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MEETING PROFESSIONALS INTERNATIONAL

MEETINGS OUTLOOK™



The latest research predicts continued growth in virtual and hybrid meetings and slight shifts in budgets while reporting on the overall health of the meeting and event industry.

2014 SPRING EDITION



MEETING PROFESSIONALS INTERNATIONAL

MEETINGS OUTLOOK

By Elaine Pofeldt

Meeting professionals have become more adept at mastering rapidly changing event technology—from hybrid/virtual meeting platforms to devices that enable better networking—and the unrelenting persistence of short lead times.

Cynthia Bullock, CMP (MPI Eastern Great Lakes Chapter), didn't panic when a snowstorm this past winter kept several important attendees of a 60-person government meeting she planned from reaching the scheduled location, a hotel in the Rockville-Gaithersburg, Md., area. Bullock, director of meeting and event services at Oakridge, Tenn.-based Integrated Solutions and Services, simply asked the attendees to join virtually, from wherever they were.

"They went home or back to their hotel room and used their laptop or iPad to work with us through Adobe Connect," she says. "It saved the day."

Bullock isn't alone in realizing that knowing how to pull together a hybrid meeting—that is, one with both live and virtual components—is a useful trick to have in her repertoire. More than half of respondents (51 percent) surveyed for this report said their organizations use virtual and hybrid technologies to enhance in-person meetings or to integrate onsite and remote meeting elements.

In using such technologies defensively, as Bullock did to keep participation in her meeting up, some planners realize how they can also help stay within budget.

"You save all of the additional costs of having to delay a meeting to another day," Bullock says.



But she has also found that such technologies can be used strategically, to attract presenters who may not be available to fly to a gathering.

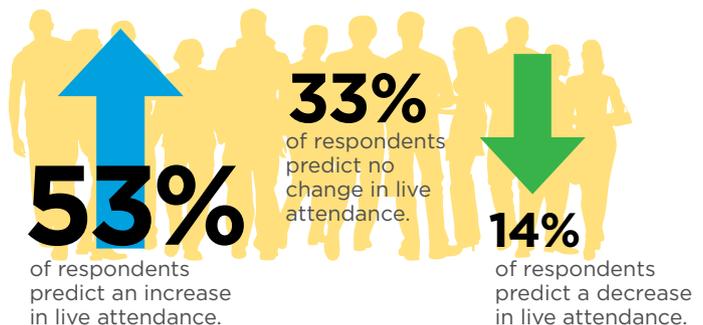
"It's a great way to bring in some high-end speakers who are only going to appear for 15 to 20 minutes," Bullock says.

The widespread adoption of virtual and hybrid technologies is occurring at a time when technological innovation has become an integral part of the lives of meeting and event professionals around the globe. Many professionals in the field are on a constant hunt to find better ways to integrate tech-based tools into everything from proposal requests to event registration to onsite attendee experiences—whether to save time, make a gathering more memorable or add to the value of an event.

ATTENDANCE PROJECTIONS

Respondents are optimistic about growing attendee numbers in 2014, especially on the virtual/hybrid side of meetings and events.

LIVE ATTENDANCE



Technology and Event Immersion

Sid Curtis, director of creative services at J&S Audio Visual in Irving, Texas, often hears from meeting organizers who want “immersive” events.

“Once they walk into their space, they want attendees to forget about the world outside,” she says. “They want them focused on the meeting at hand and the message at hand.”

Technology often provides the answer, says Curtis, who worked at MTV for nine years before joining J&S Audio Visual. One popular technique for engaging guests, she says, is pixel mapping.

“It is video projection,” she says. “Sometimes it’s done on the exterior of buildings, or you design a set that has a lot of interesting shapes and depths to it. Through the technology you can really bring an environment to life. If it’s an old building with filigree work, you can trace the outline of the building with light. You can fill it in with color and texture or make it look like it’s melting. You really are only limited by your imagination.”

