

Hotel Business Review

Best practices, insights & trends

Conference Presentations: Higher Technology, Higher Expectations

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Over the last 10 years, many things have changed conference and convention attendees' behavior – the way they travel, and the way they conduct business from the road. Further, there is no question that the rapid advancement of technology has also had a great impact on the way a conference or convention actually operates. Let's take a trip back not too many years ago when an overhead projector was a commonplace presentation tool. Those days seem like ages ago but in reality, not too many years have passed. Now presentations are turning into a form of entertainment. Presentations today involve a wide variety of up-to-the-minute technology that every Convention Service Manager (CSM) and Meeting Planner needs to have a working knowledge of.

A member of the Association for Convention Operations Management (ACOM) and a technology guru, Dirk Bohns has first-hand experience with the new technology that is now gracing the stages at conferences and conventions. Bohns has provided a wealth of knowledge about the new forms of projectors, projection screens and monitors, and presentation technologies, along with a glimpse into what the future holds for technology in the meetings industry.

According to Bohns, here are some trends to look out for:

Widescreen is Here to Stay

The widescreen presentation format is becoming increasingly popular and is here to stay. The usual setup for a widescreen presentation is to use three projectors. The three projectors will overlap images to create a single seamless image projected onto a wide screen setup. This form of technology creates an image quality that is higher resolution than a High Definition image and allows the creation of a single surface with multiple elements including fly-in logos, I-Mag (image magnification) images from a camera, Power Point presentations and HD playback. ("I-Mag" images are live and will appear on one or more screens) The benefit of having a widescreen provides a panoramic viewable surface and a backdrop that can be infinitely changed throughout the event.

Finding the Right Projector

As the surface area for projection screens is getting bigger, the projector is getting smaller. Projectors come in a wide variety of lumens, a measure of the perceived power of light, and most can easily be plugged into a wall outlet. Hotels commonly use 2500-6000 lumens projectors that run on a regular 110/15 amp circuit. This projector is smaller and easier to handle for a small conference space. The larger space of a convention center often requires using projectors that will have a lumens level of 9,000 -12,000. The chip technology in this projector is improving every day and a dark chip projector will offer presenters the best contrast levels available. High definition is another option being offered in projectors with many high end projectors able to display a resolution of 720p (1280 x 720) or 1080i (1920 x 1080) with 1080i being the higher resolution ("p" and "i" refer to the type of scan — progressive vs. interlaced, and 720 and 1080 refer to the number of scans per frame). Attention needs to be paid to how the signal will be passed to the projector, what distance is involved, and what the playback device is going to be.

Flat Screen Monitors Provide Versatility for Presenters

Flat screen monitors are also being offered in high definition and the technology is geared towards 1080i but 1080p is now starting to emerge as well. Flat screen monitors are changing the face of exhibit space as they take up less room than a traditional television monitor. These monitors allow presenters to switch between data and video displays with one click of a button. They are also on the forefront in changing the face of booth customization as they are often integrated into the design concept.

USB Technology Transforms Transporting and Uploading

These new presentation techniques have made great strides in the meeting industry and so has the technology used to transport and upload the presentation on the association or company's website. USB technology has vastly improved over the last few years as keys and portable hard disks have grown in capacity and offer a reliable form in which to transfer files quickly. This form of technology works very well for small meetings but for large meetings a presentation management system is still preferred.

Presentation Management: Putting Technology to Work for You

Presentation management systems allow the presenter to upload their Power Point e-files to a website in advance of the conference. When the presenter arrives at the conference he/she will check into a speaker-ready room at registration and confirm the e-files have uploaded. The e-files are then sent to which ever room the presentation is scheduled for and the presenter just has to show up on time. In order for a presentation management system to work, the website needs to be equipped with either an internal LAN structure or the audio visual supplier will need to run cabling to each room that will be used for presentations. High Speed lines need to be at a level between 5 and 7 Mbits (megabits) for downloads from the main server to the server on-site.

Improvements to Power Point

Power Point has also reached new levels of flexibility. Presenters can now add embedded video files to their presentations for that added touch or to drive a point home. However, presenters should be aware that problems may arise with video files. The file may appear on your laptop screen but it may not appear on the projection screen. Changing the settings of the graphic card on the laptop or desktop will often resolve this issue. The best way to avoid this problem is to bring a back-up DVD of all of the video content you would like to appear in your presentation.

On the Horizon

The future of conference and convention presentations is never a sure thing, since technology is always changing. But according to ACOM members there are already new developments on the horizon. Microsoft's new Windows Media Player 11 is becoming an increasingly popular way to view video files and play a variety of media content. Keep an older version of Windows Media Player up and running on the server because Media Player 11 still needs to get some of the bugs worked out of its system before it can be fully integrated into daily operations. The highly publicized and much anticipated Windows VISTA and Office 2007, which were recently released by Microsoft, have upgraded versions of Power Point within the programs. Also, as a safety measure, continue to run Windows XP on the server too, since not everyone is going to have the most recent updates by Microsoft.

Technology will forever be changing the meetings industry by enhancing a presenter's stage presence. Assembling that "wow" presentation can be difficult at times but new advances in technology create the ability to make a presentations stick in attendees' minds for months after the conference or convention. While some CSMs and meeting planners are more technology-savvy than others, it can never hurt to educate yourself on the new standards and nuts n' bolts of running a successful meeting.

Lynn McCullough is Executive Director of the Association for Convention Operations Management (ACOM), where she is involved with the direction and management of the association, as well as membership recruitment and retention. She provides substantial direction on strategy and tactical issues, with responsibilities that include Board of Director relations, strategic development, and event planning and management including promotion, set-up and follow-up. Lynn earned her Bachelor of Journalism degree from the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Ms. McCullough can be contacted at 609-799-3712 or lmccullough@cmasolutions.com