

The Power of Information

PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 45

Background Information: In *Professional Meeting Management*[®], fifth edition, Glory Wade addresses the importance of statistics in meeting planning. The chapter, They Came, They Met, They Left—Now What?, details the process for wrapping up a meeting. The chapter covers the importance of:

- Keeping detailed financial records and generating accurate post-event reports
- Obtaining post-meeting feedback from various groups involved in the meeting

PMM5 Postscript[™] Use: This PMM5 Postscript[™] examines the topic of data and using information effectively. PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 32 examines the power of information, data mining and Convention Industry Council's APEX initiative. The PMM5 Postscript[™] also includes additional group discussion or research projects to supplement the PMM5 chapter.

Learner Outcomes: At the completion of this reading, you should be able to:

- Define the difference between data and information.
- Summarize the value of information
- Explain how information is important to a meeting manager's career

Related PMM5 Chapter: Chapter 38, They Came, They Met, They Left—Now What
Author: Glory Wade
Chapter 45, Determine the Success of Your Meeting through Evaluation
Authors: Monica Myhill and Jack Phillips



Why Numbers

In Chapter 45, Determine the Success of Your Meeting through Evaluation, Myhill and Phillips identify eight reasons to evaluate (Myhill & Phillips, 2006, pp. 692-693):

1. Determine success
2. Identify strengths and weaknesses
3. Compare meeting costs to the benefits
4. Decide who should participate in future meetings
5. Identify which participants were best suited for the meeting content
6. Reinforce major points of the presentation
7. Gather data for future meetings
8. Determine if the meeting was the appropriate solution for the need

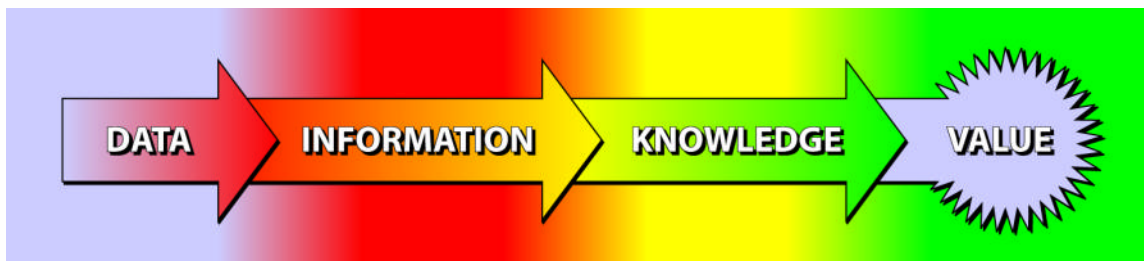
Collecting data is the first steps. Meeting managers accumulate lots of data about meetings — some qualitative and quantitative. This data can be applied toward any one the eight reasons to evaluate.

Numbers are an effective way to tell the story in business environments. Without data, a meeting manager is relying on hunches or anecdotal evidence to prove their case.

Making Sense of the Data Dump

Data by itself is only marginally useful. A person are skimming through a magazine takes in lots of data. Which articles do they choose to read and absorb? When a person's eyes reach something that is interesting to them, they stop and read the information contained in the article. Data, that is applicable, becomes information. And when a person uses information — internalizes it, analyzes it, extrapolates from it, makes decisions from it — then they turn information into knowledge. The information becomes more valuable and by default they become more valuable.

The challenge comes in transforming data to information and then adding analysis to create knowledge.



Some people say “Numbers are not my thing” or “I hate math.” The reality is that in business a few numbers can tell an impressive story. A meeting manager who can (with simple algebra skills and some statistics) tell the story is the person who can transform their meetings, their career, and future meetings.

The use of information describes a business discipline known as Business Intelligence (BI). Smarter decisions happen in organizations when data is managed, understood and analyzed. Meeting managers have the opportunity to apply business intelligence to meetings. And in doing so, bring value to their role and the organization.

