

# Connectivity: What Do We All Really Want?

WACVB 2011

Aligning Everyone's Motivations, Needs &  
Expectations to Book and Deliver a Great Meeting  
or Convention.



# DiMario & Associates

Coaching. Consulting. Collaboration.

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*Working with towns, cities and counties to compete more effectively.*

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# The Economy Rocks the Boat

*“Fasten your seat belts. It’s going to be a bumpy ride.”*

Quote from movie: All About Eve



# Global Economy

- Economy is still rocking and rolling.
  - Western Hemisphere forecast is 4% GDP growth in 2011 as compared to European Union of 1.8% to 3.4% GDP
  - Sovereign debt problems in Greece and European countries negatively influences markets and investment.
  - Arab Spring ripple effects.
  - Booming economies of China, India and Brazil have slowed but still outperforming worldwide GDP growth by 2-4%.

Sources: Economy Watch

# Global Economy

- **Implications:**

*Worldwide market and economic instability has created turbulence and uncertainty. Decision-making models are obsolete or upside-down. Business models are under scrutiny or in transformation. The term the “new normal” has yet to be defined.*

# U.S. Economy

- Growth forecast at between 2-3%.
- Oil prices fluctuating.
- Food costs rising.
- Utilities rising.
- Sales tax revenues underperforming.
- Unemployment hovering around 9%.
- Consumer confidence and consumer spending ebbs and flows.
- Consumer Price Index fluctuations low – about 1.2%
- Political environment is volatile.

Sources: Trending123, Yahoo Finance, U.S. Travel Association

# U.S. Economy

- **Implications:**

*Every aspect of travel, meeting planning and event production will continue to be affected and impacted by a volatile and recovering economy.*

- Rising fuel costs, food and commodity costs.
- Consumer confidence and spending habits.
- High unemployment.
- Underperforming tax revenues.

What are we all thinking...

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# Meeting attendees think...

- Can I afford (or the company) this convention?
- How expensive will it be to get to the meeting?
- How much are the room and taxes, food and miscellaneous expenses?
- How many nights can I afford to stay?
- How many meals or expenses are reimbursable or out-of-pocket?
- Is this a good time to be away from the office?
- How much time can I afford to be away from the office?
- How valuable is this meeting or event for me right now?
- Who else is going to be there that I can network with, make a pitch or learn something critically important?

# Meeting Planners think...

- How has our industry been affected?
- Will our budgets be cut?
- Should we contract our programming, number of meetings or events to compensate?
- Who are our target customers? Can we expand our audience targets? What new audiences can we identify that will benefit from our meeting/programming?
- Is consolidation among complementary associations or meeting tracks a consideration?
- Where can we meet that will give us the best “deal?”
- Where can we attract attendance that is also affordable and easily accessed?
- How can we control costs? Where can we trim, cut corners or get others to pay for the expense?
- Where can I go to feel “comfortable and safe”?

# Convention Centers, Destinations and Hotels think...

- Centers, hotels and destinations have choices but any choice they make may influence planning decisions and/or service delivery.
- What corporate or management expectations have been set for performance and profitability?
- What budget cuts can we expect? What can we trim, change or do without?
- Will increased operating expenses mean fewer staff or a change in vendors? How will service be affected on property?
- Will the food costs and exhibit fees for air, water, security, parking and electrical rise?
- What services that used to be free will be eliminated or charged for?
- Are Centers and hotels holding the line, negotiating harder or making it easier with planners?
- What won't get done this year that was expected or promised?
- What are the consequences of a depleted capital improvement fund?

# Travel Influences & Meeting Trends



# Travel Influences

- Customers are fully engaged in self-protection and preservation of resources.
  - Spending driven more by “need” as opposed to “want.”
  - Much more inclined to play “let’s make a deal”.
  - Looking for substantive value-added, not just a good value.
- Customers will continue to be impacted negatively and positively by travel products and services.
  - Packed airplanes, rising ticket prices, increased ala carte costs, fewer planes in service, continued air travel delays, terminal confusion and secondary and tertiary city service threatened.

