



6 Meeting Trends Accelerated By the Pandemic



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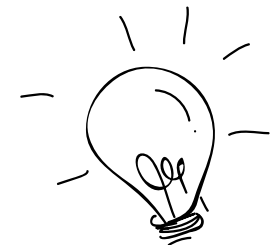
The Time is Now

There's a classic adage which reads, "Nothing is permanent except change" and, if the last few months have demonstrated anything, it is precisely that sentiment. Change hasn't just arrived on our doorstep — it has invited itself in, and taken a seat at the table.

As we discuss this 'new normal' for the meeting and event industry, the question we continue to arrive at is: Just how much will things change? Will new policies be temporary, or here for the long haul? Will travel brands be able to consistently meet newly evolved standards? How will it change classic touch-points in the hospitality realm; specifically, meetings and events? And of course there is a need for virtual/hybrid meetings short to mid-term.

Many experts predict an unprecedented demand for process to manage internal meetings. Companies will still need their employees to meet face to face, and, of course, they will need to meet with customers. The return of in person meetings are inevitable, especially as we get close to a vaccine, which could be as early as Q1 2021. More than one-quarter of planners whose meetings have been impacted by COVID-19 are rescheduling their events for sometime in 2020, according to Northstar Meetings Group's Pulse Survey and the Planner Confidence Index from Imeet is showing an 11% increase week over week on resuming meetings in early 2021.

As the global economy cautiously reopens, it's important to recognize those trends which have been accelerated by the pandemic in your planning for the next year. These will help you prepare for what is needed now and what is needed for the future of meetings and events.



Unique Venues for Day Meetings

Venues for Day Meetings

In-person meetings and professional interactions are still integral to the success of a company. Harvard Business Review notes that a face-to-face request is 34 times more successful than an email, and studies show that 85% of people believe face-to-face meetings contribute to stronger, more meaningful business relationships.

However, moving forward, venues and event planners will likely see an influx in demand for meetings of a shorter duration such as board meetings, planning sessions, recruiting, and more. These replace weekend gatherings, trade-shows, and conferences. This shift applies to every single department and facilitates departments are especially impacted.

With so many companies switching to a work-remote model and on-going travel restrictions, corporate meeting and event planners will be expected to seek out short-term, daily venue rentals to appease the need for in-person meetings and work sessions, without the need for overnight accommodations. These bookings will likely include restaurants, workspaces, unique venues, and some hotels with updated, stringent health and safety measures.



Self-Service Meeting Technology

Self-Service Wins

Across all industries, we are witnessing the steady (if not rapid) adoption of self-service technology. Understandably, event and meeting planning is no exception. As companies continue to downsize, cut costs and reconsider budgets, they require easy to use, easy to implement and more affordable systems to manage their events and meetings.

Before the pandemic, many brands relied on high cost, complicated platforms to support the robust infrastructure of large-scale meetings and events. Now, with cost-containment and the widespread shift to a 'start-up' business model in which staff members wear multiple hats; self-service tools are the answer. Self-service technology enables anyone to handle the meeting/event booking process with ease, while maintaining full oversight. Corporations now want to be able to manage expense, travel, and risk for all meetings and events within one user-friendly and centralized platform that offers both self-service and managed service workflows.



Small Meetings are Back

Small Meetings Will be the Norm

Gone are the days of large meetings and events brimming with attendees shoulder-to-shoulder — at least, for now. In the interim, corporations are likely to embrace small-scale events and meetings that allow for in-person interaction in a manageable, low-risk environment. Hyatt recently reported that even with their Q2 profits in decline, smaller group events were occurring, and that they been working with planners on new designs for events.

With a reduced number of attendees and, in some cases, a mix of in-person guests and virtual participants, venues and event planners are better able to enforce social distancing and protective measures such as temperature checks, one-way traffic flow, sanitation, and more. It also lays the foundation for enhanced contact tracing in the case of an outbreak.

From the perspective of the corporation, smaller meetings not only help to reduce risk, but also help to lower costs. And all those meetings that use to take place in an office will now take place off site due to capacity controls in an office. In many markets, day meetings have started to resume before offices



Company Wide Programs & Mandating Processes

Company Wide Programs

The pandemic has exposed companies to so much liability that loose meeting management is clearly no longer an option. The risks are just too high. Organizations are moving to developing and implementing company-wide programs and mandating practices to standardize both managed travel and managed meeting processes, policy, and logistics.

Even companies that had an SMMP (Strategic Meetings Management Programs) in place to get through the onset of the crisis are now looking to incorporate self-service technology to navigate the ever-changing landscape and make every step trackable and auditable for all attendees at all meetings.

The pandemic has also introduced another new phenomenon when it comes to meeting programs. Employees are now willing to follow mandates because they realize it is important for everyone - the company, the travelers, and their safety.



Location: Keep it Close to Home

Location

Vacations aren't the only experience subject to a 'stay-cation' makeover, meetings and events are sure to follow suit. Meetings, corporate events, trade-shows and showcases that were traditionally held in big cities such as Las Vegas may be rerouted to smaller towns and local destinations, like Aurora, Colorado, moving forward.

Additionally, with the shift from weekend/overnight gatherings to day events/meetings, corporations are more likely to seek out venues that are within driving distance for attendees. In many cases, smaller satellite events may complement larger gatherings. For example, if the main event is in Austin, you may have smaller hubs in surrounding cities.

This tendency of having meetings closer is transforming travel arrangements from flights to driving. This trend is making it necessary for companies to find new ways to track this type of event for Duty of Care.



