

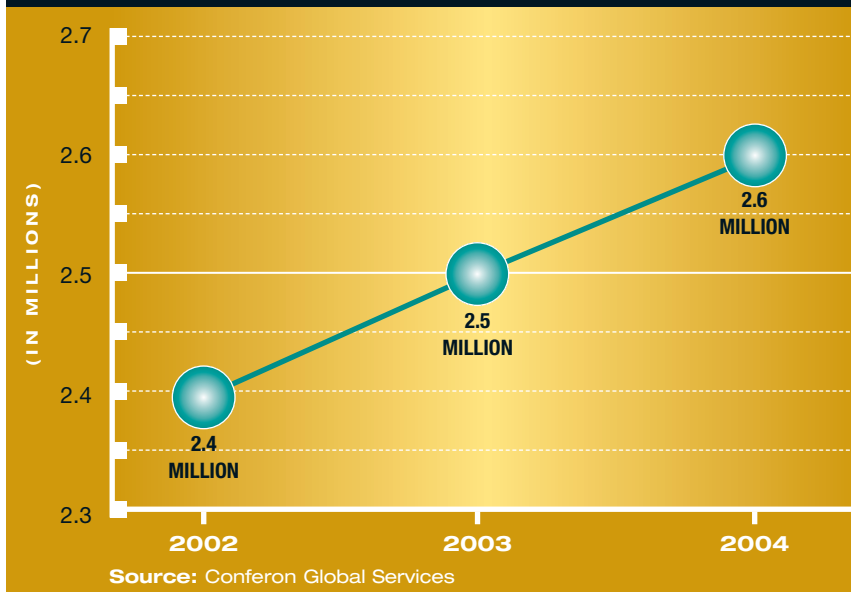


CONFERON GLOBAL SERVICES COMPANIES'

Meeting Mentor

The Leading Educational Publication for Senior Corporate, Association and Tradeshow Planners

CGS TRADE SHOW/CONVENTION ATTENDANCE INDEX



New CGS Report Confirms Steady Attendance Growth

BY CAROL BIALKOWSKI

Trade shows are a growth industry. Reports of a decline in attendance, widely disseminated in a report by The Brookings Institution earlier this year, are dispelled by a recent analysis of events serviced by ExpoExchange, Conferon and ITS, industry-leading companies of Conferon Global Services (CGS).

The analysis compared year-to-year attendance figures for more than 200 events held annually in 2002, 2003 and 2004. (The 2002 baseline was 2.4 million attendees.) The find-

ings? Average attendance at these trade shows and association conventions grew at the rate of 2.2 percent in 2003 and 2.7 percent in 2004. And for shows held in the first quarter of 2005, attendance spiked an additional 4.24 percent

"Events in the CGS Trade Show/Convention Attendance Index," noted CGS president Bruce Harris, "represent a wide cross-section of industries. There are clearly identifiable growth sectors as well as market segments that have struggled. But the breadth of the entire sample offers an

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RFID Platforms Adding Value To Event ROI

BY BOB LUCKE

Much attention has been paid in our industry recently to an emerging technology—RFID. You can hardly pick up a magazine, journal or newsletter without seeing some mention of it. It has been touted by some as the "next great thing to happen to meetings, conventions and trade shows." Before you decide whether you agree with this claim, it might be helpful to learn more about what exactly RFID is, how it works, how it will be applied at events and what benefits we can expect to gain from it.

RFID—radio frequency identification—is actually not that new. It has been used in one form or another in our daily lives for quite a few years. Consider, for example, Exxon's Speed-Pass (pay-at-the-pump), EZPass (toll pass), building access cards, etc. In

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The Insider

The Write Stuff

It's time for meeting planners to step up to the plate. If you've been reading the industry press for the past six months, you've seen many stories about purported declines in meeting and trade show attendance and cuts in funding for local convention and visitors bureaus.

It has been difficult for me and many others, who depend on CVBs to provide quality service, to sit back as politicians "cut and slash" in the mistaken belief that these reductions won't adversely impact their local economies. Because this action makes no sense, we need to ask: "Why don't these local officials see what we see?"

What they see are the dollars budgeted for association memberships, promotional mailings, site visits and entertainment. What they don't see are the countless hours spent trying to win bids for future events. Or the highly competitive environment that all bureaus operate in. Or the enormous effort required to shepherd an event from booking through the days of arrival and departure.

The fact that city leaders don't understand this tells me that we, as planners, have done the bureaus a tremendous disservice. We have readily accepted everything CVBs offer...without making enough of an effort to show our appreciation. If we

as customers don't make that effort, we will continue to put bureaus and all they do for us at risk.