# Travel Influences

- Transparency puts customers in the driver's seat.
  - Compare, contrast and even bid!
- Social Media has changed the communications platform.
  - Everyone's a critic!
  - Every good and bad comment on a travel product or service goes viral.
  - Every good or bad meeting experience is either being filmed, tweeted or YouTubed.
- Customers expect everything to be FREE today.
  - Wi-Fi in hotels, Convention Centers and all public places; coffee in rooms, breakfast, newspaper.

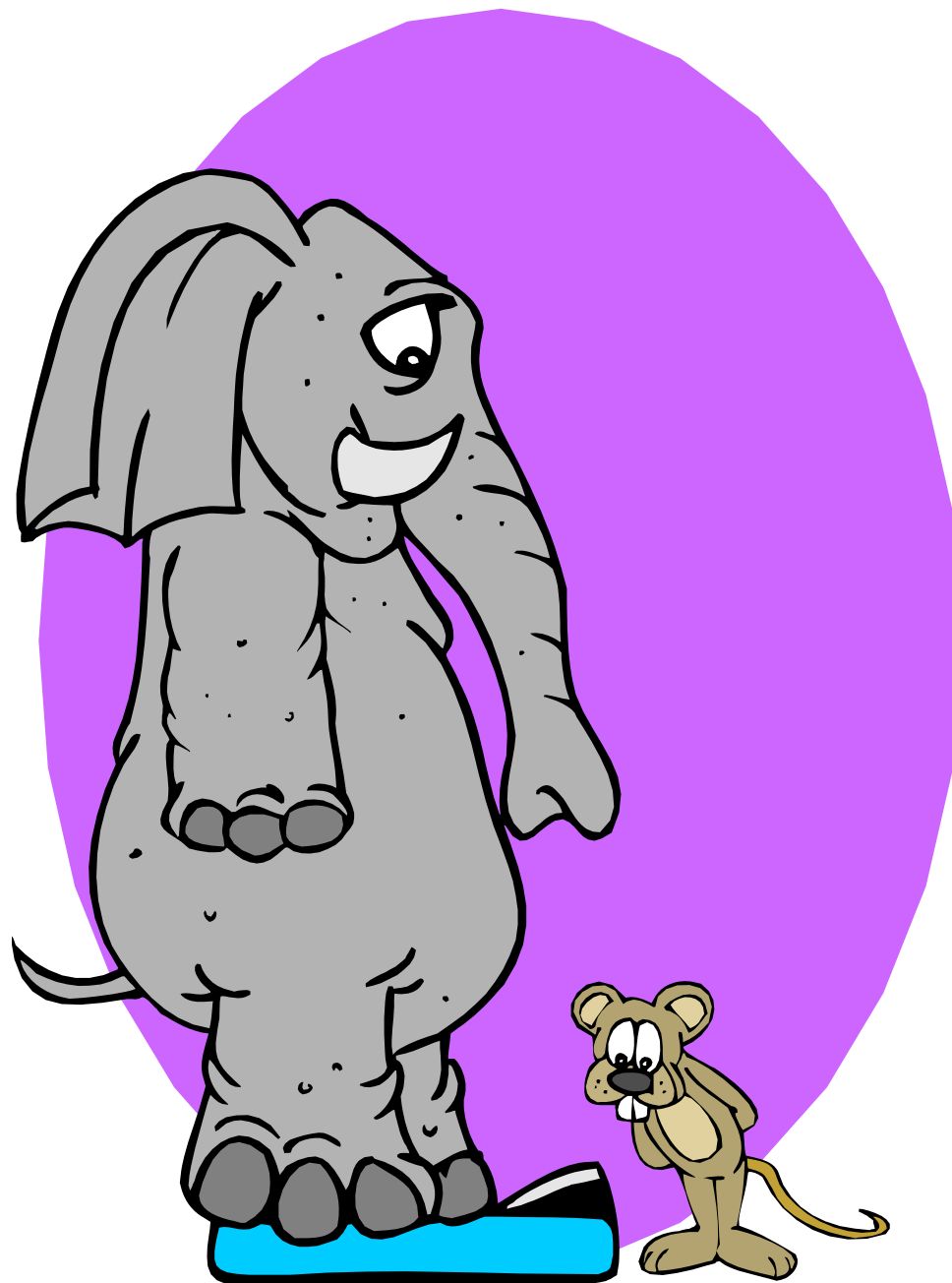
Sources: Trend Trackers, USA Today, YPartnership

