Utilizing the internet infrastructure and catering

The meeting room of the future

The MICE industry is rapidly developing. The requirements set to meeting locations follow the change. IACC asked over fifty international locations, experts and suppliers about their experiences and, based on these, published the report 'Meeting Room of the Future'.

CREATE AN EXPERIENCE
A growing number of meeting planners indicate that within their function, they pay more attention to the creation of experiences. They also foresee that in the next five years, creating an experience will become more and more important. The new generation of professionals is a driving force behind this trend. With

and more entwined. Location must therefore assess whether and how their facilities and function rooms can complement the entire experience of the meeting.

LAYOUT OF THE ROOMS

Locations find that the rooms have undergone a transformation in the last three to five years, and that the meeting design element becomes more and more important. The trend is moving further towards creative rooms with a flexible layout. This flexible layout must not only be adaptable to the number of participants, but also to the need to create spots for individual as well as places for group activities. This makes it easy to switch from plenary to group sessions. What the interviewed locations noticed, is that these days, last-minute requests for the adaptation of the rooms is more rule than exception. An other fact is that rooms decorated in colors and provided with natural light that stimulate moving around function better in engaging the participants in the meeting and stir up more creativity. This contributes to the ROI of a meeting. As a consequence of this trend break-out rooms are also used more often and locations offer more and more often collaboration and network places apart from the meeting rooms. Spots that offer more privacy where one can, for instance, check one's email are also used more often.

The furniture that is deemed the most appropriate to facilitate collaboration and flexibility, are lounge seats (like sofas and armchairs), a variety in tables and chairs, furniture with castor wheels, foldable tables and light-weight furniture. In the end, what matters most is that the participant takes first place which means that their wellbeing and comfort is to be taken into account. With lounge spaces, accessories and plants locations create a pleasant homey feeling.

Flexibility, however, also demands a well-considered layout with flexible light sources and acoustics, and an excellent access to broadband internet and power points. The exact location of the power points can sometimes hinder the moving of furniture. Charging sockets in tables and chairs offer a good solution. Maximum flexibility means an additional cost factor for locations, which have to purchase and store the furniture. Stackable, ergonomic furniture is gaining in popularity. Some locations even change over to the complete rental of furniture.

TECHNOLOGY TRENDS

In spite of the fact that the technology is constantly developing itself, locations consciously decide to purchase the new technological devices themselves. For the controlling and judging of the equipment locations rely on the knowledge and experience of their own technical staff. These persons are mainly concerned about the number of cables lying around in the function rooms. No wonder that built-in equipment is favored, just like good wi-fi and and portable technology or technology in the cloud. Hardware for videoconferencing and display technology are the most offered forms of technology. Experts, however, are less enthusiastic about these facilities and do not think they are worth the investment. They prefer videocommunication services via the cloud which require just a laptop and a good wi-fi connection. Smartboards also seem to fail to meet the expectations, according to the feedback the locations received from their guests. The market is reserved in the use, probably because of the lack of training to be able to use this technology in the proper manner. Ease of use is essential for sharing content. But smartboards are not as easy to control as other wireless collaboration solutions. Often external training or assistance is

the increasing influence of these participants, locations realize the necessity of anticipating on this trend. 93% of the interviewed locations is always or often involved in the creation of an experience at a meeting. They do this by offering various facilities, for instance by attuning the catering to the location or the city. Locations are well-advised to benefit from their role as strategic advisor in the field of experience and education design. To achieve this, smaller locations can collaborate with experienced design professionals. It is to be expected that internal and external experiences will become more

necessary. Locations do keep on investing in technology in which knowledge is shared via displays and monitors. The advantage of this is that participants can easily and live share content via their smartphones, tablets and laptops. Also increasing are the investments in virtual reality. Of course, an excellent internet connection is then essential.

INFRASTRUCTURE ENABLING COLLABORATION

We are already annoyed when the wi-fi connection breaks down during the meeting. What is more: the success of meetings nowadays is partly determined by the quality of a location's internet structure. It is expected that in the coming years, good-quality internet will be the most important element of a meeting. As a result, meeting and event planners pay more attention to ensure this facility. A good internet connection is also essential for the increasing use of technology that enables collaboration and interaction. A good example of

this are the many event apps with which participants can vote and pose their questions.

A moot point in offering wi-fi is whether, as a location, you add it to the cost price. More and more locations offer free internet as part of an arrangement. A good internet connection is not only considered a bonus, but is even a reason to prefer one location to one that does not have this facility. No wonder that 52% of the interviewed parties plans to invest in bandwidth the coming year.

INVESTMENTS AND INNOVATION

The facilities locations invest in to create an experience, is mainly determined by feedback from the guests. The competition is also watched closely. However, because of a shifting demography locations should also take notice of surveys, ideas and views concering the new generation of guests, as this generation will have a growing influence on the format of meetings.

Research has shown that corporate meetings are the best platform for millennials for dedicated self-education, the extension of their network and planning their career. It is for that reason that millennials argue for more effective forms of meeting design and better ways to come into contact with each other, online as well as offline. A meeting's quality is more important than its length. In stead of extending a meeting, knowledge is more and more shared before and after the event.

CATERING

Meeting planners think that the format of breaks and meals should change. But there is disagreement whether the breaks should be shorter and more frequent, or longer. A number of locations takes advantage of this by offering catering service throughout the entire meeting. An other trend originating from the meeting planner is attention to sustainability in the drinks, snacks and meals served. Locations are well aware of the fact that the coming generation of meeting

planners will pay even more attention to this. Besides, the average guest's taste is becoming more and more refined, people get used to exotic dishes and extraordinary culinary creations. Healthy food is also gaining in importance. An increasing number of participants have specific (dietary) wishes. This makes it increasingly difficult to compose a menu that can take

into account so many different tastes and wishes. Fortunately, there are also culinary trends that can easily be integrated into a menu. One of these is the trend to let vegetables play the leading role on the plate, in stead of meat. By making good use of seasonal vegetables, chefs are inspired to create new dishes, although it remains a challenge to balance between a guest's wishes and the availability of certain products throughout the year. More and more often guests also ask for local ingredients and products that are not mass-produced, like home-baked bread. Besides this, eating is more and more often considered a social activity, in which people want to participate in the preparing, the picking and selecting of ingredients, and to learn directly from the chefs how best to prepare certain dishes. Could this be the reason why more and more farmers' markets and food festivals are organized?

The global MICE industry is rapidly developing and locations adapt to the changing demands of meeting planners and their guests. Anticipated is especially on the developments in the fields of internet infrastructure and food & beverage. The result is more options for the market in locations that offer a sepcial experience.

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