

**Expert interview conducted with Rohit Talwar as part of primary research for the master thesis of Vanessa Jansen - International Tourism Management, University of Applied Sciences Westküste, Heide, Germany, 2011.**

This interview was given to assist in the research of Vanessa Jansen, who is analyzing the trends and challenges which the meetings industry will face in the decades ahead, in her MA thesis - The convention industry today and tomorrow – international insights and perspectives.

**Question 1:**

What in your opinion are the current issues facing the meetings industry?

**Answer:**

Economic uncertainty – the industry is not good at planning ahead and preparing for turbulence so it tries to ignore the warning signals. In the next downturn a lot of firms in the sector will suffer, venues will close – it will be tough.

Generations coming through that are not so committed to live events – how do we attract them.

How to blend live and virtual experiences in events – risk that the live becomes the poor version of the rich online experience.

Finances – downward pressure on budgets will be felt everywhere.

Innovation – the sector is slow to change designs, formats, business models, etc – needs to get quicker.

Competition – few barriers to entry – more and more players looking at the space.

Talent - not enough smart people in the industry – just not attractive enough.

**Question 2:** How is the current situation of the meetings industry? Was there a change after the economic downturn?

**Answer:**

Sector didn't learn many lessons – a few focused on innovation but most tried to repeat the same old models.

Now greater pressure to share financial risks with customers.

**Question 3:** Will the target groups for meetings be more diverse in the future?

**Answer:**

Generational diversity, increasing mobility, emergence of new professions and industries will all expand the range of event types, formats and expectations to be catered for – we'll see some big events try to cater to everyone while many will opt for more focused events targeting particular groups within the overall diversity

**Question 4:** What is the motivation to visit a congress? Will this change in the future?

**Answer:**

See the responses to our research – lots of factors – all centred on the human experience of meeting, connecting, learning together, building relationships etc.

There will always be a role for live events but we'll become more selective over which ones to attend.

**Question 5:** Will there be cultural issues due to more globalised project teams and customers? How to handle this?

**Answer:**

Differing cultures, age groups, experience, expectations, - all will make it tougher to satisfy customer needs – personalisation, enabling people to create their own event within an event will be key.

**Question 6:** Is there an increased awareness of the economic benefits of the meetings industry?

Slowly starting to happen – beginning to look beyond tourism benefits to the broader economic and community benefits – Sydney is the best example

**Question 7:** Is there increasing competition from new destinations?

**Answer:**

Yes and this will continue – everyone wants to attract people to their destination to help grow the local economy – we can expect this competition to intensify for large international events – event owners will expect increasing financial subsidy from their host cities.

**Question 8:** How important is CSR?

**Answer:**

Patchy – some taking it very seriously, most just paying lip service or doing g very little. Will fall down the agenda if we have a big economic downturn.

**Question 9:** Is there a shift towards more empowerment of the customer?

**Answer:**

In some ways technology in particular is making this possible – enabling more personalisation. However, we also see a counter trend of firms cutting costs and scaling back service so customers are offered less choice and forced down paths that suit the supplier not the buyer.

**Question 10:** Will face-to-face meetings become obsolete?

**Answer:**

No – we value human contact but we may become more selective over which to attend and demand real value.

**Question 11:** Are there changes in the marketing of a meeting?

**Answer:**

Lots of things being tried – social media, bulk discounts, incentivizing word of mouth marketing, increasing delegate involvement in the design.

**Question 12:** Are there changes in the organisation of a meeting?

**Answer:**

Growing focus on meeting architecture and more participative events with less long speeches and more interaction e.g. social gaming.

**Question 13:** Is there a trend towards niche conferences?

**Answer:**

Yes – see above – as industries grow and new ones emerge, events become more and more targeted at key sub-sectors to attract attention.

**Question 14:** Is changing political (in-) stability an issue?

**Answer:**

Yes – leads to delegate nervousness about visiting unstable destinations. Also instability may threaten the funding of publicly supported bodies e.g. CVB's.

**Question 15:** What is/are in your eyes the key business trend(s) and when will they take place (specify the time scale)?

Short term (1-3 years)

1. Growth in cost pressures.
2. More demand for virtual events.
3. Growing diversity in the delegate base.

Middle term (3-5 years)

1. Greater emphasis on knowledge capture at events.
2. Increased focus on innovation.
3. More use of immersive technologies.

Long term (6-10 years)

1. Focus on maximising long term economic impact of events.
2. More strategic focus in the industry.

3. Closure of poor performers.

**Question 16:** How do you measure/evaluate what the future trends will be; how do you keep informed?

**Answer:**

We run a continuous research process scanning what comes next.

**Question 17:** What have you done so far to be prepared for the changes ahead?

**Answer:**

Diversifying our focus away from the meetings industry to focus on other more robust sectors.

Promoting event innovation.

**Question 18:** Is there anything you would like to add?

**Answer:**

Good luck!