# Travel Influences

- The “new normal” is fluid. Centers, hotels, and meeting planners are unable to rely upon history, financial models or trends any longer to position and negotiate with confidence.
- Research supports a strong meeting and convention market but attendance, length of the meeting and number of room nights booked are fluid.
- The number of meetings being held may be the same but they are shorter, more compact.
- Some destinations are politically “suspect”.
- Destinations are finding tourism partners either more cooperative and eager or more confused and fearful.

What are we all thinking...

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# Meeting Attendees think...

- I need to preserve resources. Mindful spending replacing random, casual spending. Every decision is being considered within the context of personal and professional resources and evaluated in terms of how will this meeting or purchase improve my condition or situation.
- How important is this? Price sensitivity is driving bottom-line decisions requiring products and services to attach real and perceived value that can be measured.
- What are other people saying? Every transaction or encounter can now be shared with millions – altered, edited and biased – and capable of influencing people to travel, book, or register.

# Meeting Planners think...

- There is more outside my control or ability to influence through controlled channels than at any time in history.
- Decisions to attend are being made based on information and resources separate and apart from great programming or an attractive destination.
- The pressure to do more with less is greater. And I usually have little to say about it.
- I want as much control as possible over the success of my meeting. The more seamless the meeting planning and meeting delivery system is, the easier it is for me to manage and control.

# Convention Centers, Destinations & Hotels think...

- I don't know what tomorrow is going to look like so how can I make a commitment today with confidence for something two years in the future?
- Am I going to be a hero or a goat if I make this deal?
- How do I explain the new fee, the stalled project, the delayed opening, the stained carpets, the postponed renovation?
- What's my competition doing?
- How can we make this work for another year?
- How are we going to turn a profit when meeting groups are squeezing us so hard?
- If all the trends are so strong for meetings, why are attendance and room blocks so weak?

So, what do we all really want?



## ...it's all about connectivity!

- Finding the points of intersection between what meeting planners, attendees, hotels, Centers and destinations want, need and expect builds and strengthens an authentic purpose-driven working relationship focused on delivering a memorable and productive meeting or convention.

# What defines connectivity?

*Do you have a shared goal among primary partners in the destination ?*

*Is there an understanding and acceptance of what each needs from the other?*

*Is there a commitment to work together to plan, manage and deliver?*

*Is there an understanding of who the customer is and what they need, want, expect?*

*What opportunities are there to enhance and improve the connectivity?*

So, where do we go from here?



# Premise

- ✓ Connectivity is a key developmental strategy for personal and professional relationship building.
- ✓ We are the sum total of our personal and professional experiences. These experiences – good, bad and everything in between – contributes to a perspective through which we view all our working relationships...and through which we develop expectations.
- ✓ We are only as good, or as bad, as the quality of our connectivity with one another in the decision-making process, planning and delivery.

# Connectivity: Expectations & Experiences

Those Who Create Them

*Destinations, Hotels and Convention Centers*



# Sales & marketing creates expectations.

- Hotels, convention centers and destinations sell and market their products and services by defining, describing, promoting and even guaranteeing experiences and expectations among meeting planners.

