

On the Information Superhighway

Online marketing is ripe, ready for planners

June 11, 2007

By Rayna Katz

Whether meeting planners are just beginning to embrace the Internet as a marketing vehicle or are already using blogs and other web tools to promote meetings, a couple of things are clear: the time has come for online marketing to be deployed, and there's no shortage of options.

"As the world changes and the demographics of meeting attendees change, you have to change your tactics," said **Cris Canning**, a San Diego-based industry marketing consultant who is writing a workbook on meetings marketing that will serve as a springboard for her new company, Attendee Marketing Resources. The workbook will include templates for tasks (such as defining one's target market) that Canning believes planners often overlook. She is also setting up www.attendee marketing.com to provide that information.

Some planners are testing the waters. Deborah Gaffney, director of conference planning at the Tax Executives Institute, in Washington, DC, is shifting the marketing of most of the association's meetings to the Internet, eliminating expensive brochures. "This will save us considerable printing and mailing costs," she said.

Many groups haven't gone quite this far, but they are finding ways to leverage the Internet, said Jeff Kline, executive VP of business affairs at TBA Global, a Los Angeles-based marketing communications firm.

"People would like to think we're a savvy enough culture to get rid of print altogether, but our clients still use it," he said. "However, they're also using very targeted e-mail campaigns and blogs."

The latter is especially good for building excitement over an event because it allows attendees to talk, in a public online forum, for weeks or months before the event, said Kline. "You miss that community-building opportunity if you just send a brochure and say, 'See you in six to eight weeks.'"