

Operation Interaction

Do event managers use Web 2.0 tools for planning and scheduling their events? They would – if they knew how. IMEX and CIM have asked around.

Study. Everyone is talking about Web 2.0, which is why we have sounded out our readers. Of 1,000 questionnaires we sent out in January 48 were returned. First result: Web 2.0 applications are better known than the term itself with 62.5 percent. Almost all of the event managers (91.7 percent) were familiar with Wikis, which every second one tapped for information. Forums were similarly prevalent and visited by every third manager. 81.3 percent knew about blogs, but only 12.5 percent participated in them. The discrepancy is even larger with Second Life: 66.7 percent heard about it, but a mere 2.1 percent actually were there.

And what about at their jobs? Today two out three planners already inquire online about free hotel rooms and every second about conference rooms. 23 percent of planners in meetings management work online by publishing and updating documents on the Internet from widely-dispersed planning teams. 62.5 percent like this idea. Only 14.58 percent relied on interactive exchange with participants in planning schedules and contents. Even less, namely 8.33 percent, get immediate feedback from delegates during an event via blogs or online surveys. 52.08 percent are considering this, while 39.58 percent reject the idea. The use of Pod/Vodcasts and news bulletins for the e-promotion of events is low, merely 4.17 percent.

The 64,000 dollar question, "Do Web 2.0 tools improve the planning and scheduling of conferences?" divides those surveyed. 42 percent answered "yes", 48 percent "no" and ten percent did not respond. At least every tenth planner has shared ideas and opinions in a blog or forum before or after a conference. Every second one would participate if evaluations were made, particularly from conference hotels. Planners see benefits in the exchange of information, tips and experiences about venues, events and exhibitions. The handful of those surveyed who already employ Web 2.0 features for their meetings report optimised exchange among participants and stronger emotional connections. Moreover, immediate feedback and up-to-date information impress all of them. Of those still not using Web 2.0 one third plans to do so in the next 12 to 24 months, another third plans not to do so in the near future and the last third does not want to commit itself. Most planners need more information.

"I don't know whether Web 2.0 helps in events, possibly in exchanging experiences relating to service providers and destinations," says Christian Timmer, with 26 years in event management speaking for many. The owner of CTC Christian Timmer Consulting remains critical. "I have enough on my hands with dealing with the flood of emails. I

don't participate at XING or other platforms and protect my email address like a treasured possession."

The task of building a community on the Internet was assigned by 67 percent of planners to trade journals, followed by trade fairs (40 percent) and trade associations (31 percent). The "ideal conference community" would have simple menus and be well-structured ("without too many useless extras"). Thematic forums head the wish list. Qualified members, preferably event managers, would be essential in deciding to join up. Some planners would like to have trade journalists moderate, others providers (conference centres, hotels, agencies, caterers). Freedom of expression for everyone is vital.

The community should be "transparent, open, honest, competent – and free of perpetual sceptics." They however contributed their two cents: "Something like this will never get going, since the possibility/temptation exists of (secretly) influencing topics/evaluations. A larger number of participants will relativise this problem, but not eliminate it." 20.8 percent of planners at least employ e-evaluations and e-rankings of destinations and venues, while 72.9 percent could imagine doing so.

Just as many (72.92 percent) agree with the statement that Web 2.0 applications increase the opportunity for strengthening the interactivity of meetings and events. 53.33 percent believe that younger generations of planners and participants expect the use of Web 2.0 technologies for meetings. Only 43.75 percent find that they can do their work faster and more efficiently with Web 2.0. And only every fifth planner sees Web 2.0 as a threat for the conference industry.

The final diagnosis? Planners know that Web 2.0 tools benefit their events, but do not know how to use them. KH

Grafiken

2 Are you familiar with the following possibilities of "interactive" Internet?

Web 2.0	<i>familiar with it</i>	<i>use it</i>	<i>not familiar with it</i>
Blogs	69%	12.5%	18.8%
Forum	54	35.4	10.4
Community	52	20.8	27.1
Wikis (Wikipedia)	42	50	8.33
Second Life	65	2.1	33.33
RSS feeds	33.3	6.3	60.4
Pod/Vodcasts	48	12.5	39.6

6 Where could you imagine using Web 2.0 applications for organising your meetings and events?

	already use it	considering it	will not use it

Meetings management uses and updates documents accessible to a widely-dispersed planning team	22.92	62.5	14.58
Inquiring online about available capacity in hotels	66.67	25	8.33
Booking conference rooms online	45.83	43.75	10.42
Interactive exchange between planners and participants in planning conferences and contents	14.58	60.42	25
Instant feedback from delegates during an event via blogs, online questionnaires and online voting	8.33	52.08	39.58
Using Web 2.0 tools to substitute some meetings	10.41	39.58	50
E-evaluation and e-ranking of destinations and venues by organisers and participants	20.83	72.92	6.25
Increased online promotion of events, Pod/Vodcasts and news bulletins	4.17	50	45.83
Networking with other event managers	27.08	60.42	12.5
Higher participant satisfaction thanks to social software programmes	4.17	60.42	35.42