Mining for Nuggets

The first step is to make sense of the huge amounts of data and decide what is “information.”

Where to start? It depends on what must be accomplished? What are the objectives? What are the organizational hot buttons? What's important to the business? That is where to start.

The answer is not the same for everyone in every organization. Converting data to information to knowledge requires the intervention of a person who can see (or at least make an educated guess of) what is needed.

There are two thing important questions to consider about information:

1. What does it tell us?
2. How can we better manage information?

First consider the need to make sense of the huge amounts of data and decide what will provide the information needed.

There are many technology tools available to support meetings (online registration, online site selection, housing management, meeting consolidation and post-meeting feedback). And just as companies have installed major Enterprise Resource Systems to manage their manufacturing processes, there are also Enterprise Meeting Systems.

While beyond the scope of this PMM5 Postscript™ to analyze the various meeting management systems, savvy meeting managers know that technology is an enabler (a tool). These tools can result in important benefits: automation, time savings, cost savings, easy registration for attendees. In addition, these tools offer meeting managers the opportunity to improve the meeting and collect valuable information. Their use should not be confined only to the meeting process.

Whether using a spreadsheet or a specific meeting technology solution, meeting managers can solicit information that improve the meeting (or a future meeting). Consider these possibilities:

- Meeting participants' interests
- Meeting participant's past program registration
- Meeting registration patterns
- Meeting spend
- Savings

By analyzing the information, meeting managers can gain information that helps them target the content and logistics for the next meeting they plan.

The Best Information is Seamless

Many industries have worked to create better supply chain management. Part of supply chain management is eliminating inefficient processes between trading partners. For example, it is terribly inefficient to have one company's computer system spew out a piece of paper and send it (perhaps even by mail or fax) to another company, who must key the same information into their system in order to process the paper. This is the cycle that occurs for countless types of business transactions. It's inefficient, error prone and expensive.

There are changes occurring in the travel/hospitality industry to help eliminate paper and waste. One example is in the area of hotel billing.

According to a survey of one-hundred U.S. corporate travel buyers released by the Association of Corporate Travel Executives and MasterCard International, 13 percent said they are receiving line-item (hotel folio) detail from their card provider and 77 percent said they plan to acquire such information in the near future. More than half of all respondents said receiving e-folio data is "very critical" for their travel programs (Boehmer & Jonas, 2005).

While it is unlikely that all hotel companies will electronically transmit folio detail, the transferring of detailed data (level-three data) allows companies to create efficiencies in expense report. For example, "At Rockwell Automation, travelers sign off on expense reports through our intranet. The system allows them to identify any items of a personal nature incurred at the hotel and that they're going to pay separately." says Tom Formberg, Director of Business Services (Boehmer & Serlen, 2003).

Major hotel chains like Hilton, Hyatt and Carlson are implementing e-folio data. David Sjolander, Vice President of Carlson hotel information systems, says he sees the competitive advantage for Carlson's participation as twofold. "Not only can we offer the convenience to the traveler and buyer in term of handling expense reporting, but there's a benefit in data analysis as well. Travel managers now will have considerable information at their disposal as to how total spend at the hotel actually is broken out."

New products continue to develop. For example, MasterCard and TRX announced an agreement to develop a Web-based dashboard that will combine data from MasterCard's corporate card program, including electronic hotel folio data, with TRX's data-reporting tools.

"By employing the Travel Dashboard to provide in-depth reports of category-specific spending patterns, corporate travel managers and companies will gain better insights and control of their travel expenses—leading to cost reductions, improved efficiency, better compliance and more impactful vendor agreements," said MasterCard Worldwide group head of the large market segment Marcie Verdin (TRX, 2007).

That is enabling business intelligence.

This type of data integration occurs when large companies create mandates around business practices required to do business with them. IBM played a critical role when it required its preferred hotel suppliers to be able to provide data for its own travelers this way — if they wanted to keep their share of IBM's significant room night volume.