There's a simple solution. If bureau marketing or service contributes to your meeting's success, write a letter. Address it to the mayor of the city where you met, and send copies to the city council president and the editor of the local newspaper. Let them know how valuable their bureau was in bringing your business to that city. (Note: Be sure to also copy the head of the local bureau.)

Mention the specific things the bureau did to get your business...and what it did to support your group while it was in town. This point is critical—explain to the city officials that without the bureau's efforts you wouldn't have booked the destination. And that, thanks to their efforts, both you and your attendees will be back.

Conferon Global Services has begun its own "Mayoral Campaign." And we're encouraging the entire industry



to follow suit. To help you identify who these letters should be addressed to, we have posted simple instructions on our web site. Just go to csgcompanies.com and click on the area at the top marked "Tips for Writing CVB/Mayoral Letters." Print out the instructions and you'll be ready to go.

In advance, I want to thank you for responding to this urgent call. If you have time, please copy me as well.

Bruce Harris, CMP
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Has Attrition on F&B Become the Norm?

Once upon a time...attrition applied only to anticipated guest room revenue. Today, however, there is food and beverage attrition, attrition on meeting space and, occasionally, damages if spending on ancillary services falls below a certain level. Have these become industry norms?

During a recent forum, *Meeting Mentor* asked industry attorneys John Foster of Foster, Jensen & Gulley, Jonathan Howe of Howe & Hutton, and Peter Connolly, former general counsel for Hyatt Hotels, to comment on this issue. Here's what they had to say:

John Foster: "I don't have a problem with a contract that includes damages for performance-based issues covering different revenue sources. But what both sides have to understand is that the profit margins are different in each area. So don't lump them all into some sort of sliding scale."

Jonathan Howe: "Never sign an F&B clause that specifies the menu of a particular event. Instead, include in the contract how much money you are going to spend. Menu prices are not confirmed until six months out. So if attendance goes south, the same budget could turn a banquet entree

from chicken to filet mignon."

Peter Connolly: "This is one area where the hotel parts company a little bit on the issue of 'damages' versus 'revenue.' Take a full-service hotel with two restaurants, a bar and a spa. When half a group doesn't show up, a hotel can't simply shut down a restaurant. The hotel incurs administrative, labor and overhead expenses to keep the business running; it needs to find some way to pay for that."

For more details about the legal forum, see the Winter 2005 issue of *Meeting Mentor* at www.conferon.com/solution/index.html.



CONFERON

Contracts Corner

BY ROBIN ROTH

Get a Grip on Risky Attendee Activities

The popularity of reality TV and the quest for physical fitness are spilling over to meetings and conventions, where the traditional golf tournament is being supplanted—or even replaced—by riskier activities such as white water rafting, hot air ballooning, wave running or horseback riding. A downside of this fondness for the adrenaline rush is the potential for lawsuits, which is why many organizations are choosing to shift the risk of liability that may arise out of participation in the event to the participants themselves.

The document used to shift the risk of liability is called a release and waiver. While not absolute protections

against liability, they provide an excellent layer of protection. The document states that the attendees know that the activity they are voluntarily electing to participate in is potentially hazardous to their health, they *release* the group from liability due to any resulting injuries and *waive* any claims they might have against the organization for liability.

Every participant should be required to sign a release and waiver for any kind of activity in which he or she chooses to engage. The language should be as specific as possible—specific to the event, the potential dangers and the potential claims that are being waived.

Signatures must be gathered close to the event and not months ahead, but neither should the document be thrust out for signature moments before the boat leaves the dock. A suggested timeline is to include a notice in the registration materials stating that a release and waiver will be required and the actual document signed upon arrival at the meeting. All participants should be required to sign—no signature, no participation.

For more information, see the Summer 2003 issue of *Meeting Mentor* at www.conferon.com/solution/index.html.

Robin Roth is senior contracts editor at Conferon.

'Is the Toilet Paper Included?'

Questions to Ask When Using A Unique Venue

BY SUSAN HENDERSON, CMP, DMCP

Unique venues such as museums, historic homes and airplane hangars can be the setting for fabulous and memorable occasions. But if you don't know the right questions to ask before you book the site, your event could be a disaster.

Consider this real-life example. When doing a final walk-through just prior to an event being held in a new venue spawned by the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, our staff checked the restrooms. They were clean, but there wasn't enough toilet paper. When we brought it to the attention of the venue manager, the response was, "We don't provide it." Hence, a new addition to the following checklist of questions to ask.

■ **The Facility Itself.** Read the contract carefully and check on rental fees, cleaning before and after the event, and damage charges. Make sure you understand what, if any, additional costs may be incurred and what the procedure is for you to authorize those. (You don't want to be presented with a \$5,000 electrical bill when you haven't been apprised of that potential.)

Back to our toilet paper question: Are there enough restrooms or do you need to provide comfort stations? More restrooms are always needed for a seated dinner than a reception, and it's nice to have a higher ratio of women's to men's rooms. Are the restrooms stocked and staffed throughout the event?

