

Meetings Strategies: Metrics of M&E Success



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Understanding why we meet, where we meet and what we hope to achieve are key to unlocking event ROI

By Stefani C. O'Connor

Wow! What a *great* meeting!
Amazing! That was a *fantastic* experience!
Hearing such plaudits from event attendees and vendors are the kind of kudos planners, travel managers, solutions providers and hotel-venue operators love to bask in, knowing such from-the-gut responses are proof of a job well done. They also know there's no magic formula, no easy rinse-and-repeat that assures an equally over-the-top outcome the next time.

As meetings and events are flourishing again after years of foundering, finding the right mix of elements that coalesce into effective meetings and events that provide tangible ROI for all those involved has become the focus of innovative strategies across multiple agendas.

On the hotel side, global chain IHG approaches ROI by focusing on how meetings and events support long-term success for its hotels, rather than applying a single universal metric, according to Yola Marshall, vice president global sales, Americas. "A key priority is trackability - helping hotels understand how meeting and event interactions contribute to ongoing relationships, engagement and long-term value over time. Meetings often play out over a longer cycle, so outcomes may not be immediately transactional, but they can influence future business, loyalty and repeat demand," she observes.

From an execution standpoint, Marshall notes success is also measured—whether hotel teams are aligned, adequately prepared, and able to meet planner expectations while driving sustainable commercial impact. "Across all meetings, attendee

and planner feedback remains a critical indicator of ROI, as experience quality directly shapes future placement decisions, repeat business and the strength of long-term relationships between planners and hotel teams," she says.

Frank Passanante, senior vice president, global head of sales and HRCC for Hilton, sees participant enthusiasm as one of the hallmarks of well-developed meetings. "Attendee and vendor satisfaction absolutely carry weight in contract negotiations today. And not just as 'nice to have' metrics. They've become leading indicators of whether a meeting is worth reinvesting in," says Passanante. "If an event drives strong engagement, repeat attendance and delivers for sponsors and partners, that shows up quickly in renewal conversations, in multi-year commitments and in how planners prioritize spend."

According to Hilton research, more than two-thirds (67 percent) of professionals will only attend events that directly support their career goals. "That raises the bar," Passanante says. "It puts pressure on agendas to be more focused, on experiences to be more intentional and on every meeting to clearly deliver value to the individual attendee."

Different Strokes

Due to the sheer variety of meetings, success looks different for every gathering, according to industry veteran Shauna Whitehead, senior vice president, commercial strategy, BCD Meetings and Events. "It's shaped by the event's purpose, audience and stakeholder expectations," she asserts.

That said, Whitehead cites several core elements she finds consistently define a

successful outcome, including a "meaningful" return on investment. "For all events, ROI is a critical measure of meetings success. It involves comparing the event's financial gains against its costs," says Whitehead.

Other pro-success components include achievement of objectives, a positive participant experience, stakeholder satisfaction and long-term impact and legacy. "A successful event leaves a lasting impression and contributes positively to its community, industry or cause," Whitehead explains.

From her perspective, Alisa de Gaspe Beaubien, CEO and co-founder of AI-driven meetings and events management platform Groupize, says the most important element of a successful meeting is simple: It happens in person, in the right place. "We've learned a lot from virtual and hybrid [meetings and events], but the highest-value interactions still happen face-to-face. That's where trust is built, decisions are accelerated and real connection happens," she says.

Venue Matters

"But where you bring people together matters just as much. A successful meeting isn't just in person; it's in a location that's right for the business and respectful of the traveler." And it takes far more nowadays than just being near a beach or a hot metro area to be the "perfect" meetings location, says De Gaspe Beaubien.

For starters, she says ease and efficiency of travel, i.e., minimizing friction and fatigue, combined with reasonable duration, and not asking people to travel farther than the value of the trip justifies or on dates that conflict with common personal commitments (religious holi-

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— Alisa de Gaspe Beaubien, CEO and Co-founder, Groupize

days, Mother’s/Father’s Day, etc.) are key primary considerations.

Having preferred and vetted suppliers on board also helps ensure quality, consistency and value, and a property that understands your travel program. “When you get the location right, you’re not just improving logistics, you’re improving engagement, energy and ultimately, outcomes,” says De Gaspe Beaubien. “In-person meetings are an investment, so they need to deliver something you simply cannot achieve over a screen, in a setting that actually enables people to show up at their best.”

Kari Wendel, vice president, lodging and meetings solutions at global technology company HRS, agrees that the selection of the right venue, setting up the right environment to meet a company’s overall goals for a meeting, is important for attaining the desired end result. Working on behalf of its corporate clients, HRS focuses on venue sourcing, contract negotiation on key elements (room and tax, amenity access and use, etc.) and payment.

Wendel notes that HRS “has knowledgeable ‘feet on the street’ in the vast majority of top city centers used for meetings, giving hoteliers engaged in bids with HRS clients an extra resource to ensure bids are submitted in a timely manner, appropriate property attributes are highlighted, etc.”

To help achieve this, the company offers its procure-to-pay solution for a venue via its HRS Connect platform. The solution covers everything from initial procurement and bid analysis through to booking, payment, reconciliation and VAT reclaim where applicable.