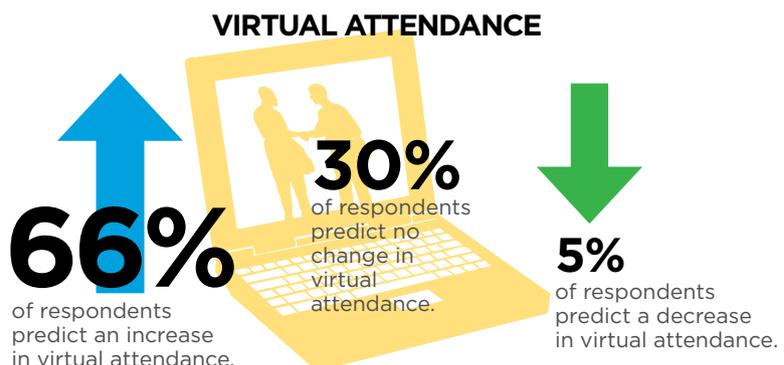
Gaming has also sparked new ideas, notes Curtis, who is always on the lookout for technologies to improve her meetings (she recently tested Oculus Rift, a virtual reality headset for 3D gaming) and says it’s possible to incorporate cutting-edge technologies on a tight budget if you have creative vendors and you challenge them.

“TECHNOLOGY AND MEETING PLANNER APPS FOR EVERYTHING FROM PREPAYMENT TO REGISTRATION ARE A DAILY PART OF EVENT PLANNING. WE TRY TO CONSTANTLY UPDATE OURSELVES AND OUR EMPLOYEES ON WHAT’S NEW IN THOSE AREAS.”

CYNTHIA BULLOCK, CMP

*MPI Eastern Great Lakes Chapter
Integrated Solutions and Services*

51%
of organizations use virtual and hybrid technologies for meetings and events



VIRTUAL IN DEMAND

HOW **VIRTUAL/HYBRID MEETING OPTIONS** ARE BEING USED



To **enhance face-to-face** meetings.



To **integrate onsite and remote** meeting elements.



To **replace face-to-face** meeting elements.



Virtual/hybrid options are **not in use**.

*As this represents a **6% increase over the previous quarter**, we'll keep an eye on this data point.*

Economic conditions seem to have influenced the willingness to innovate. European meeting and event market conditions lag behind the U.S. and Canadian markets in terms of economic stability and recovery, with significant government austerity measures taken by various E.U. member countries having a deep, long-lasting effect.

In this climate, E.U. meeting and event professionals have embraced technology and innovation at a faster pace and are more willing to explore and adopt new technology—both for the sake of innovation and to improve efficiency. This may be due to the financial pressure to do more with less, or cultural differences between regions.

In contrast, Canadian meeting and event professionals have been least affected by domestic economic uncertainty and are seeing the least volatility in business levels among these three regions. While they clearly express intentions to keep improving the attendee experience and achieve better overall outcomes, they feel less pressure to rapidly innovate technologically and to experiment with new tools and solutions.

DSM, a 23,000-employee firm in Heerlen, Netherlands, has actively embraced virtual and hybrid meeting technol-

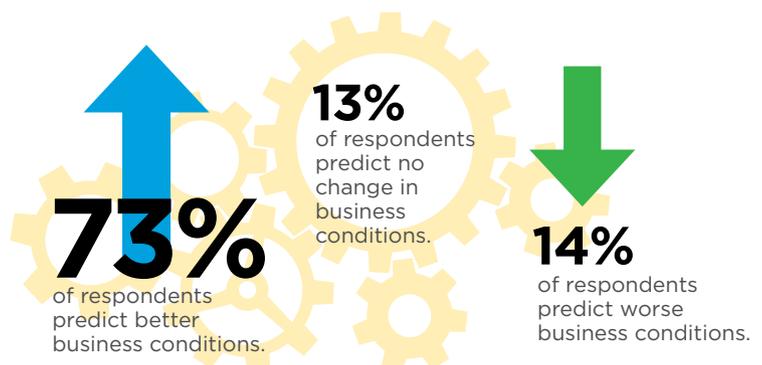
ogies since the recession. Alise Long, CMM (MPI Netherlands Chapter), communications manager, strategic meetings and events, first used the company's Tandberg Videoconferencing System—with help from the internal ICT team—to connect employees to the firm's top management meeting in 2009. The virtual meeting brought together 500 people from five hubs around the world.

