

Conferencing trends in 2015

 By [Teresa Jenkins](#)

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Face-to-face still critical

Senior leaders now know what needs to be communicated in meetings and exactly why these meetings are important. They have dissected different platforms including virtual meetings, teleconferences and WebEx and discovered they cannot replace the benefits of a face-to-face meeting. In today's multitasking work world, it is important to create a more focused environment with fewer distractions.

In the hyper-connected world we live in, business professionals, CEOs, meeting professionals and others are starting to place a much higher value on the power of human connection and the impact that meeting face-to-face brings to the table. A study conducted by IMEX Group in partnership with the Meetology Group found that on average, face-to-face meetings generate 30 percent more ideas than their virtual counterparts. In 2015, we anticipate seeing an even higher value placed on networking in-person and the strong impact it can have on reaching business objectives.

Engaging audiences inside and outside events

We have seen a shift toward considering the complete attendee experience when planning events and meetings. As an example, we know more and more travellers are looking to adopt or continue healthy habits while on the road. Professionals can no longer just focus on the logistics of an event, but instead, have to think holistically about the attendees to ensure they are getting the most out of the experience.

The 24/7 work environment is leading the trend to do more with less time. Content is presented in shorter sessions, and more audience engagement tools are being used. It is important to be able to get the attendee to be "in the moment" and enthused to be there. The use of images will continue to be seen, and the use of shorter video will be on the rise. Attendees are seeking to be actively engaged versus being passive listeners. Facilitation of discussion and participation through room setups is being seen to encourage engagement.

We also anticipate a growing recognition of the importance of many small meetings. In an industry used to planning meetings at a mass scale, this trend requires us to shift our thinking and evolve what we are offering. In order to advance our relationships with customers, we need to understand what meeting professionals need to be successful, no matter the scale of their event. For most small meetings this means maximising efficiency and streamlining the customer experience.

Creating special events, ones that the attendee could not do on their own, are being sought-after to create distinctive experiences. The experience is carried from start to end to help keep the event alive through the year. This helps the

attendee to remember the event - and be excited to come back next year. Local elements are tied into the event to create a sense of place for the attendee. Offerings of farm-to-table produce, regional cuisine and engagement in local volunteer opportunities and outside activities are seen.

Technology opportunities

While face-to-face meetings remain a critical component to moving businesses forward, the growth of virtual and hybrid meetings will continue to adapt, creating more opportunities for those who cannot travel due to limited time or money to participate in meetings. Mobile technology and social media platforms will continue to rank high among the growing resources for planners and suppliers to both conduct and market meetings more successfully.

The embracement of technology will continue to be seen in 2015 with more items being done digitally. Less printed material will be used, further pushing the industry forward into a paperless trend. Websites, apps and social media will continue to be used to push information out to attendees. These technological platforms offer the opportunity for rich analytic data to be compiled, which will help make business decisions to improve customer interaction.

Social media, mobile technology and other tools have brought a new level of personalisation to people's lives, and attendees demand the same from meetings and events. They do not want just to attend meetings; they want to be part of an experience.

In the year ahead, the industry will see continued growth in meeting personalisation and the integration of mobile technology.

Sustainability becomes critical

As we begin to plan for 2015, a trend that is truly becoming a pillar in the meetings industry is the focus on sustainability and CSR. Client requests prove that programs addressing energy, water and greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals and the supply chain are no longer just a preference, but a requirement when selecting meeting locations.

Sustainability efforts continue to be a key component in the meetings and conventions industry as planners and show organisers realise the environmental impact their events have on the local community. They have come to expect a certain level of environmental consciousness from their venues and assistance in implementing greener practices to reduce waste and energy.

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I am a passionate international marketer with particular bias for building sustainable brands, from inception to managing premier clients' marketing strategies and results-driven Public Relations. Outside work, I cherish spending time with family and friends, exploring wildlife and oceans through travel, indulging in reading, and embracing the adventure of lifelong learning facilitated by the internet of things.

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