“Corporations can turbo-charge adoption of preferred meetings sourcing and payment processes – and use of preferred hotel properties – by deploying a symmetrical program across state lines and country borders,” Wendel says. “The key here is to standardize the many simple meetings (10 to 75) that a typical company will hold in a given year – on average nearly 75 percent of the total of a company’s annual meetings calendar.”

She notes HRS has seen scenarios where companies are achieving adoption beyond 70 percent when they implement standardized, digital processes across the range of their formal and informal event planners.

Numerous meetings and events planners/managers opt for hotels as venues of choice and Whitehead notes BCD M&E is “highly intentional” in its approach.

“We start by aligning venue selection with the event’s purpose, choosing hotels whose spaces, location and capabilities directly support the desired outcomes. From there, we collaborate closely with hotel teams to design seamless, engaging attendee experiences through thoughtful

F&B, technology integration, hospitality touches and operational flow. Transparent communication keeps all stakeholders aligned,” Whitehead explains. “Throughout planning and execution, we focus on creating environments that elevate content, foster connection and leave a lasting impact, ensuring every hotel partnership contribute meaningfully to the event’s overall success.”

Meeting the Objective

With Groupize’s tech-advanced platform, its trademarked agentic AI assistant known as aime manages the lifecycle of corporate meetings, events and group travel, helping travel managers, planners, procurement teams and travelers source venues, negotiate contracts and ensure policy compliance.

When collaborating with hotels as venues, De Gaspe Beaubien asserts, “We’re systematizing what good looks like.” On her agenda, that means matching the right venue to the right objective – not one contracted just due to its availability – and doubling down as an end-to-end partner while also collaborating with hotel teams.

“And that’s critical,” says De Gaspe Beaubien. “We operate as an end-to-end orchestration layer and the system of record for the spend, but we don’t replace the ecosystem – we connect it.”

Just as important, she adds, the property itself plays a key role in success. “A great hotel partner doesn’t just respond to an RFP – they understand the customer.” That includes knowing the client’s account history, preferences and priorities; delivering consistency across programs; and when it’s a new relationship, taking the time to learn the customer, their culture and their attendees.

“It turns a fragmented process into a coordinated system, where both technology and the hotel partner are aligned to deliver a better outcome. Because ultimately,” says De Gaspe Beaubien, “You’re not just hosting a meeting, you’re hosting a business objective.”

And critical to meeting that objective is assessing the ROI of the event. “A successful event is more than logistics and execution. It’s an experience that achieves its strategic objectives, satisfies stake-

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— Shauna Whitehead, SVP Commercial Strategy, BCD Meetings & Events

holders and creates lasting impacts,” Whitehead says.

To measure this, BCD M&E uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative metrics to gauge ROI across several dimensions, including goal attainment, attendee engagement, satisfaction levels, financial outcomes, operational efficiency, and long-term value, she explains. “These key performance indicators help us understand not only how well the event is performed at the moment but also how it contributes to broader organizational goals,” Whitehead says.

The Measuring Stick

So what metrics should planners and meeting owners use to judge success? In such a broad field with so many variables, there’s no single measure of success, according to IHG’s Marshall. “Instead, success is evaluated through a combination of experience, outcomes and future engagement.”

She points to key indicators such as attendee and meeting planner feedback, which reflects the quality of both the content and the onsite experience. “Success also is measured by whether the meeting strengthens relationships, supports repeat business and builds long-term trust – factors that matter deeply in a relationship-driven industry,” Marshall maintains.

Wendel says that the selection of the right vendor has consistently proven to be a baseline, positive element of any successful meeting. “Moreover, in scenarios when the meeting planner elects to use a property that is part of the company’s preferred transient program, the hotelier is notably more likely to be responsive to specific meeting requests across all ‘time sections’ tied to the execution of a successful meeting,” she adds.

For Whitehead, the measure of event success is both quantitative and qualitative, including core metrics such as attendee participation and engagement, satisfaction reflected in surveys and post-event evaluations, and the quality of interactions and connections formed.

“We also assess broader visibility and influence through social media activity and media coverage, while financial metrics, such as revenue versus expenses,

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— Yola Marshall, VP Global Sales, Americas, IHG Hotels & Resorts

help determine commercial effectiveness when applicable,” says Whitehead. “No matter the size, scope, or purpose of the meeting, our goal is always to ensure that clients and attendees walk away feeling they were part of something exceptional.”

Groupize’s De Gaspe Beaubien sees the industry as “finally growing up” and becoming mission-critical. “For years, meetings were influential investments a company makes, often representing up to 3 percent of revenue,” she says, noting that what’s changing isn’t just how meet-

ings are measured, it’s the role they play in how work gets done.

“Meetings are becoming the most trusted source of truth inside organizations,” De Gaspe Beaubien says. “They’re where decisions happen, alignment is created and momentum is built. Meetings are no longer just events – they’re infrastructure. They’re how companies operate, align and move forward. It’s time to stop managing meetings as an afterthought and start treating them like the strategic function they are.” ■

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