

'Greener' meetings challenge for German event organisers
IMEX poll shows conference organisers increasingly take the environment seriously

The opinions of meetings organisers in Germany have strengthened in favour of staging more environmentally-friendly events and in some respects are more pro-green than those of industry colleagues in most European countries.

This analysis follows a survey (December 2007) involving over 100 German corporate and association buyers from sectors as diverse as food manufacture and engineering, pharmaceuticals and the automobile sector, telecommunications and medical services. The job titles of those replying typically include: event manager; outbound sales manager; director, conventions; p.r. manager; events consultant; and travel advisor. For benchmarking purposes IMEX used a survey of comparable pan-European attitudes to the environment that was undertaken in September/October 2007.

A higher proportion of German compared to European MICE buyers (81% to 72%) say that they 'would deliberately avoid destinations/venues known to have a poor environmental record'. A similarly high proportion (76%) admit to having 'taken environmental considerations into account in their work', a percentage again higher than the wider European average of 72%. Characteristic green-minded comments are: 'a sustainability approach matters in this new age'; 'we now favour destinations reachable by train'; 'we always compensate for and offset emissions caused by travelling delegates'; and 'we always arrange local transfers by bus rather than encourage the use of taxis'. The most frequently mentioned suppliers in the country used by organisers to ensure the staging of more environmentally-friendly meetings are Deutsche Bahn and the Star Alliance airline grouping. The City of Frankfurt was also highlighted for its environmentally-conscious approach.

Asked to specify and rank those green practices that they have applied to their events, the German buyers replied as follows (with comparable European ranking):

	Germany	Wider Europe
* Recycled conference material	1 st	1 st
* Selected an hotel for its environmental programmes	2 nd	2 nd
* Selected a transportation supplier for its green credentials	3 rd	6 th
* Undertaken fundraising for a green cause	4 th	5 th
* Viewed wilderness or animal conservation areas	5 th	3 rd
* Involved an inspirational speaker on the environment	6 th	4 th

The degree to which the German specialists specifically try to use environmentally-friendly transportation can be noted.

eco-tax

German buyers are also significantly more in favour of applying an eco-tax on conferences (whether on travel, venue hire, registration fees etc.) than is the average across Europe, namely 65% in contrast to around 50% generally. Their arguments in favour include: 'this would underline just how important the issue is'; and 'it is time to face reality and invest in our future'; whilst those against said: 'we already pay enough in fuel taxes'; 'there is no guarantee that the money will be used to help the environment'; and 'there is no real measure of what sustainability means or involves'.

As with fellow buyers across Europe the German respondents are unanimous in anticipating that the environment will matter more in coming years.

They also expect to take the issue 'more seriously' into account in their work (79% compared to the Europe-wide figure of 74%). Characteristic (verbatim) comments of German buyers supporting such pro-green views include:

- *'because large groups and opinion leaders are involved in meetings and can therefore influence change'*

- *'because the greenhouse gas emissions arising from delegate travel are so obvious to the public'*
- *'because our industry clearly depends on the natural environment for its success'*
- *'because if we continue to do nothing but talk we will leave our industry wide open to competition from video-conferences'*
- *'because soon it will become unthinkable to stage a conference without sustainability fees'*
- *'because the problem is becoming so fundamental to the future of mankind'*

However, there is still a minority who deny the seriousness of climate change and doubt whether it is being made worse by carbon emissions. Their (verbatim) comments include:

- *'this is all just a media bubble that is going to burst and quickly be forgotten'*
- *'this is an issue where people are responding with emotion, not logic, and the seriousness of the situation is much exaggerated'*
- *'we must learn to adapt to climate change and not fight it'*

Nevertheless, and irrespective of such views, a significantly high proportion of event organisers (74%) believe that their delegates are becoming more concerned about the environment and how the meetings that they attend seem to impact on global warming. Typical comments include: *'our attendees are becoming better informed all the time' ... 'we are beginning to see resistance to participation if our conference doesn't look sufficiently green'.*

future

Finally, and turning to the future, German conference organisers want industry leaders to provide them with more and better information to help make their events greener (e.g. benchmarking criteria; sustainability tips; case-studies of eco-friendly conferences); and they also call on the German government to do much more. Their suggestions for such official intervention include: *'legislate to make sustainability more fashionable' ... 'undertake more accurate research and monitor more' ... 'make it clear that the conference sector is seriously contributing to travel-related*

emissions' ... and 'to set an example with politicians travelling less and video-conferencing more'. Above all, many suggested that 'the German government should be investing more in environmental sciences in order to improve our technological response to the changing climate'.

The prevailing view seems to be that sustainability is no longer a fad, nor merely an excuse for cost-saving, but is now an essential justification for investing in the future.

- Ends.