# What are you saying and why?

*How are you describing your destination and products? Why?*

*Are your claims and narrative justified?*

*Are you telling the planner what you want them to know or what they want to know?*

*Are you accurately portraying the properties and destination assets?*

*Are you creating the expectation for an experience that the destination or products can't deliver consistently?*

*Are you providing accurate specifications so meeting planners can make good decisions?*

*Can we trust what you say to be true?*

# What do meeting planners want ?

- *Will my meeting / convention fit or work in your community?*
- *Do you have the right size and type of hotel or facility that I am accustomed to?*
- *Will my attendees like it there?*
- *Does everyone work together well?*
- *Will my boss be impressed?*
- *Can I trust you to deliver?*

# Checklist

- Accurate visual and factual portrayal of property or destination.
- Precise usable square footage of meeting facilities.
- Accurate maximum set-up numbers and configurations for meeting space.
- Real room types and numbers of each.
- Description of inclusive amenities.
- What's free, what's for a fee.
- Proximity of hotels to one another and the Center.
- What are the benefits of selecting you.
- Why will a meeting planner and attendee like it here?
- How do the partners work together...

# What happens when “advertised” doesn’t meet expectations?

*What goes through their mind when a hotel, center or destination falls short of what is “advertised?”*

*How do the planner and sales manager handle it?*

*How does it affect their decision-making ...and in the future?*

# Checklist

- Trust is eroded.
- Skepticism sets in.
- Colors all future interactions with this hotel, center or destination sales team.
- Experiential suspicion effects relationships at other hotels, centers and destinations with other sales managers.
- Add things to your planning list.

# How is the meeting planner motivated?

- *What is their decision-making process?*
- *What information and data do they need to plan effectively?*
- *What information, help or assistance do they need and expect from you?*
- *What role does a General Manager, CEO, Sales Manager or Operations Team play in their decision-making?*

# Checklist

- Avoid hyperbole!
- Know what the meeting planner needs, wants and expects.
- Partner with the planner on a checklist.
- Match all specifications and expectations with physical facilities or assets.
- Introduce and provide tangible proof about hotel or destination “intangibles.”
- Establish clean and reliable lines of communication before, during and after.
- Cultivate quality relationships at all levels of service delivery.

# What can you do when expectations don't match up to reality?

*How can a meeting planner influence a hotel or destination to go beyond their capacity?*

*How can a hotel or destination rally their team to deliver promises or deliver beyond their capacity?*

*What can be managed, mitigated or overcome and what are the deal breakers?*

# Checklist

- Engage in problem-solving, not fault-finding.
- Cultivate a customer-centric platform that puts sales and operations on the same team.
- Work for a customer from the top-down and the bottom-up.
- Honor all promises at all costs.
- Seek alternatives, options and solutions; get creative.
- Operate in good faith, be honest and gracious in defeat.

# Connectivity: Expectations & Experiences

Those Who Have Them.

*Meeting & Event Planners*



# Meeting planners are influenced by experiences.

- Meeting planners do not perform their responsibilities in a vacuum. They are influenced each day by aspirations, past experiences, current limitations, obligations and driven to meet and exceed a set of expectations often imposed on them by others.

# What aspirations and experiences drive decision-making?

*What's really important to the meeting planner— what are the underlying motivations?*

*How do aspirations reflect on their planning and decision-making?*

*How do their collective experiences influence their planning and decision-making?*