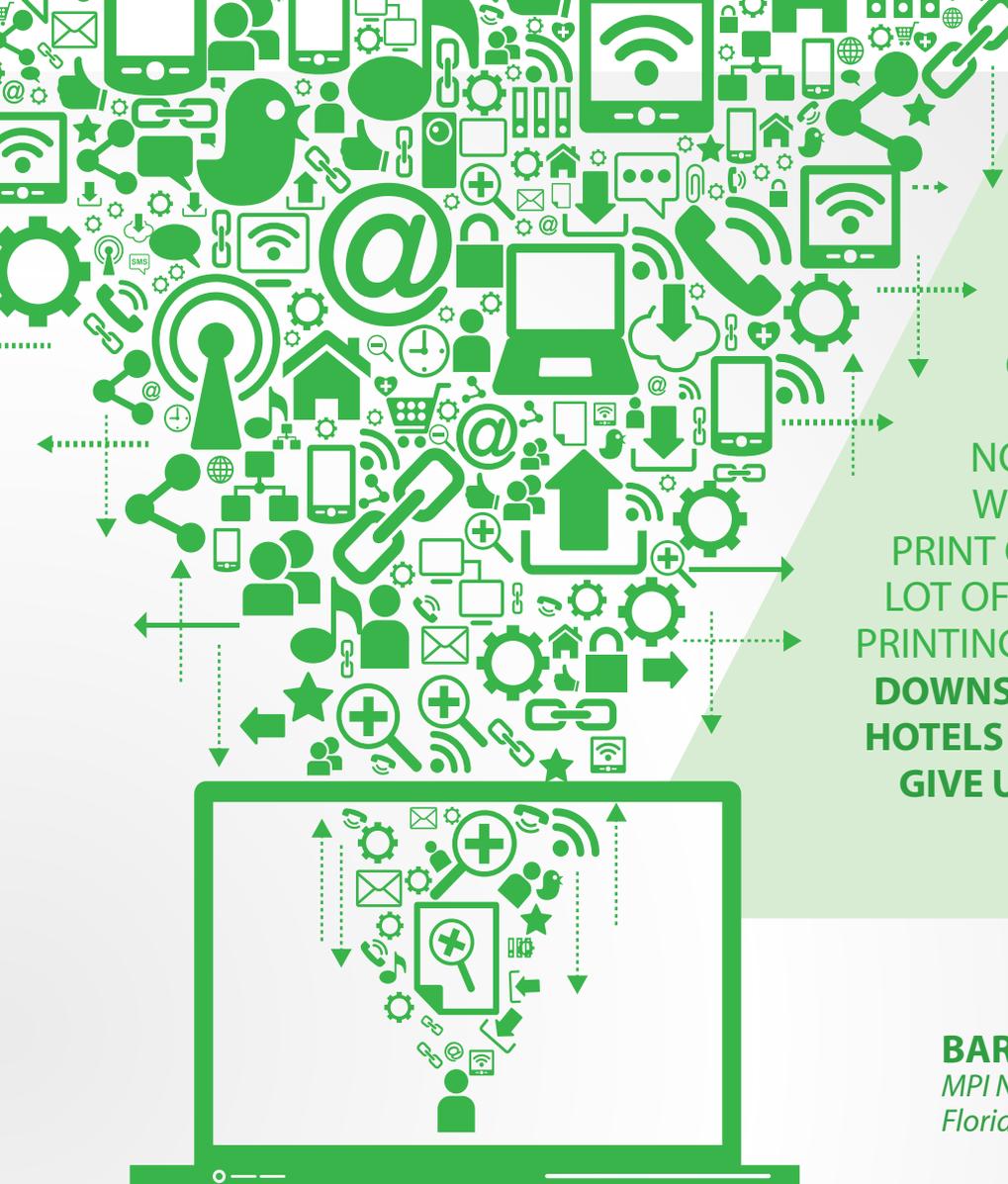
"It was an amazing production," she says—and it led to a huge increase in use of the videoconferencing system internally.