■ **Equipment and Furnishings.** What does the venue have on hand? Is it included or at an additional cost? Do you need to rent or provide tables,

chairs, linens, glassware or votive candles? If the site has this equipment, be sure to find out the size of the tables and type of chairs...and check the condition they are in. Is there a "to scale" floor plan that you can import to room set software? This can prevent the last-minute rearranging of tables, props, lighting, staging, etc.

Check the scheduling and cost for delivery, setup and tear-down. Many venues include a fixed number of total hours in their fee, with extra time at an additional cost. Poor planning on supplier load-in can create a ripple effect, causing a mad scramble to be ready on time.

What kind of permanent kitchen or caterer's area is on site? Is there an exclusive food provider or a list of caterers to choose from? There's typically an advantage of working with a caterer who is familiar and experienced with the venue.

■ **Power.** Determine all of your power needs and make sure there is ample power for ambient lighting, catering and entertainment. If you are working with a new site (particularly if it's an older or historic building), have an electrician check it out and consider a generator. It's no fun to blow a breaker as soon as the band comes on stage! Does the venue have heat and air conditioning, and do they charge to use it? You may need to add space heaters or air conditioning systems.

■ **Transportation and Access.** If buses will be used, how close can they get to the facility? Where can they drop off and stage? Is there parking for guests and/or suppliers? Valet

service? Remember, the first impression guests have upon arrival is often their lasting one.

■ **Legal Issues.** Do local zoning regulations allow for your event? Does the venue have a liquor license? A noise curfew? Many facilities are loath to share their written emergency plans, but a meeting is certainly in order to discuss how to handle fire alarms, bomb threats and other potential hazards. Also be sure to request a certificate of insurance.

■ **Tenting.** This lengthy topic is best addressed with a tenting expert. Issues include: the surface area and whether sub-flooring will be necessary; the appropriate type of tent and support structure; power and lighting; and local permits and fire codes.

■ **Security/Medical.** Is there on-site security, and is it included in the rental fee? Based on the complexity of the event and demographic makeup of the group, you might consider augmenting security with a private provider. Will you need traffic assistance? Find out what other activities are taking place nearby on the date of your party.

■ **Contingency Plans.** Remember Murphy's Law. Never assume anything and attempt to anticipate anything that could go wrong. The more "Plan Bs" you have in mind, the easier it is to go with the flow and adapt to challenges along the way.

Susan Henderson, CMP, DMCP, is president of Atlanta Arrangements.



Meeting Nightmares

So you think *you* had a bad day? Check out these real-life “meeting nightmares” and you’ll no doubt think that your job is a dream!

“Blindsided at the Buffet

When I was a CSM at a hotel, I was in charge of a group for which we planned a buffet lunch. When the attendees arrived, we discovered that nearly all were sight impaired and thus could not see what was on the buffet and what was written on the wonderful menu cards next to each item. I was shocked that no one thought to men-

tion that the attendees would be sight impaired. We had to scramble and find enough staff so that there was someone at each food item to verbally describe the item and put some of it on the plate. The sight-impaired attendee held his/her plate in one hand and walking stick in the other.”

Bill Reed, CMP
Vice President, Mid-Atlantic Region, Conferon

“Overseas Obstacles

We faced several obstacles during our recent annual convention in a fairly large city in a foreign country. Six weeks out from our off-site dinner for 850 attendees, our contracted venue closed its doors in a rent dispute. Just prior to and during this hurdle, our main DMC contact left the company, our customs agent went on medical leave due to heart complications, and we had to move our 2006 conference from the last week in April to the first week in February due to issues with the center. We lost three months in the pre-planning process and were already less than one year out without having completed our 2005 conference!

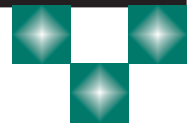
“Once on site, one of our committee members was rushed to the hospital after having a stroke in his hotel room, signs appeared with typos after perfect proofs were approved, our pre-printed registration materials for more than 1,000 people were in our registration company’s missing luggage (don’t ask), and major components of our association booth were either incorrect or stuck in customs. Everything, of course, was pulled off without notice to the attendees, but it sure was a rough ride.”

Anonymous

Care to share your own meeting nightmare? Send it to MeetingMentor@cgscompanies.com. The “best”—or should we say the “worst”—will be featured in the next issue of *Meeting Mentor*.