A second example of moving toward seamless information is the use of travel cards. Many organizations already track spend using a corporate procurement card. Travel cards have followed suit as a method of consolidating, tracking data and creating more efficient operations. According to Visa Commercial Solutions 2004 Corporate Travel Card Benchmark Survey:

- The typical organization has given travel cards to 23 percent of its employees and charges the majority of its travel expenses (over 70 percent) to those cards.
- The primary rationale for the travel card program includes convenience to employees and better data about travel spending.
- Over 83 percent of respondents indicate that they expect travel card spending to increase over the next five years. The main drivers of expected growth are plans to increase the number of cardholders in the organization and general expectations of increased travel spending.

The APEX initiative is another example of how the hospitality industry is creating more efficient process. The more standardized information is, the fewer hands that touch it and more automated the flow, and the better it can be managed. (The next section contains more information on APEX.)

The travel and hospitality industry will continue to use technology and data as an enabler to make better decisions. Experience in the closely related industries (travel) and non-related industries show that when information is integrated and seamless it leads to more efficiency

APEX Revealed

APEX (Accepted Practices Exchange) is an initiative of the Convention Industry Council to develop and implement industry-wide accepted practices to create and enhance efficiencies throughout the meetings, conventions and exhibitions industry. It is addressing seven key areas: terminology, history/post event reports, resumes and work orders, requests for proposals (RFPs), housing & registration, meeting and site profiles and contracts.

The overarching benefit of APEX is to streamline and decrease the cost of doing business between parties in our industry (just like the automotive industry accomplished in the '80's). Those benefits are derived from:

- Creating cost efficiencies (time and costs)
- Streamlining systems
- Easing communication and sharing of data
- Enhancing customer service
- Avoiding duplication of effort and increased operational efficiencies
- Creating better educated, more professional employees

The cornerstone of APEX is data or terminology. Terminology is critical so that all parties can be guaranteed that they are talking about the same thing. Terminology has been standardized through the APEX glossary. Also, behind the scenes, much time has been spent mapping data elements so that various computer systems can seamlessly exchange data.

However, before the entire industry is ready to “run” by exchanging data seamlessly, other APEX tools allow meeting managers to “walk.” The APEX Meeting and Event Toolbox, version 2.0, enables planners to access standard templates (paper-based) to exchange information.

Although the ultimate end state has parties exchanging data automatically, even standardizing paper information creates benefits and improves communications,

Terri Breining, the current APEC Commissioner, elucidates the benefits for many parties in the industry, on the Meeting Industry Gurus website.

For planners:

- Consistent information allows for better site selection decision-making by comparing apples to apples, especially in the site profile and RFP areas
- Demonstration of professionalism and knowledge which can lead to better potential for raises, promotions, and credibility within the company while demonstrating strategic value, not just tactical application
- Creates time to spend on things like creativity, marketing and strategic thinking
- Saves time

For companies and organizations:

- Standardization within company, particularly if the planning function is decentralized
- Resource savings (e.g. planner time, head count, etc.)
- Quicker, more consistent personnel training
- Consistency in forms and processes will be more likely to protect company because there will be less room for gray areas
- Standardization of the post event review helps in defining and tracking ROI (Breining, August 16, 2006)

For hotels and other housing facilities:

- Most service delivery issues occur because information was not shared, or it was communicated in an unacceptable format. Use of standard event specifications will help customers focus their requirements around the information that hotels require so that the property can deliver a zero-defect experience.
- Much time is spent currently collecting information of what the customer needs, in terms of specific requirements rather than understanding what could help the property make the sale. By having planners use a comprehensive, consistent RFP, hotel sales people will better understand the opportunity and make specific recommendations for dates, meeting rooms, and F&B activities which enable sales people to become a consultative sales professional rather than just a processor of dates, rates, and space (Breining, August 17, 2006).
- Operational savings as information flows through computer systems not people and paper.

