

IACC Meeting Room of the Future™ Shows Shift in Meeting Planner Objectives

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The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, December 2017 ... Like the quest for the Holy Grail, the search to find the Meeting Room of the Future may never end. The latest report from the ground-breaking IACC Meeting Room of the Future™, shows that yesterday's breakthroughs are today's technology and that meeting planners and conferees now have specific, rapidly evolving goals and great expectations. Technology has greatly expanded and redefined the definition of what a meeting room is and can be, leading the initiative's founders at BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company partnering with IACC, the association that represents the finest meeting venues and services globally, to continue the project for the foreseeable future.

Technology is the major force driving these changes in an industry where members of every age are increasingly tech savvy. Today's successful planners see the value of these innovations to the success of the meeting and the bottom line. And though technical advances are evolving with head-spinning speed, they are welcomed, not feared, by the majority of the industry that sees technology as a means to meeting a range of objectives. Those objectives - return on investment, budget control, education and networking – won't change but the means of achieving them will.

Additionally, some new and crucial objectives are taking shape, according to Ellen Sinclair, Benchmark's senior vice president operations, and chair of the Meeting Room of the Future initiative. The survey showed that an increased focus on conferee engagement and personal development is taking shape. "These elements need an inspiring and dynamic setting in which to thrive," Sinclair says. "A boardroom, ballroom or auditorium, however many technical bells and whistles they have, can't create that personalized and unique experience that planners and attendees now demand."

Benchmark partnered with IACC on the Meeting Room of the Future, beginning in 2015 under Sinclair's leadership and she continues to lead the project. The project is designed to transform the meeting experience through a global collaboration of leaders in conference space design, audiovisual technology, hospitality, academia and conference management. One-hundred-fifty thought leaders were surveyed for the 2017 report, and participants spanned executives in government, corporations and associations.

Projected to run for three years, the project is now ongoing. Says Sinclair, "Our goal was to build a meeting room of the future, but we soon realized that meeting spaces are no longer confined to a room. Thanks to mobile technology, a meeting room can be in a park, on a beach, in an art studio or other inspiring site. There will always be a need for a sophisticated, technically advanced meeting space, but the idea of what constitutes a meeting room has vastly changed in a very short space of time."

Consequently, the IACC Meeting Room of the Future™ project will continue in its research efforts for the foreseeable future. As part of a new partnership between IACC and Meeting Professionals International, announced at the IACC Americas conference this past April, MPI's meetings professionals will take a wider role in the research process that has drawn on the skills of thought leaders on a global level.

The Data to Date

Meeting planners are the end users and the industry's key decision makers. The most current research, presented at IACC 2017 Europe Knowledge Fest in London by Ellen Sinclair and IACC President Mark Cooper, identified several key trends.

- Planners recognize the impact of venues on productivity and creativity.
- Experience and purpose remain constant, regardless of age. Seventy-five percent of the respondents say that meaningful experiences will become even more important.
- Objectives – ROI, value, networking, education won't change. The methods of meeting those goals will.
- Flexible space is a top priority of 75% of those surveyed. However, as interactive technology advances, this may change. Right now, the most crucial elements, listed here in order of importance are:

1. Quality Broadband
2. Acoustics
3. Lighting
4. Collaborative Spaces
5. Flexibility to change layout

- Eighty one percent of those polled have introduced new technology in the last five years, much of it interactive and social media based. These include social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, conference apps such as ShowGizmo and Proxfinity and audience participation apps like Glisser. Tech-savvy planners demand user-friendly, relatable technology, and a capable tech support staff.
- Planners want to control the meeting's organization themselves. Only 23% of these surveyed would consider outsourcing the process.
- Collaboration, productivity, inspiration – technology enables all three.
- Food and beverage service should support networking efforts with more informal "grazing" menus. Meal schedules should allow ample time for participants to check back with offices, family and friends.
- A Commitment to the Meetings Industry

The partners in this trailblazing effort to define the Meeting Room of the Future agree that what started as a three-year program has rapidly transformed into an open-ended quest spanning a diverse spectrum of countries, cultures and organizations that impact business, politics, public health and social life.

"Benchmark's commitment to the development of the meetings industry goes back to our founding in 1980," says Alex Cabañas, Benchmark's CEO and current IACC president. "My father, Burt Cabañas, saw the industry's huge potential. But 37 years ago, no one could have envisioned the impact technology would have on conferences. Today, we are charged with shaping a vision for the industry's future using the resources of its most prominent thought leaders and the expertise of its global membership. Our pursuit of the perfect meeting room may never be realized, but the journey is bound to be exciting and beneficial."

Mark Cooper, IACC's CEO comments "understanding the key trends in the delivery of meetings and the environments needed for an optimum experience is important for planners and venue operators. With the help of our partners, including Benchmark, we invest in research to give us valuable information and understanding and allow us to make informed decisions linked to investment in meetings".

About BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company.

BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company, is a trailblazer in the development, management, marketing and owner-advisory services of resorts, hotels, conference centers and exclusive private clubs. In addition to the company's iconic Benchmark Resorts & Hotels portfolio, the Gemstone Collection is a distinctive luxury portfolio of independent hotels & resorts in highly preferred destinations.

BENCHMARK'S distinguished and proven reputation is deeply-rooted in core values that are focused and aligned with exceeding ownership and stakeholder performance expectations. The combined portfolios feature nearly 70 unique and distinctive properties domestically and internationally. The company leadership and valued employees are passionately committed to delivering the industry's most

authentic, enchanted, soulful, vibrant, unrivaled and memory-making experience. BENCHMARK'S progressive "Be The Difference" culture and values are a cornerstone to the company's nearly 40 years of extraordinary achievement and prosperity. Many properties have been recognized with the Benchmark Conference Centers® mark of meeting excellence. BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, is based in The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, and has regional offices in Park City, Utah; Miami, Florida; New Brunswick, New Jersey; Seattle Washington; and Tokyo, Japan.

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