Long was so excited by how well the meeting went that when it was again held in 2012, she opted for a hybrid approach, even though she had the budget to bring together 400 people at a face-to-face gathering at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center in Washington, D.C. In addition to the in-person attendees, she included 3,000 participants who viewed the live-streamed proceedings and could submit comments, chat-style, to the moderator via a jet communication tool. If, for instance, a question came from a remote attendee in Brazil, the moderator might say, "Good morning, Brazil. I see so-and-so has a question," Long explains. Then an executive at the live meeting would stand up and answer it.

HOW'S BUSINESS?

Respondents are predominantly optimistic about overall business conditions for 2014.





“WE NOW DO MORE ONLINE MAILINGS AND HAVE A MOBILE APP FOR ALL OF OUR CONFERENCES. ALL OF OUR HANDOUTS ARE NOW AVAILABLE ON THE WEB FOR ATTENDEES TO PRINT OUT. WE ARE SAVING A LOT OF TIME AND MONEY ON PRINTING/MAILINGS. **THE ONLY DOWNSIDE IS GOING BACK TO HOTELS AND ASKING THEM TO GIVE US MORE COMPETITIVE WIRELESS INTERNET.**”

BARBARA SOLIS, CMP
*MPI North Florida Chapter
 Florida League of Cities*

For the company’s 2014 meeting, Long is enthusiastically planning a hybrid event.

“It is so much easier now,” says Long, who is investigating ways to give remote participants an even more active role.

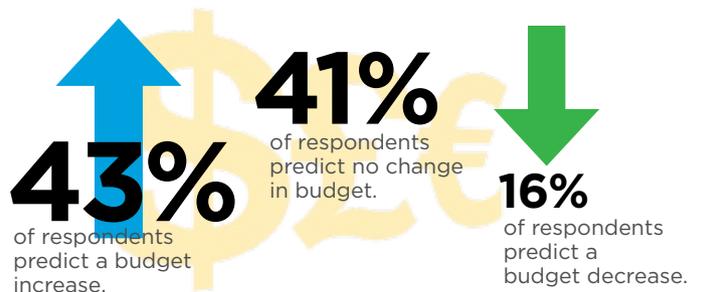
Virtual and hybrid technologies are far from the only way that planners are integrating new technologies in meetings. Brenda Carter, CMP, CMM (MPI Toronto Chapter), event manager at KPMG Management Services LLP, was impressed with how attendees responded to the use of MingleStick at a 1,400-person event for the firm’s alumni at the Sony Centre

for the Performing Arts in Toronto. KPMG rented the digital devices, which attendees could point at people they met to download their contact info and access it later, in lieu of trading traditional business cards. (Each person’s data had been previously entered into the system upon check-in.) Besides being convenient, the MingleSticks were a nice icebreaker.

“Everyone thought it was fun,” Carter says. “We had people from their 20s up to their 70s. All of them were thrilled with the whole concept.”

BUDGETARY MOVEMENT

Spend over the next year is still predicted to grow, but will remain stale for many.





WI-FI DEMANDS

Free Wi-Fi in the U.S. is demanded by some respondents—*significant* in that it wasn't a trending topic in last quarter's *Meetings Outlook*.

Shannon Guggenheim, CMP (MPI Texas Hill Country Chapter), who recently joined EventLink International in Dallas as a senior account manager after working at the tech firm Ixia, found that at her previous employer, there was considerable demand for podcasts from clients, either because they offered a savings over live meetings or were more convenient. Ixia also found there was demand among network engineers for webinars on topics such as a network testing technology the company offers and subsequently made the webinars available on demand for the engineers' convenience.

"It's not like they can step away from the job for five days and go to an event somewhere," she says.

Apps have become another important part of the meeting planner's tool kit. At a 400-person government event, for instance, Bullock used a mobile scanning system to check in attendees and found it worked well for the government organizer.

The increasing use of technology has in some cases required planners to renegotiate contracts to reflect lower costs for high-speed wireless Internet access, though this isn't always a top concern.

"We were able to save them a lot of money by not having as many people on staff just to do registration," she says.