Other industry partners like CVBs, third-party systems providers, vendors, exhibitors and service contractors also stand to gain from the widespread use of APEX terminology, forms and technology.

The full report on APEX can be found on-line at <http://www.conventionindustry.org/apex/apex.htm>.

Why Crunch the Numbers

In referring to consumer marketing, Business Week stated, "In the electronic age of marketing, personal information is the new currency." In the meeting world, meeting managers can use meeting information to be their currency, too (Judge, 1996).

Meeting managers can enhance their net worth by:

- **Creating senior management support** — By linking information to business objectives, meeting managers will be able to sustain senior management interest and support for efforts.
- **Speaking the language of business** — Like it or not, the language of business includes statistics and dollars. Use this language and meeting managers will be "understood" by the people controlling the purse strings.
- **Practicing business intelligence** — Use information to perform business intelligence. With the right information meeting managers can analyze the numbers and conduct research. Numbers lend credibility as a meeting manager quantifies information. Then a meeting manager is not perceived as relying on hunches or anecdotal evidence.

Meeting managers can use information to organize staff and processes. For example, a meeting manager may choose to segment responsibilities — one person does all site selection. A meeting manager may realize the benefits of consolidating the information and function.

Meeting managers can use information in negotiations. Meeting managers possessing good historical data on room pick-up can leverage that information when negotiating with a hotel. Without information, a meeting manager is losing amenities, losing complimentary rooms, and losing discounted exhibit space.

Meeting managers can use information to identify patterns to better manage an event. These numbers can be at the macro level (about the event) as well as micro (about the participants).

- **Using decision making tool** — With sufficient historical information, meeting managers can use the information to help make decisions
- **Re-engineering processes** — Meeting managers can re-engineer (the buzz word for "improve") data flow within any organization. A comfort around the numbers will allow a meeting manager can find out what data exists. Then determine in which system it resides (paper, Excel, proprietary company, ASP, other). By focusing on how the data is useful and used, a meeting manager can find a way to capture useful information as simply as possible into a preferred "warehouse."
- **Leveraging information to enhance careers** — Use information to document performance. The value of a meeting manager's knowledge and skills will become indisputable.

Many of meeting managers already perform these functions; in order to advance the professionalism of the meeting manager role, the number crunching is as important as the day-to-day responsibilities.

Summary

Data management will be a growing opportunity for meeting managers. New technology, a continued focus on accountability and a strong interest in saving money will drive meeting managers to capture, manage and use data in new ways. Knowledgeable meeting managers realize that there is “power in information.” Whether using that information to determine success, identify strengths and weaknesses, compare meeting costs to the benefits, practice good business intelligence or communicating success to others, the meeting and hospitality will continue to be data driven.

Meeting managers live in a world where information can help them quantify the power of face-to-face interactions. There is ample opportunity to turn data into information and information into knowledge thus increasing their value to organizations.

Group Discussion or Projects

1. Data privacy is a major concern. Please analyze the following hotel clause as it relates to the privacy of your attendees:

We will share personal customer information with our hotels, representatives and trusted service providers and contractors for limited purposes, including fulfilling reservations; offering certain products and services; communicating to customers; providing customer service; enhancing and improving customers' experiences; enabling access to our partners' sites; providing a personalized experience; and completing credit card transactions. We may share aggregated demographic and statistical information in the course of our business with certain third parties.

Would you, as a meeting manager, allow this clause in your hotel contracts. Why or why not.

2. Discuss how a meeting manager could capture personal and professional preferences of its attendees yet still protect the individual's privacy.
3. Examine the Convention Industry Council's Glossary of Terms (available at <http://www.conventionindustry.org/glossary/>) and list three benefits of this resource.
4. Edward Tufte said, “Graphics is “intelligence made visible.” What are some problems with graphs and charts used in meetings? How can that be avoided?
5. Building on Tufte's quote, how can a meeting manager use charts and graphs effectively to communicate their own efforts and success?

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