Maximizing Revenue

BY DEIRDRE BOURKE, CMP



Pre-Planning Takes the Bite Out of Bill Review

An overnight delivery arrives at the office with your name on it and you are instantly struck with a sinking feeling...the master bill for your most recent conference has just arrived. For many meeting managers, reviewing

a hotel bill falls into the same category as stuffing registration packets or worse, going to the dentist. As a result, some meeting planners simply pay the bill without reviewing it thoroughly, which may lead to financial losses for the organization. (It's not uncommon for mistakes on a final bill to total \$1,000 or more.) At the opposite end of the spectrum are planners who spend hours trying to make sense of the bill, which takes them away from other important projects.

Fortunately, reviewing your final bill does not have to be an arduous task. In fact, it can be quite simple if you've spent a sufficient amount of time clearly communicating your needs to the hotel in the pre-planning stage. Read on for specific information on how to handle the entire bill review process—from pre-planning to problem solving.

Pre-Planning

1. Establish, in writing, deposit due dates and amounts with the hotel.
2. Complete and mail the credit application to the hotel on a timely basis; contact the property's accounting department to confirm direct-billing approval.
3. If applicable, turn in the tax-exempt certificate to the facility.
4. Provide the hotel with a list of people who are authorized to charge items to the master account, along with any restrictions or limita-

tions, and be sure this information is included in the hotel resume. (A staff member may be authorized to sign off on business center expenses, for example, but not additions to food and beverage functions.)

5. Provide clear instructions to the hotel about the specific charges that should be posted to the master account, such as room and tax, food and beverage, audio-visual, electrical, telecommunications, business center, etc.

6. Advise the hotel in advance if different master accounts are required. (Associations often require a separate master account for the conference, the charitable foundation, etc.) Establishing multiple master accounts is a simple way to segregate your bills in advance so that you don't have to sort them out after the event.

7. Similarly, if you have sponsored functions, you can establish multiple master accounts so that all charges associated with those functions remain separate from your main master account.

8. Confirm with the hotel that all charges posted to the master account must have backup, including copies of invoices, signed checks and banquet event orders (BEO).

9. Set up a conference call with the accounts receivable contact and convention services manager to review how you need the master

account to be organized. (Do you need, for example, banquets or room and tax to be broken down in a particular way?) Send printed examples—actual previous bills or your own mockups—and review these examples with the accounting department.

10. Provide a detailed final rooming list to accounting that includes:

- names of people you have assigned to complimentary rooms, staff rooms, specialty suites, etc.
- specific billing instructions for each guest such as: "Mr. John Jones—Room/Tax to master"
- instructions that attendees are responsible for incidental expenses

11. Review and sign the BEOs and resume just in case they indicate any charges that you may not be aware of or have not agreed upon.

12. Be sure the hotel knows that you need to review the master account prior to departure.

On Site

Review all billing instructions and master account format in person with both the accounts receivable contact and convention services manager. (Conduct this review before or after the pre-conference meeting, but *before* any charges are posted on the master account.)

1. Review and sign checks daily, writing notes on each check. For example:

- Describe the event and actual number of attendees, note if the guarantee matches your records, confirm that the prices on the check

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Pre-Planning Takes the Bite Out of Bill Review

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are correct.

- Specify that the master account is to be billed, include any special coding the event should have.
- Jot down any other notes that will help you back at the office.

2 ■ Try to review the master account daily.

3 ■ Keep copies of all signed checks together in an orderly manner.

4 ■ Keep a record of any changes to the rooming list, audio-visual equipment, etc.

On-Site Bill Review

1 ■ Review the bill for any major errors at the end of the meeting.

2 ■ Do not sign off on the bill until you have had a chance to carefully examine it back at the office—after you have recuperated from the meeting.

3 ■ Resolve all disputes or complaints, such as service problems, quality issues and/or actual counts on food and beverage functions, prior to departure—while they are still fresh in your mind and you have some negotiating leverage. Try to arrive at a solution that benefits those who

have been inconvenienced by the problems, and do not leave the property until a satisfactory settlement is reached. Resolving disputes *after* a meeting rarely results in an agreement of terms by *all* parties.

Final Bill Review

1 ■ Compare the final bill to the signed checks and any other backup material.

2 ■ Be sure the hotel provides you with *all* backup material.

3 ■ Make certain that all items posted on the master account have been authorized.

4 ■ Compare the room and tax portion of the bill to all of your rooming lists, checking that all of the rooms you are being charged for are actually in your block and that you are only being billed for the authorized number of nights for each attendee.

5 ■ Review all credits to the account, including deposits, complimentary rooms, tax-exemption, etc. (Credits often don't make it to the final bill.)

Addressing Discrepancies

Any mistakes found in the final bill should be addressed in writing and include:

- items disputed and the reasons
- the total undisputed balance for which you have enclosed a check
- a statement that once the hotel justifies the disputed items with proper backup, the remainder of the bill will be paid within 30 days

Troubleshooting

If the bill arrives in no semblance of order, even after you have taken all of the above precautions, try the following measures:

1 ■ Call the hotel's accounts receivable contact and convention services manager, explain the situation and ask them to come up with a solution. (They may be able to talk you through the bill over the phone.)