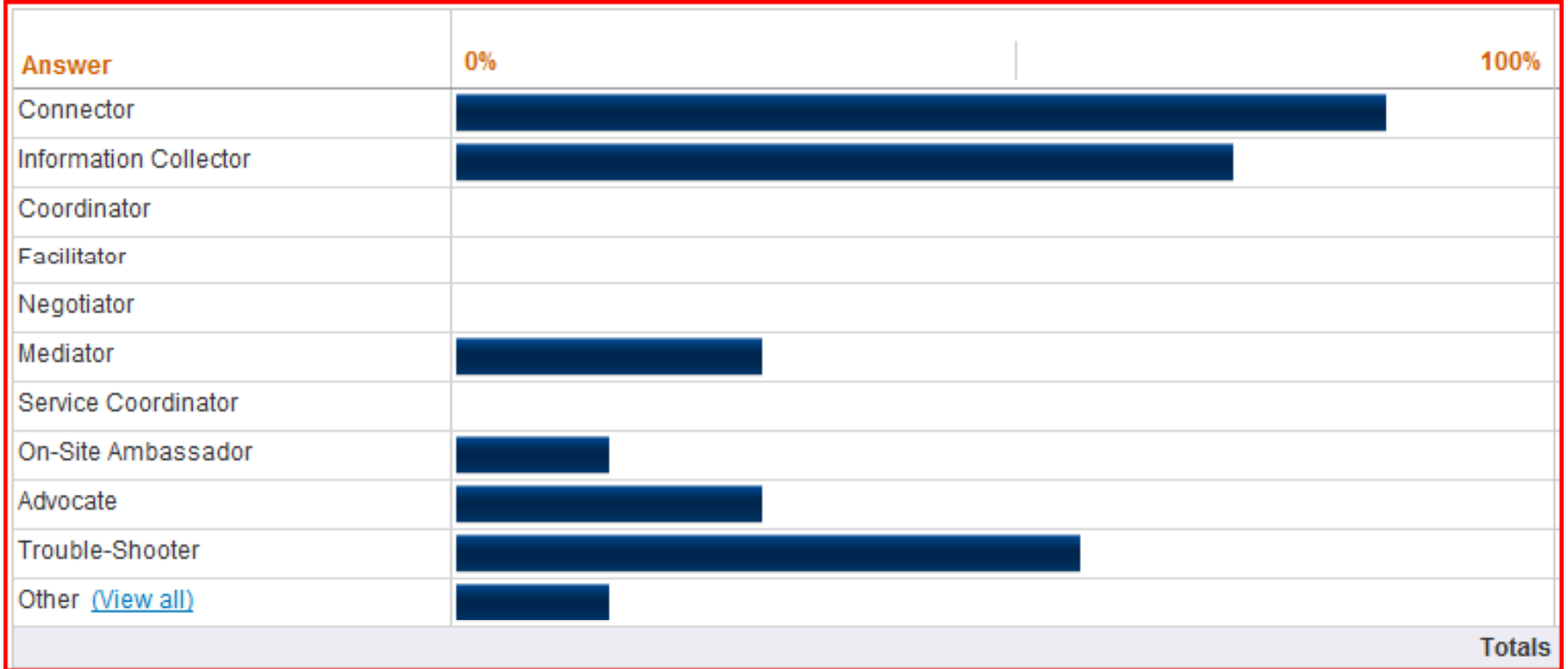
*How can hotels and destinations influence decision-making?*

# Checklist

- What really motivates meeting planners is a need to be thought of as indispensable, really good at what they do, meticulous and/or better than someone else.
- Aspirations motivate meeting planners to seek that which will make them successful.
- Past experiences form a decision-making framework from which they operate.
- Obligations and limitations create an expectation for negotiating.
- The ability of a hotel or destination to deliver and influence others to deliver is highly coveted and respected.

# What does a meeting planner expect of a CVB?

- *Connector*
- *Information Gatherer*
- *Coordinator*
- *Facilitator*
- *Negotiator*
- *Mediator*
- *Service Coordinator*
- *On-Site Ambassador*
- *Advocate*
- *Trouble-Shooter*



# The Reality of Experiential Decision-Making

*What did they learn from their best meeting experience?*

*What did they learn from their worst meeting experience?*

*How did the good and bad experiences “color” their decision-making  
moving forward?*

# Checklist

- Best meeting experiences are good templates for hotels and destinations to learn from and adopt or adapt.
  - Match your best assets and opportunities with their expectations.
- Worst meeting experiences are those from which we learn even more... what to avoid, eliminate.
  - Use the worst experience findings to position your destination and shape your sales presentation.
- Be prepared to be “judged” by past experiences and learn how to manage objections, assumptions and perceptions.

