

Chapter 4 Meeting Planners

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4.1 Types of Meeting Planners

Growth trends in the conference and meeting industry support the need for more conference centres. To ensure the viability of these centres, careful attention must be given to location, design, and marketing

The size of the meeting industry has expanded to such an extent that at this point it requires and encompasses a variety of players/teams/3rd parties. To understand this segment of the hospitality industry, one must understand these players and their roles.

Today we have professional convention planners and are categorised as:

- i) **Corporate meetingplanners** are employed by a for-profit business or corporation, and their job includes, but is not necessarily limited to, planning meetings and conferences for the company. They range from a secretary who has been given the responsibility to plan one training session for the boss to an official corporate meeting planner whose sole responsibility is planning, organizing, and implementing meetings and conferences for the employees, managers, and owners of the corporation, etc. Therefore they often have titles other than “Meeting Planners”. Corporate planners are involved with a variety of different meeting types, such as management meetings, training meetings, sales meetings, seminars and workshops.



- ii) **Independent meeting planners** are entrepreneurs who specialize in planning meetings and conferences. Associations or corporations who do not have a full time meeting planner may choose to contract with an independent meeting planner. With the downsizing of corporations' budgets, this is an economical way to have meetings and conferences professionally planned. Independent meeting planners may also work in conjunction with a full time corporate or associate planner. In this case the role of the independent meeting planner is that of a support person who lends his expertise to the project. For example, the independent meeting planner may only be involved with the site selection process or be in charge of a single event, or may act in an advisory role for the entire meeting or conference.
- iii) **Government meeting planners** are meeting planners who work exclusively for the government. They function much as corporate meeting planners do and can be found in all segments and ranks of government's abroad. In India the concept of meeting planners has not yet taken shape the way it has in the West. But even there these planners are facing tough economic times and must be masters at managing the budgets more and more budgetary constraints are placed on government employees regarding travel and overnight stays.

4.2 Responsibilities of Meeting Planners

The duties of a meeting planner are as diversified as the meeting planners themselves. more than two thirds have clear cut responsibility for the logical aspect of planning, a sizeable percentage shoulder more than half the burden for strategic and tactical goals setting objectives: creating the agenda and budgeting”.

The role of the meeting planner varies from meeting to meeting and organization to organization, but in general meeting planners have the following responsibilities in the following areas:

- i) Pre-meeting activities
 - Plan meeting Agenda
 - Establish Meeting objectives
 - Attendance • Set Meeting budget
 - Select Meeting Site • Select Meeting Facility
 - Plan Travel To and From Site
 - Arrange ground Transportation
 - Organize Audio-visual Needs

- ii) On Site Activities
 - Pre Event Briefing
 - Execute plan
 - Troubleshooting
 - People Management

- iii) Post Meeting
 - Debriefing
 - Evaluation
 - Thank you • Shopping
 - Plan for the next year

- iv) Related Activities
 - Pre-conference tours planning
 - Entertainment arrangements
 - Shopping arrangements
 - Post-conference tours planning

Meetings Management is a stressful job requiring a special kind of individual. Although history has continuously recorded meetings of individuals with one another, the job description of meeting management has just begun to evolve. Some 25 years ago, meeting management was simply to make lodging arrangements and organize meeting rooms. The planners did not need any special knowledge regarding audiovisual equipment, negotiation techniques, subcontracting or education of adult learners. Today meeting management is a much more sophisticated and knowledgeable industry and many responsibilities have been added to their job.

4.3 Technological requirements for Meetings

The subject of technology as it pertains to meetings encompasses many different areas:

- i) First there is the issue of technology as it is used to facilitate meetings. Hence things like overhead projectors, three dimensional image projection, and equipment for computerized meetings are needed.
- ii) The second area that has seen the arrival of technology is for the planners themselves where such things as desktop publishing, fax machines, tablets, smart phones etc. have found their way.
- iii) The third relates to attendee themselves with business centres becoming more and more advanced. When it comes to technology there are many things that are new and things are changing everyday. One such development is that of videoconferencing. In this era of cost cutting, budgeting and immediate communication videoconferencing is surely very useful. Videoconferencing is defined by the International Teleconferencing Association as a telecommunication system that combines audio and video media that provides both voice communication and motion video images.

When videoconferencing was first introduced it was expected to cause the demise of hotel and conference centres. Meetings in the traditional sense were expected to disappear. It was also considered advantageous because it eliminates the need for air travel, food, and lodging expenses. However, fortunately or unfortunately this did not happen because the equipment needed for video teleconferencing is very expensive, however, various apps available online makes it fairly inexpensive and so has the cost of the smart devices these applications utilize. Further there are still a lot of firms who believe that nothing can be more effective than face to face human contact or the human interaction side of meeting. Despite the fact that videoconferencing did not quite create that stir that it was expected to, it is certainly regarded as a crucial communication link.

Another innovation in the meeting technology are the computer/tablets/smartphones. Initially, for most people the use of computers was limited to the planning stages but now all sorts of smart devices are being used in conjunction to LCD projection panels that allows other attendees to share information with the presenter.

Apart from this area technology is also used in the planning phase of meetings. Today there are a number of software packages that are very useful for the meeting planner.

Desktop publishing is another area where computers have made a significant contribution. With desktop publishing, sophisticated communications material, from meeting brochures to full sized association magazines can be produced in house on a computer screen via various application. Apart from the utility provided by the computer there are other technological advances that help meeting planners. Promotional videotapes, fax machines, electronic mail, whats app, facebook and youtube have become invaluable aids for the meeting planners.

They not only reduce the time spend by the meeting planners but are also cost effective, for, e.g., sending email is so much cheaper and quicker than sending invitations or plans through post office mail. The networking technology is also being fully utilised by the planners in relation to their tasks. They also use websites for marketing their services.

Any discussion on the meeting technology would not be over till one talks about its influence on attendees. In most cases the attendees are business travellers and in most cases they are very sophisticated in their needs and expectations. Business centres, telecommunication technology, and computerized check-ins and check-outs are really popular with the meeting attendees. All in all technology has had a profound impact on the meetings industry. Almost every aspect of this industry has been touched by technology.