2 ■ If the issue cannot be resolved by phone, return the master account bill to the hotel to redo and be sure to advise the hotel that you are doing so. (Note: Take this action *only* as a last resort. Do *not* use it as a stall tactic.)

3 ■ Once you have resolved the dispute, promptly send the property a check for the balance of the bill in order to avoid getting a reputation for not paying bills on time and possibly losing future direct-billing privileges.

Finally, take stock of the entire bill review process—from pre-planning to troubleshooting (if applicable)—and decide how you might improve the procedures the next time around. Remember, not only are you responsible for planning an extraordinary conference, but you also need to ensure its financial success.

Deirdre Bourke, CMP, is an account executive at Conferon.

Coming Events

JULY

Meeting Professionals International, World Education Congress

July 10–12, Miami; (972) 702-3001; www.mpiweb.org

TS2—The Trade Show About Trade Shows

July 12–14, Washington, D.C.; (703) 683-8500; www.tsea.org/ts2

AUGUST

Conferon Global Services' Meet With Success

August 2, St. Louis; (800) 246-9011

American Society of Association Executives, Annual Meeting

August 13–16, Nashville; (202) 626-2723; www.asaenet.org

National Business Travel Association, Annual Convention and Trade Show

August 14–17, San Diego; (703) 684-0836; www.nbta.org

International Association of Hispanic Meeting Professionals, Annual Conference and Trade Show

August 31–September 3, Washington, D.C.; (281) 333-1552; www.hispanicmeetingprofessionals.com

SEPTEMBER

The Motivation Show

September 27–29, Chicago; (630) 434-7779; www.themotivationshow.com

NOVEMBER

Society of Incentive and Travel Executives, International Conference

November 3–6, Toronto; (312) 321-5148; www.site-intl.org

Insurance Conference Planners Association, Annual Meeting

November 6–10, New York City; (312) 245-1023; www.icpanet.com

International Association for Exhibition Management, Annual Meeting and Exhibition

November 29–December 1, Atlanta; (972) 458-8002; www.iaem.org

DECEMBER

Conferon Global Services' Meet With Success

December 7, Denver; (800) 246-9011

AD: Lexington CVB

1/2 page horizontal

Do's and Don'ts

- >> **DON'T** pay meeting room rental charges unless the charges were identified in your contract.
- >> **DON'T** assume that you have to pay tax on any attrition or cancellation fees you may have. Some states don't consider these "sales" and therefore don't tax them.
- >> **DON'T** assume that the amount of the final bill will be the same as the bill you signed on site. Discrepancies are not uncommon.
- >> **DON'T** pre-pay your entire estimated bill (if at all possible). As long as there is still money "on the table," you have negotiating power.
- >> **DO** ask for a 7 percent or more discount for payment on departure (after full review) as opposed to payment in 30 or more days.
- >> **DO** ask if your group gets mileage credits, hotel points, etc. based on the amount of your master account or overall value of your meeting.
- >> **DO** pay the undisputed portion of your master account promptly in order to keep a good credit rating.
- >> **DON'T** assume the hotel will allow you to make our own payment plan.

New CGS Report Confirms Steady Attendance Growth

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accurate snapshot of heightened trade show and convention activity.

“Benchmarking attendance figures from the high point in 1999 to the low point during the recession, which included the aftermath of 9/11, presents a skewed picture of industry trends,” he added, referring to The Brookings Institution’s report. “The 2002 to 2005 attendance history gives a better picture of what the short-term future holds for us. It’s an analysis CGS will continue to track and share with the industry.”

Industry leaders like Michael Gehrisch, president and CEO of the International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus, concurred with Harris during interviews with *Meeting Mentor*. “The problem concerning the [Brookings] report is that it sloughed off 9/11, SARS, the war in Iraq and some pretty tough economic times as being inconsequential, and obviously that wasn’t the case. These are important points that were left out,” he noted.

“Are there situations where attendance has legitimately been down? Yes,” Gehrisch continued. “There is definitely increased competition. In some markets, to be candid, there are centers that probably shouldn’t have

Trade Shows Change With the Times

SEVERAL YEARS of lagging attendance following recession and 9/11 have prompted many trade show managers to rethink their events, according to Mary Power, CAE, president and CEO of the Convention Industry Council.

“We’re seeing a lot more co-location of similar shows in which one show comes in a day and a half early or two shows hold their events jointly and pool exhibitors and attendees,” Power observed. “Regional and national meetings are co-oping as well. Why hold a regional meeting if the national meeting is going to be in the region that year?”

Trade shows also are beefing up their educational content in an effort to attract more attendees. “It used to be that the only way you could be up on the latest products is to go to the show. Today new products are coming out all the time. The exhibition is still a key element of a trade show, but there needs to be more,” she noted.