# Extracting what matters...

- *Do meeting planners share past good and bad experiences ?*
- *Do meeting planners express what they value most?*
- *How do meeting planners expect hotels and destinations to respond to this information?*
- *What can hotels and destinations do better for meeting planners at the selling and planning stages?*

# Checklist

- Extract and evaluate good and bad experiences.
- Ask meeting planners to tell you what they value most.
- Identify specific meeting goals.
- Identify expectations in terms that can be translated into action.
- Get meeting planners to tell you how they measure success.
- Be the meeting planner's chief problem-solver and solution-finder - customize your response and presentation to reflect this ability and capacity.

# Connectivity: Expectations & Experiences

Those Who Bring Them  
*Attendees and Exhibitors*



# Attendees and exhibitors want something for their time and money.

- Meeting attendees and exhibitors bring their own set of expectations and experiences to a meeting. They expect the meeting to deliver promised content, learning and networking opportunities and business contacts, an opportunity to get away for awhile, all in a comfortable, safe and memorable environment.

# What role do these expectations play in planning and delivering?

*What do you know about the attendees your meeting planner is trying to attract?*

*Who are they? Where do they come from? What are they accustomed to? What do they expect? What will they like?*

*What do you do with ground intelligence you collect about a group's attendees and exhibitors?*

*Are you ready for problems discerned from this intelligence or past experiences?*

# Checklist

- Ask the questions!
- Request demographic or lifestyle information on attendees so you are better prepared to accommodate.
- Make recommendations based on your intelligence gathering.
- Manage expectations before and during event.
- Get your partners aboard.
- Set-up pathway for concerns or grievances.
- Develop the “YES” list.

What pre-planning do you and your partners do to anticipate?

*What steps do you take when a complaint or concern is made on-site?*

*What catastrophic emergency and medical emergency preparedness planning do you do?*

*How deep are your vendor back-up plans?*

*If you know particular attendees, groups or exhibitors are historically troublesome, how are you handling this in advance of the meeting?*

# Checklist

- Show yourself capable and confident of influencing partners to deliver quality customer experience.
- Consider every complaint or concern as an opportunity to create value.
- Assure meeting planners and attendees with a meeting-specific catastrophic emergency and medical emergency preparedness plan.
- Keep back-up plans simple but always be prepared with options and alternatives.
- Work with meeting planners to manage “problem” attendees or exhibitors before the meeting.

# Connectivity: Expectations & Experiences

Those Who Deliver Them.

*Destinations, Convention Centers and Hotels*



# Destinations, Centers and Hotels

- Destinations, hotels and centers are in business to make and keep customers. They need meetings, conventions, tradeshow and events to generate revenue. Their capacity, capability and commitment to delivering products and services designed to meet and exceed expectations is paramount to achieving that goal.

# What really defines the best working relationship with a meeting planner?

*What are you really putting into the “sales call” to get maximum out of the sales call?*

*What information do you collect before considering the account qualified?*

*How engaged and involved are hotels and destinations with meeting planners during planning and on-site?*

*What preparation goes into planning a site visit?*

*What are partners doing well before the site visit?*

*What do partners need to do better before the site visit?*

# Checklist

- Make the sales call customer-centric.
- Make it count! Get the information you need.
  - Specifications
  - Decision-Making information
  - Motivations, Needs, Wants, Expectations
- Create and cultivate a “seamless” destination experience.  
Agree upon a single point of contact.
- No surprises! Diminish meeting planner anxiety and stress -  
provide contracts, floor plans, fees and details before they  
ask.