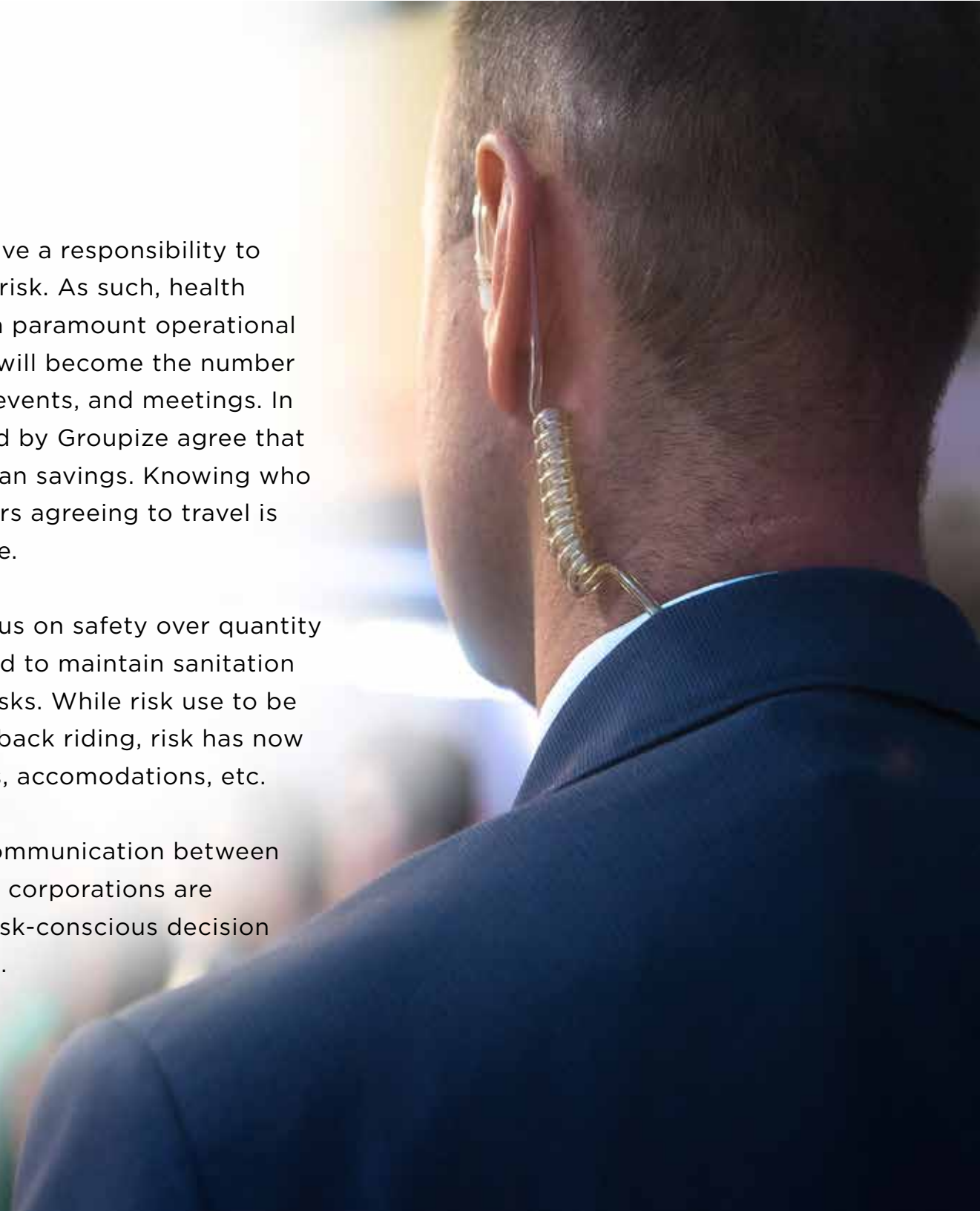
Managing Traveler & Corporate Risk is #1

Now Everyone Manages Risk

In a post-pandemic work, brands have a responsibility to appropriately identify and mitigate risk. As such, health and safety considerations become a paramount operational consideration, and attendee safety will become the number one factor for any company travel, events, and meetings. In fact, 100% of companies interviewed by Groupize agree that risk mitigation is more important than savings. Knowing who was where/when is vital and travelers agreeing to travel is important and needs to be auditable.

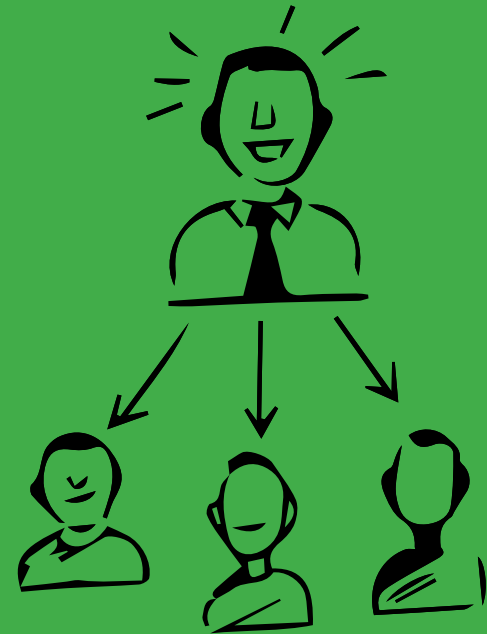
Meeting planners will exercise a focus on safety over quantity and scale, while venues are expected to maintain sanitation measures to proactively minimize risks. While risk use to be associated with activities like horseback riding, risk has now expanded to venues, other travelers, accomodations, etc.

With increased transparency and communication between planners, travel brands, and venues, corporations are empowered to make an informed, risk-conscious decision while planning meetings and events.



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Ultimately, meetings and events are here to stay; they’ll just look a little different moving forward.

With these trends and emerging standards firmly intact, along with the right event management technology, corporations will continue to benefit from the safe execution of a high volume of small-scale events and meetings.”





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