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Mastering the New Rules of Meetings & Events

Golden Rule: Master Your New Group Business Mix

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Whether groups are social, business, or hybrid with a virtual component, they are a high priority segment for most properties, with group business making up anywhere from 30-35% of hotel business globally prior to the pandemic. It's often the highest-rated business, not only for the income generated, but for filling in gaps during low demand periods, ancillary spend, and potential for repeat business.

With 2022 being a time of both continued change and opportunity, this is an important time to assess which group segments are booking your property to best adapt to market demands and anticipate the new needs of your customers.

Business

Structural shifts to how we meet and conduct business have companies questioning how they can create better, more immersive experiences for their customers and employees. The acceleration of innovation has widened the scope for opportunities to meet virtually globally, although many will express that there's no viable substitute for meeting face-to-face.

Substantial growth in meeting volume echoes this sentiment with an increase in the US of **48.1%** from January to February 2022 and a whopping 340% from February 2021. Corporate budgets are increasing globally as well with **64%** saying their overall meeting spend year over year is increasing in 2022.

For people passionate about meetings and events, there is power in knowing the details of how people want to receive these experiences. Corporations have to take more extensive precautions when it comes to evaluating risk, with health continuing to be an overarching consideration. To place a greater focus on the reward, hotels will have to lead with meeting safety measures and then follow by demonstrating the value that comes along with the property experience – the perfect views, level of service, amenities, or even the prospect of an extended bleisure trip.

Action Steps:

- » Lead with safety and communicate your structured meeting and event programs.
- » Focus on your property's unique value points at your hotel versus the competition.
- » Emphasize prioritizing the individual traveler, even if they arrive with a group.
- » Adjust your event space to account for more social distancing based on local regulations.
- » Reimagine larger suites and outdoor spaces to host events.
- » Shift buffet-style gatherings to individually plated meals or wrapped breakout snacks.
- » Ensure indoor spaces have mechanical ventilation or high efficiency filters, such as HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filters.
- » Offer recommendations for local or third-party COVID on-site testing for pre-event screenings.
- » Reevaluate your existing equipment and technology to host hybrid events.
- » Consider leveraging technology to aid in the management of the meeting or event, according to the planners' specific corporate guidelines.



MICE business is key for us to fill our hotel occupancy, and our protocols have been a big factor in closing deals and continuing with events. In addition to our cleaning program, we've adjusted our air conditioning system with HEPA filters and always measure the carbon dioxide levels in all of our meeting rooms. We also use disinfectant fog machines prior to events, during breaks, and after events, and install fans or open doors to ensure enough air flow in the function space.

Mauricio Ramirez, Commercial & Marketing Director,
Mundo Imperial

Social

As global restrictions continue to ease, pent-up demand for travel and social interactions are coming to fruition. From city-wide events having major impacts on surrounding hospitality markets to more intimate functions like micro-weddings with fewer attendees, people are excited about the prospect of moving around the world more freely and socially.

The wedding market in particular is poised to be cause for celebration in the year ahead with roughly 2.5 million weddings expected to happen in the US - the most since 1984. Despite inflation, couples aren't cutting back either, with wedding demand at some hotels matching pre-pandemic levels. While people continue being very financially aware, they also want to get the best value and explore creative ways to honor special moments. For events, this may mean smaller gatherings at a higher frequency or for weddings, fewer guests amid elaborate settings.

Action Steps

- » Offer incentives for room blocks, ballroom reservations, or underutilized outdoor spaces during lower demand periods.
- » Consider labor shortages when it comes to event staffing to ensure service standards meet the expectations of pent-up demand for social engagements.
- » Reevaluate preferred vendors to stay on the cutting edge of event execution and exceed the bride and groom's wow-factor expectations.
- » Consider incorporating time saving plug-and-play options like reusable backdrops and decor.
- » Think about how innovative lighting can make a splash without compromising budgets.
- » Instead of discounting rates to make up for lost revenue, offer value-add welcome amenities, hotel credits, or upgrades.
- » Make sure you are able to be mobile with your sales and event management technology to be able to take orders, check availability, and make changes to BEOs (Banquet Event Orders) or diagrams on a whim.



The one thing that we're seeing continue to trend is micro-weddings. We're definitely seeing smaller weddings and smaller groups, but with higher food and beverage, so we've maintained average check size. What people want after waiting for so long are grander, more extravagant weddings, even if on a smaller scale.

Luis Quiñones, Catering and Conference Services
Director, Hotel Washington

Hybrid

The pandemic has pushed forward technology at an accelerated rate, making way for new alternative ways of meeting and working together. To pivot successfully, hotels have had to adapt to the evolving requirements to support these emerging programs, as well as fundamental changes to the event experience.

As comfort with technology increases, hotel professionals are becoming more confident about their ability to sell, plan, and execute events with a virtual or hybrid component. These optimistic outlooks are echoed by global meeting and event professionals with nearly 73% confident about their ability to not only incorporate technology, but using it to enhance the overall meeting experience.

With all the pandemic-related challenges meeting and event professionals have faced, it certainly adds another dimension to working collaboratively with third-party audio-visual vendors, clients, and different departments across the hotel.

Although there's nothing like meeting face to face, virtual and hybrid events will remain an important business strategy in the short- and long-term. Even as physical events resume, having hybrid options helps to ensure events are financially viable and accessible to a wider audience of attendees.

Action Steps:

- » Find ways to engage the audience virtually while keeping up the energy in the room.
- » Take into account the timelines for run of show to avoid virtual fatigue and account for breakout sessions.
- » Consider how TV is different than live production and how the ambiance will translate to an in-person audience versus virtual.
- » Think about lighting and how it impacts speakers who will need more focused, bright lights, while the room should be softer, more ambient.
- » Find creative ways to start and close discussions to make transitions between virtual and live speakers as seamless as possible.
- » Sound in a larger function space is different than in a suite. Work with your tech department to ensure vocal, microphone, or music sounds are optimal.
- » Build in extra visual moments with AV content to keep your audience engaged.
- » Explore how you can expand your audience with virtual and hybrid options.



The pandemic has helped us to change how we think about doing business. It's made me more creative for sure. Challenging how we can break the traditional mold and think about out of the box solutions. How we can really push the limit of space and offerings, while still maintaining the integrity of the hotel?

Luis Quinones, Director of Catering and Conference Services,
Hotel Washington



DISCOVER

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