# Checklist

- Translate the information for partners in ways that connect with them.
- Get beyond the traditional “pre-con”...
- Block meeting space accurately and responsibly.
- Understand the program, theme and goals of the meeting.
- Create a protocol for managing issues and problems.
- Empower staff to problem solve.
- Provide meeting planner with single contact and “chain of command” names, telephone/pager #s and 24/7 access.

# Checklist

- Establish an expectation for partner communication throughout the planning cycle. Develop a timeline and work flowchart from which both plan and act.
- Make the site visit a priority!
- Everyone knows and everyone goes!

# Know what we all worry about...

- And do something about it!
  - *Attrition Clauses*
  - *Multiple Booking Channels*
  - *Attendance Building*

# Attrition Options

- Counter with a “best effort” provision.
- Use accurate historical data and a pace report.
- Under block the rooms.
- Base “damages” on lost profit, not lost revenue.
- Define “sold” and “sold-out.”
- Anticipate changes, provide for revisions.
- Base attrition “damages” on hotel’s average occupancy for past three years over same period.
- All rooms occupied count toward room block, even if purchased on another channel.

# Multiple Booking Channel Options

- Do your homework before negotiating.
  - Compare room rates with online rates over same period of time.
  - What rates are the hotels offering to consolidators during the month and time of the meeting?
- Negotiate with research.
  - Ask the hotel to guarantee that they won't offer lower-rated inventory to consolidators over the convention dates.
- Offer in-block booking incentives.

# Attendance Building Options

- Understand what really motivates attendees and play to it.
  - I feel alone.
  - I want to see my friends and colleagues, commiserate with them a little and laugh a lot.
  - I want a break from work.
  - I want to eat, drink for free.
  - I need to be re-inspired.
  - I want to leave my family obligations behind for a few days.
  - I don't know enough.
  - I want the goodies.
  - I want to visit someplace new on someone else's dime.

# Connectivity: Points of Intersection and Common Themes



# Connectivity breeds responsibility...

- Accuracy, reliability, trustworthiness, shared goals and thoughtful actions creates and sustains a sense of responsibility between partners which builds a stronger service delivery platform.

...and everyone benefits!

# Connectivity builds a common sales and operating platform...

- When all the destination partners agree on shared goals, narrative, operating principles and customer interaction guidelines, the destination can leverage this stability and strength throughout the sales and marketing cycle.

...and everyone benefits!

# Connectivity builds trust...

- Customers will more likely reveal what matters most and share their core values, needs and expectations with people they trust. The higher quality the information shared, the more likely the destination can deliver a successful meeting experience.

...and everyone benefits!

# Connectivity encourages planning and preparation...

- When everyone is on the same page and focused on booking and delivering a consistently excellent meeting experience, everyone wants to be involved, engaged and contributing.  
...and everyone benefits!

# Connectivity relieves stress...

- Working together, creating and nurturing connective “tissue” between the customer and the organizations delivering the goods and services distributes the burden and responsibilities more evenly and relieves stress points along the planning and delivering process.

...and everyone benefits!

# Connectivity improves the negotiating environment...

- When the partners are in alignment, the meeting planner becomes a partner in the process rather than a provocateur, able to pit one partner against another.

...and everyone benefits!

# Connectivity improves the delivery model...

- When the partners are in sync with the meeting planner and the teams and service providers are well-informed, fully engaged and genuinely committed, the likelihood is greater that the meeting will be delivered seamlessly and without incident.

... and everyone benefits!

# Checklist

- Think of the destination as more than the sum of its parts.
- Get to know the meeting planner and what he or she wants and needs to succeed.
- Get to know the hotel and what he or she needs to look the boss in the face.
- Get to know the Center and what they need to make it work.

# Checklist

- Think about the working relationship as one to be framed for mutual benefit.
- Think about the working relationship as one built today to last tomorrow...and the next day, and the next day...
- Identify the “launch platform” and build on it.
- Find common ground in missions and goals.
- Intersect at the customer!

# Connectivity

More than an aspiration. Today, it is a business imperative!