Technology is playing a major role in enhancing the trade show experience too. “Show managers are leveraging technology to increase pre-sell and follow-up for exhibitors. Today attendees can preview the show floor plan and set up appointments with suppliers so that they’ve got a time slot instead of walking by and hoping the person they want to see is there,” Power pointed out. “Using technology, attendees can spend their time more effectively on the trade show floor.”

The bottom line? “Shows that have always done what they’ve always done year after year won’t show growth,” she said. “Shows that are more nimble and more reactive to changing environments and the needs of both exhibitors and attendees are doing very well.” —C.B.

been built or expanded. But overall our members are seeing increased attendance now.”

“In late ‘04 and well into the second quarter of ‘05 the experience universally seems to be extremely good in terms of exhibit sales and attendance. Several key shows have had record attendance—the Consumer Electronics Show, NAMM [The International Music Products Association], CONEXPO-CON/AGG, American Association of Critical Care Nurses,” he

pointed out. “The evidence is all anecdotal, but it adds up to a conclusion that I feel comfortable about.”

Hacker’s conclusion is supported by other evidence as well. “The airlines are running at peak capacity with the equipment they have in use now—around 82 percent, which is phenomenal compared to a few years ago. The hotels are clearly enjoying a seller’s market for the first time in three to four years. We know that because of complaints from planners about pernicious policies,” he continued. “All of this evidence adds up to show that if this is an industry in decline, no one has been informed about it.”

“If this is an industry in decline, no one has been informed about it.”

“We have not done a statistically verifiable survey. But I’ve been

Members of the International Association for Exhibition Management are also enjoying increased attendance, according to Steven Hacker, CAE, president of the organization. “We have not done a statistically verifiable survey. But I’ve been

“In late ‘04 and well into the second quarter of ‘05 the experience universally seems to be extremely good in terms of exhibit sales and attendance. Several key shows have had record attendance—the Consumer Electronics Show, NAMM [The International Music Products Association], CONEXPO-CON/AGG, American Association of Critical Care Nurses,” he

Carol Bialkowski is the editor in chief of Meeting Mentor.

RFID Platforms Adding Value to Event ROI

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fact, much of the science behind today's RFID came as a byproduct of research done for the advancement of radar systems during WWII.

In the simplest sense, RFID is made up of two basic component parts—the tag and the reader. The system utilizes radio waves to communicate between the tag and the reader, possible when a tag is close enough to a reader to be “seen.” The tags consist of a small silicon microchip attached to a microthin foil antenna, both of which can be laminated between two layers of paper. The readers consist of an antenna and a transponder, both of which are enclosed in a plastic case about the size of a small pizza box.

In order for a tag to be “read” by a reader, it must first be within range. With tags of the 915 megahertz variety, read range can be as far as eight feet. (Some tag manufacturers claim longer ranges, but tests prove otherwise.) Other tags that operate at a 13.56 megahertz radio frequency only have a reliable read range of about three to six inches. When a reader reads a tag, it records the unique identification number contained in the tag into the reader's memory.

So why is this technology important to those of us in the event industry? The core benefit that RFID provides is having the ability to unobtrusively record when and where a tag is read automatically. Specifically, when a tag is worn by a registrant (incorporated into a typical paper name badge), RFID readers can be deployed wherever you want to record data.

Many events offer educational seminars, meetings and conferences where it is a requirement to record participants' attendance. Various systems have been used for session tracking over the years, but they all require some action on the part of the partici-



RFID is made up of two basic component parts—the tag, which can be incorporated into a name badge, and the reader, which is about the size of a small pizza box.

plant, such as inserting a magnetic stripe card into a reader, swiping a badge or depositing a paper ticket. This works fairly well, but it is completely dependent on the registrant to complete the process.

When RFID readers are placed at the entrance to each meeting room, attendance is automatically recorded each time someone enters or exits— instantaneously. No action is required on the part of the participant besides walking through the doorway. By compiling a comprehensive database of session attendance, meeting planners can begin to make all sorts of decisions regarding logistics, meeting content, marketing and CEU/CME certification.

Another valuable benefit of utilizing RFID relates to tracking attendance in and out of the exhibit hall. Many show managers are being chal-

lenged to document who the trade show visitors are, how much time they spent visiting the exhibition floor, what their demographic profile is, etc. Prior to deploying RFID readers at the entrances to the exhibit halls, it was virtually impossible to know any of these things.

As exhibitors become more demanding in their exhibit experience expectations, show managers are going to be forced to demonstrate the value of the audience they promise to deliver. RFID is a perfect platform on which to build relevant marketing. To go a step further, one could deploy additional RFID readers at numerous locations throughout the exhibit hall to more thoroughly

track attendance patterns.

