

IACC MEETING ROOM OF THE FUTURE: A SURVEY OF MEETING VENUE OPERATORS AND SUPPLIERS



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IACC

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RESEARCH PARTNER
DEVELOPMENT COUNSELLORS INTERNATIONAL

PREDICTING THE MEETING ENVIRONMENTS OF THE FUTURE & IMPROVING MEETING DYNAMICS



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INTRODUCTION & RESEARCH SCOPE



PREDICT. CREATE. SHAPE. IACC Meeting Room of the Future™ is an initiative led by IACC, with the goal to share the association's vision on what meeting spaces will look and function like in the future. The initiative brings together research, trends and innovations with the single goal of predicting, creating and shaping the future of meeting environments.

A study was conducted to gain insights from global venue operators, industry experts and suppliers with the goal of understanding how they are responding to the changing needs and expectations of meeting planners.

As the industry evolves and expands, just as meeting planners must continually evaluate all elements of the meeting experience, operators and suppliers must also ensure they are meeting and anticipating the changing needs of planners. Surveys were conducted among venue operators and suppliers to the meetings industry on select meeting elements including:

- Role in experience creation
- Meeting space/room design
- Technology
- Internet & Bandwidth
- Food & Beverage

Over 50 venues across 4 continents took part in the research. The profile of venues surveyed includes a high number of IACC-certified venues, where meetings, conferences and training represented between 50% and 100% of their business mix. Their focus on meetings includes the average group size of less than 100 delegates. The venues already offer dedicated meeting spaces and not simply multi-use function rooms.

Suppliers to the venues were separately surveyed and interviewed and these included global meeting space designers, architects, technology companies, nutritionists and furniture manufacturers.

It should be noted that this survey does not look at the different types of meetings or different objectives for similar meetings. As meetings become more effective, more outcome-focused, more tuned in to ROI, it will be necessary to make this distinction. We know that often the best and the hardest work of the year takes place at meetings. Investing time and money in the design of the space to support the wellbeing of participants has the ability to turn a cost into a strategic investment that has the power to transform behaviors, cultures and companies.

EXPERIENCE CREATION



“

With the importance of creating memories through experiences and inspiring delegates gaining more traction, we encourage venue teams to put in place a range of experiences that are unique and help meeting planners touch as many of the 5 senses; sight, sound, touch, taste and smell as possible.

– Mark Cooper, IACC’s CEO

A greater number of meeting planners indicated their role not only involved more “experience creation,” but that “experience creation” will become more important over the next five years. Planners pointed to the demands of incoming generations as the primary driver of this trend.

Sarah Weller of Steelcase Event Experiences expands on this concept and says, *“Meeting planners have typically lumped experiences in with services, but they are distinctly different. Learning from B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore in their “Experience Economy Certification Course” we know that ‘An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event.’ Understanding how to design and create experiences will become a highly coveted skill in the future. The core of experience design is putting the human first.”*

As power continues to shift to participants (albeit still with a very high percentage still advocating their role in this area being important), venue operators are seemingly relying more on meeting planners to provide the “experience creation” element. This year, the percentage of operators indicating their role does NOT involve experience creation increased from 4% to 7%.

Venue Operator’s Role to Provide “Experience Creation”

■ 2018 ■ 2017

Yes



No



Sometimes





We consider our role a vital one in experience creation and to be the best that we can be, we engage with our local suppliers to help us. We have created a menu of different experiences, including culinary offerings, in a style inspired by the Apple App Store, where our planners can add a little magic to their meeting.”

– Chris Kelly, Convene

The disconnect from “experience creation” on the part of venue operators may stem from an apparent paradox in the meeting planner’s role in “experience creation.”

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE AND TRADITIONAL PROGRAMMING CONTINUES

Mike Van Der Vijver of Mind Meetings notices that while meeting planners discuss the need for creating memorable meeting experiences, creativity and co-working between delegates, there is a continuation of relatively traditional programming and often a resistance to changes in meeting formats. However, Steelcase reports a very different experience and has seen more frequent requests from meeting planners who are “changing up” their formats and need help in executing their vision. Once planners become braver, the need for venues with an edge and high degree of experience creation will become even greater.

THE VENUE MUST PLAY THEIR PART AS A STRATEGIC CONSULTANT.

The future leaders of this marketplace will be the venues that take advantage of their role as strategic consultants in the areas of experience and education design, acting as true partners to the meeting professionals they serve. In addition, smart venue operators will work closely with experienced design consultants to provide a memorable meeting experience.