Bullock also recently tested Personify Live after hearing buzz about it among meeting professional peers, but has yet to put it to work for her. The videoconferencing tool lets users present virtually against a backdrop of their own presentation materials, rather than showing the room they are in.

"Just to be aware of what's out there puts you in the forefront in this competitive market," she says.

The increasing use of technology has in some cases required planners to renegotiate contracts to reflect lower costs for high-speed wireless Internet access, though this isn't always a top concern.

"I don't believe we've had to renegotiate any contracts," says Carter, though she notes she has seen growing attention in Canada to getting the best prices for Internet services at conferences.

In addition to mastering a more tech-enabled world, meeting

A Better Visitor Experience

One of the trickiest issues confronting convention centers these days is offering enough wireless capacity to keep digitally savvy attendees happy.

With many visitors toting a laptop computer, a mobile phone and an iPad, it's easy to reach capacity, says Ron King, executive director of the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas. That can lead to frustration when, for instance, a meeting organizer suggests that everyone download a new meeting app at the same time.

"It has become an issue for a lot of facilities," King says. "It is difficult to keep up with the bandwidth usage."

To keep pace with the demand for more wireless capacity, the convention center recently sent out an RFP for a technology provider that can offer solutions to help it keep pace with growing demand.

"I don't know if you could ever have too much bandwidth or capacity," King says. "Technology is growing exponentially."

Managing infrastructure costs is a significant challenge. While the center offers free wireless access in locations such as its lobby area, there is a cost to use it in the exhibition space.

"More and more often, we're hearing that there is an expectation of free technology," King says.

To make sure visitors are happy with their experiences, the center, which now has two team members monitoring social media, has also been partnering with meeting organizers to keep track of comments attendees make on social media.

"We can see what they're tweeting and as a facility respond to issues we might otherwise not know about," King says.



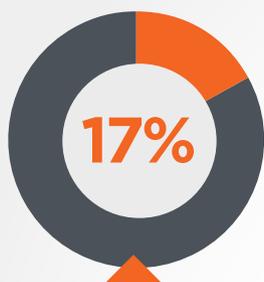
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DALLAS
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THINGS
HAPPEN
HERE

IT'S (STILL) SO LAST-MINUTE

HOW IS YOUR **LEAD TIME** WINDOW CURRENTLY TRENDING?



Longer lead times.



Shorter lead times.



Lead times **not changing**.

professionals have had to tackle the continuing challenge of short lead times. Fifty-three percent of respondents said lead times are getting shorter, up from 46 percent in December 2013. As organizers' budgets have increased in stabilizing

markets, planners have had to arrange larger meetings and events in tighter time frames. Declines in room availability in the U.S. have posed challenges for organizations accustomed to using short lead times to protect themselves from attrition. In some cases, planners and suppliers have revisited attrition clauses to ensure longer lead times.

Shorter lead times have been the norm for many meeting professionals in recent years, including Allyson Wagner (MPI Georgia Chapter), a project specialist at Omnience, an Atlanta

firm that does traditional meeting planning and develops tech tools to help clients handle registration and manage their meeting space.

“We just find that our clients may have something tentatively on the calendar. It always seems to be kind of rush, hurry up, now we’ve got the budgeting approved. A big part is funding issues.”



“WITH THE ECONOMY STARTING TO GAIN MORE TRACTION, PLANNERS ARE SEEING HOTEL RATES INCREASE, WITH SHORT-TERM BOOKINGS SEEING SPACE NOT AVAILABLE. IT WILL BE IMPORTANT FOR PLANNERS TO EDUCATE THEIR INTERNAL CLIENTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANNING AHEAD TO GET THOSE BETTER RATES AND HAVE SPACE AVAILABLE.”

CARMEN SMALLEY, CMP

*MPI Wisconsin Chapter
Great Wolf Resorts*

“We just find that our clients may have something tentatively on the calendar,” she says. “It always seems to be kind of rush, hurry up, now we’ve got the budgeting approved. A big part is funding issues.”

But, as in many situations that challenge meeting professionals, being prepared helps.

“One of the things that makes us able to respond so quickly is that we have all of our technology in place,” Wagner says. ■



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