Before you decide if RFID is right for your event, consider this. RFID is an emerging technology, meaning that many aspects of it are rapidly evolving. Manufacturers of tags and readers are announcing advancements virtually every week. And RFID is not inexpensive to use. Prices will come down as more equipment is sold, but don't expect it to be cheap anytime in the next two to five years. You can expect to spend at least \$1 to \$2 per registrant plus the cost of readers; the total cost could be tens of thousands of dollars. However, RFID will most definitely have a profound impact on how we produce events now and in the near future.

Bob Lucke is executive vice president of business development at Conferon Global Services.



How to Deal with Labor Disputes

A number of meeting, convention and trade show planners and sponsors recently have been contacted regarding a dispute between labor unions and the hotels

at which the attendees of their event will stay. The callers have asked planners to move their events and offered to help with “alternative accommodations and good future contract lan-

guage for hotel booking.” If you happen to receive such a call, take the following steps recommended by the Convention Industry Council:

- Take notes of the conversation, identifying:
 1. date and time of the telephone call
 2. name of the individual
 3. the organization he or she said they represent
 4. the telephone and fax number of the individual
 5. any statement made by the caller
 6. any other pertinent information
- Under no circumstances should you record the conversation without first checking with legal counsel. Many states prohibit the recording of telephone or other conversations without the consent of all the parties involved.
- Contact your management and legal counsel as to what, if any, action you should take regarding the information you gathered.
- If permitted by your management and legal counsel, fax a copy of the information to the individual who contacted you, stating that you are verifying your conversation.
- If permitted by your management and legal counsel, fax a copy of the information to your sales representative at the hotel.

The Winner Is...

Congratulations to **Janette Eng**, director, convention and meeting services, Associated General Contractors of America, Alexandria, Va.

She is the lucky winner of a free roundtrip ticket on Southwest Airlines from *Meeting Mentor*. To enter to win, simply fill out the fax reply form in this issue and return it to: (972) 390-1021.

EE Veteran Joins BDMetrics

Conferon Global Services (CGS) and BDMetrics recently announced the transition of **Mike Godsey** to vice president of business development at BDMetrics. Godsey, a 15-year veteran of CGS's ExpoExchange division, was instrumental in the creation of the ExpoExchange SmartEventSM product, developed by BDMetrics and brought to the trade show industry through the collaborative marketing efforts of both companies.

"Mike will transition into a full-time role with BDMetrics to focus on the market demand of SmartEvent," said Dave Lutz, president of ExpoExchange. "Mike's ability to concentrate on SmartEvent demonstrates his personal confidence in the future growth and importance of this offering to the trade show industry."

One year after its market introduction, SmartEvent is being implemented at 78 events representing over 1 million attendees. The revolutionary new technology was ranked number one in top trends for 2005 by a leading trade show industry association.

More Changes at EE

Brian McAllister, a 12-year veteran of ExpoExchange, was recently promoted to senior vice president of show services at the company. In his new position, McAllister is responsible for overseeing the project coordinators, account executives and other client-facing employees. **Chris Jensen**, a former account manager, replaces McAllister as vice president of national accounts. In this new position, he manages one of ExpoExchange's show services teams. Jensen has been with the company for more than eight years. **Brian Duckett** also was recently hired as a vice president of national accounts. A 20-year veteran of the trade show industry, he most recently



operated The Duckett Group, which provided project management and consulting services for exhibitions.

Congrex Creates New Company

Congrex Holding BV recently announced the creation of **Congrex Americas SA** based in Caracas, Venezuela and Panama City, Panama. The new company was established by acquiring two companies in Latin America—Congreca CA and Asocius.com CA—which are active in the fields of conference and exhibition management, association management, IT systems development and technology services. Congrex Americas SA will have some 30 permanent staff members.

"The creation of Congrex Americas SA allows us to provide integrated management and IT services to a wide variety of clients in the Latin American marketplace," said Javier Montilla, managing director of the new company. "Being part of the Congrex Group will further allow us to benefit from the marketing and operating capacities that Congrex unfolds around the globe."

Conferon Welcomes Two Execs

Two new account executives recently joined Conferon's St. Louis Regional Office. **Mike Rowan** comes to the company from the Gaylord Opryland Nashville, where he spent more than 19 years, most recently serving

as director of national accounts for the Midwest region. **Linda Walter** brings more than 24 years of hospitality industry experience to Conferon. Previously, she worked for AACSB International as director of events and sponsorships.

Meet with Success

Need a refresher course on meeting planning? Conferon is hosting complimentary Meet With Success[®] training programs in Chicago on June 23, Washington, D.C. on June 28, St. Louis on August 2 and Denver on December 7.

