

# ATTENTION, PLEASE!

**Why is there such a need to focus on delivering content value in meetings nowadays? Content is king, or so we are told through many articles and discussions within our beloved meetings industry. Of course it is! I would argue it always has been, but times change and so do business environments. Rather than the content itself, and the increasing variety of delivery tools, we should consider the factors enhancing attention and reception.**

In the meetings industry around associations responsible executives have had to redefine and reorganise their activities because of budget restrictions and competition. Potential delegates have similarly had to minimize their conference attendance on the basis of budget, time and regulatory restrictions. It is a trend well documented. The result of this trend is that the active organisations - both commercial and not-for-profit - are trimming down the edges of our market place, and necessarily have started to look for better delivery and reception of content. However, sometimes it just feels as if we are re-inventing the wheel, when it comes to addressing topics on how to capture the attention of meeting attendees.



First of all, there is the overflow of information in sound bites, nowadays continuously delivered to all of us desk tigers in electronic format. The volume of information available freely through internet and other media sources to potential meeting delegates is beyond boundaries and often beyond control. Wanted or unwanted, the bits and pieces of information reach all of us through our various electronic portals and it is significantly affecting our ways to

process content properly. Even more difficult is to judge the quality of this content and its usefulness for the recipient. As a result the attention span of an average meeting attendee seems to reach its limits much faster. Without access to platforms that offer sorted and selected information, prepared and served in the right order at the right time, our delegates are as lost as we all are in the content jungle.

This brings us to the actual value of the content delivered. There is a clear distinction between all of those who act in order to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, and those who actually have and share the knowledge. The latter can only determine the real value of content. Thus, those of us who operate as facilitators and service providers should be focusing on the delivery of content and seek appropriate advice on the value of it. Especially in meetings with scientific, academic or very specific content the peer-to-peer communication requires a good understanding, in order to be efficiently facilitated. The experience of committees and faculty of associations in these areas, who are responsible for creating the meeting's content, mostly guarantees the received value, either in a positive or a negative way.

In other words, if the content of any meeting proposal has value at all, as perceived by a majority of potential attendees, there is a reason to meet. In whichever way, shape or format possible, peers will seek each other to exchange information that is vital to their work. It is this premise that allows commercial service providers to connect with such groups and develop a relationship, turning a contact into a client. Subsequently, in the world of business meetings and events there is a continuous need to evaluate and innovate the needs of these clients.

**IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THE ATTENTION OF THE DELEGATE BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE MEETING, ONE NEEDS TO APPLY A SPECIFIC DIVERSIFICATION OF THE AVAILABLE TOOLS AND THE MESSAGES, APPROPRIATE TO THE AUDIENCE**

Professional Congress Organizers (PCOs) consider it one of their tasks - and prerogatives - to consult their clients on how to leverage the available content. Having made a profession out of organising congresses - the much discussed 'P' in PCO - the true pioneers within our industry were of course as much focused on leveraging content, as the PCOs of today. And the evolution of the role of a PCO - serving as a local, core or in-house provider - has not changed this either. The circumstances were different, but the need to capture the audience's attention was and remains the same.

to get their real attention has become a more important issue.

In order to achieve the attention of the delegate before, during and after the meeting, one needs to apply a specific diversification of the available tools and the messages, appropriate to the audience. It is nice to develop an application that allows delegates to search for restaurants around the conference centre, but resources may be limited and the audience might rather have a functional reference tool for scientific content. For educational purposes, the online meeting library is a great



Now we are facing a time in which technological developments are fast and furious, leaving little opportunity for effective implementation in meeting formats. Moreover, the social adaptation to available tools has proven to be difficult at best. How often do we ask ourselves: "to 'tweet' or not to 'tweet'?" The availability of excellent tools has not only created attractive opportunities to communicate, but also laid bare the limitations of the human mind to focus. For example, we may still be trying to deliver the best application for mobile devices in order to let our delegates get engaged, but

tool, increasing the usage of content, as well as offering the content provider with a source of revenue. In time this tool might completely replace the library of hard copies and as such the change is merely in terms of shape.

The real challenge the PCOs will face is to manage the diversification of approach and application, with so many tools and so much content available to reach an audience with a growing attention deficit. For now, associations and their suppliers should certainly consider the advantages of leveraging the content via the social media and other online applications. Within the parameters of cost-effectiveness and user-friendliness there are many ways to serve all associations, great and small. But to capture and retain the actual attention of their delegates, and providing them with valuable content on both short and long term, requires a development of our minds, rather than of tools.

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author Michel Neijmann, Managing Partner, K2 Conference and Event management Co., Istanbul, Turkey. IAPCO represents today 115 professional organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 42 countries.  
[info@iacpo.org](mailto:info@iacpo.org) / [www.iapco.org](http://www.iapco.org)

