden, former Manager – Corporate Social Responsibility, General Motors Corporation
- Sue Tousignant, Manager, Market Communications, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan
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