The full-day interactive seminars have been called "the best short course in meeting planning" by past attendees. Topics covered will include revenue management, attendance promotion, contract negotiations, food and beverage trends, room block management and much more.

For more information, or to receive an invitation to attend Meet with Success, contact Conferon at MeetingMentor@cgscompanies.com.

Come See Us

Conferon Global Services will be participating in several industry events in the coming months. Following is a partial listing:

JULY 10-12 ■ Meeting Professionals International, World Education Congress, Miami

JULY 11-14 ■ TS2—The Trade Show About Trade Shows, Washington, D.C.

JULY 13-16 ■ Council of Engineering and Scientific Societies, Annual Meeting, Portland, Oregon

AUGUST 13-16 ■ American Society of Association Executives, Annual Meeting, Nashville

AUGUST 14-17 ■ National Business Travel Association, Annual Convention and Trade Show, San Diego



Conferon

Conferon, the nation's largest independent planning firm, serves more than 800 corporate and association clients, manages more than 2,200 meetings, books more than 1.8 million room nights and generates more than \$300 million in group hotel room revenues annually. Established in 1970, Conferon services include site research and selection, contract analysis and negotiations, comprehensive on-site support, registration and housing management, full-service graphic design and marketing, and trade show sales and management for events from 50-20,000. Headquartered in Cleveland, Conferon has regional offices in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Denver, St. Louis and Washington, DC.



ITS

ITS offers complete, integrated registration and lead management services with a partnership approach. In addition to its core services, ExpoExchange offers attendee/exhibitor business relationship optimization (SmartEvent), personalized e-mail marketing, on-site information kiosks, year-round online event services and more. Each year, ExpoExchange serves more than 300 events, processing more than 3 million attendees and working with over 50,000 exhibiting companies. ExpoExchange is headquartered in Frederick, MD.

ExpoExchange

ITS offers complete, integrated housing, pre-registration and travel services to individual events and CVBs. Established in 1943, ITS employs a customized, full-service business model, including real-time online and staffed reservations, full-color HTML confirmations and comprehensive reporting. Each year, ITS manages nearly 2 million room nights while serving more than 130 clients. ITS also provides housing reservation services to some of America's top convention cities, including Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, New Orleans, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Washington, DC and Hawaii. ITS is headquartered in Deerfield, IL.



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Learned Behavior

How quickly they forget. During the Goldilocks economy of the late 1990s, the meeting industry's oldest living editor continually warned that attrition was a ticking time bomb. An inevitable downturn in the economic cycle,

I predicted, would leave many organizations committed to room blocks they'd be helpless to fill. And so it came to pass.

The severity of the damage was compounded many times over in the aftermath of 9/11, when room pickup plunged in the wake of soft demand and Internet discounting. While the reflex response among meeting managers was to reduce blocks for future meetings, it came too late for business already on the books. Meeting sponsors and hotels are still sorting through the rubble.

“Any organization that considered 2001 to be a one-time ‘Perfect Storm’ nightmare will be in for a rude awakening.”

Published research indicating that concern about attrition is abating should raise the industry's collective eyebrows. When the economy again slides into recession—be it six months or six years from now—you can go to the bank that there will be a parallel decline in room pickup. Any organization that considered 2001 to be a one-time “Perfect Storm” nightmare will be in for a rude awakening.

While attrition has been the buzzword, it's really just a symptom of a much more insidious disease,

heretofore dubbed “Room Block Management-itis.” While it's a recurrent illness, the good news is that some organizations have discovered a cure. While group history and formulas for projecting meeting attendance are well and good, they don't amount to a hill of beans unless and until attendees and exhibitors become invested in filling contracted room blocks.

It's easy to preach the need for more education. But it's far more effective to offer, as one group did, a \$150 registration fee discount for

booking within the contracted block. Or to offer additional “priority points” to exhibitors who block in contracted hotels. These measures, currently positioned as incentives, eventually become learned behaviors...and a powerful hedge against the fickle fortunes of the economy.

The Convention Industry Council spent the better part of a year raising awareness of the problem through its Project Attrition. What's next? One initiative is the forthcoming publication of the Conferon Global Services



“Guide to Room Block Management.” Produced in cooperation with Hilton Hotels and Resorts, the 68-page guide will trace the entire process—from analyzing group history and contracting blocks to maximizing attendance and auditing room pickup.

Make no mistake: Attrition will remain both a deterrent and a remedy. But the win/win for all parties remains putting heads in contracted beds. Effective room block management is the best antidote for the dizziness caused by swings in the economic pendulum.

Peter Shure
Editorial Director

P.P.S. All association and trade show manager subscribers to *Meeting Mentor* will automatically receive a complimentary copy of the room block management guide. Corporate planners interested in receiving a copy should forward an e-mail request to MeetingMentor@cgscompanies.com.