As event budgets remain relatively flat while prices continue to rise; meeting professionals will rely more heavily on their venue partners to help make choices that maintain the integrity of their brand experiences and education programs. To assess your venue’s success in this realm, Mike recommends asking the question, “*What percentage of clients do I offer advice on making their meeting programs more effective?*”

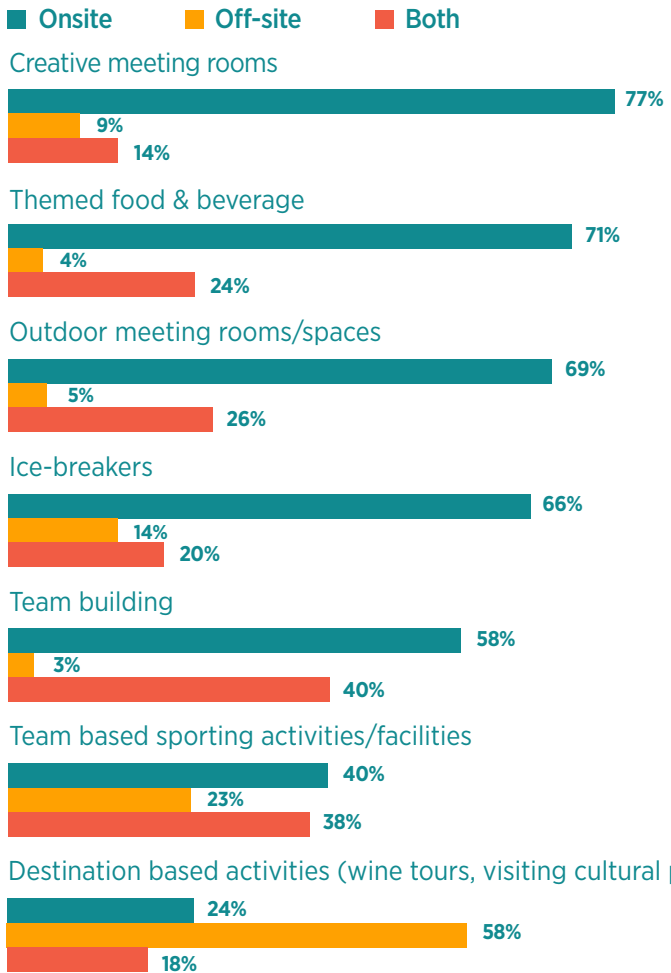
Fortunately, 93% of operators indicated “yes or sometimes”, their role does include experience creation. These operators are responding to the demands of meeting planners by offering a variety of on and off-site amenities that foster “experience creation,” with an increased emphasis from previous years on providing on-site team building experiences.



Venue operators are being asked for 'experience' creation and in many cases, they are responding with higher levels of existing services. Spatial experience design consultants have the ability to partner with the meeting planner and the venue to shift the meeting to a true experience for participants.

- Sarah Weller, Steelcase

Elements Offered by Venue Operators to Assist with "Experience Creation"



We can consider experience creation in terms of the uses of the venue and how the facilities are incorporated with other complementary business services. Ellen Sinclair of Benchmark, A Global Hospitality Company says, "In creating memorable meeting experiences, venues, suppliers and planners alike see a desire by participants to "act like a local" and in turn are including a taste of the destination/location of the venue in their meeting elements, especially food & beverage offerings."

AFFORDABLE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Culinary team building remains a popular choice, with venues often using their own staff for food & beverage activities and experiences. There is also a renewed enthusiasm for activities which include community or charitable giving as this carries high value for incoming generations.

As on and off-site experiences and amenities become more intertwined, venues must consider how their facilities and meeting space design fit into the entire meeting experience.

MEETING ROOM SPACE AND DESIGN



Venue operators agree that meeting spaces have transformed over the last three to five years and the design element is more important now than ever before.

FLEXIBLE MEETING SPACES GROW IN POPULARITY

The trend towards flexible, creative meeting spaces is only intensifying. In the 2017 Meeting Room of The Future™ survey of meeting planners, planners repeatedly reported on the importance of flexible layouts. It should be noted however that flexible space doesn't just refer to space appropriate for groups. Creativity requires a balance of individual and group space and according to Sarah Weller, it's critical to *"intentionally design spaces to support the needs of individuals and teams as they move through the different stages of the creative process."* Survey respondents also report that meeting spaces are being asked to work harder to achieve meeting owner's goals and objectives. Effectively switching between the three different modes of learning - auditory, visual and collaborative - is best supported with active learning spaces that support easy movement and reconfiguration without interruption.

60% of operators feel that the flexibility of meeting spaces will become more important over time. Suppliers named flexible, "non-traditional" meeting room furniture as one of the biggest trends in meeting space development and design over the past three years.

Operators have already noticed that last minute requests for meeting space layout changes mid event are now the norm, rather than the exception they used to be. Ellen Sinclair, Benchmark links this trend to evidence that shifting layouts stimulates creativity and reinvigorates the delegates. Designing spaces that incorporate colour and natural light, as well as encourage movement in both sessions and throughout the day are proven to increase participant engagement and creativity and provide higher ROI to meeting owners.

David Vogt of the Edith Macy Conference Center in New Jersey comments on the changing configurations of meeting space between different segments of a client's meeting; *"More casual area breakouts, not necessarily breakout rooms, but more "wherever space" where segments of a group pop out, discuss then reconvene with more frequency. Wi-Fi speed is hugely important for all areas including outside of the main room, even outdoors."* Steelcase, Inc. also reports that activating under-used or third spaces, such as foyers and atriums into work cafes and networking lounges is a great opportunity to increase collaboration



“Commentary in the survey was that a percentage of the productivity/results of a meeting happens outside the meeting room itself. The growth of collaborative space options creates an ability for the facilitator to gain more values from these opportunities.”

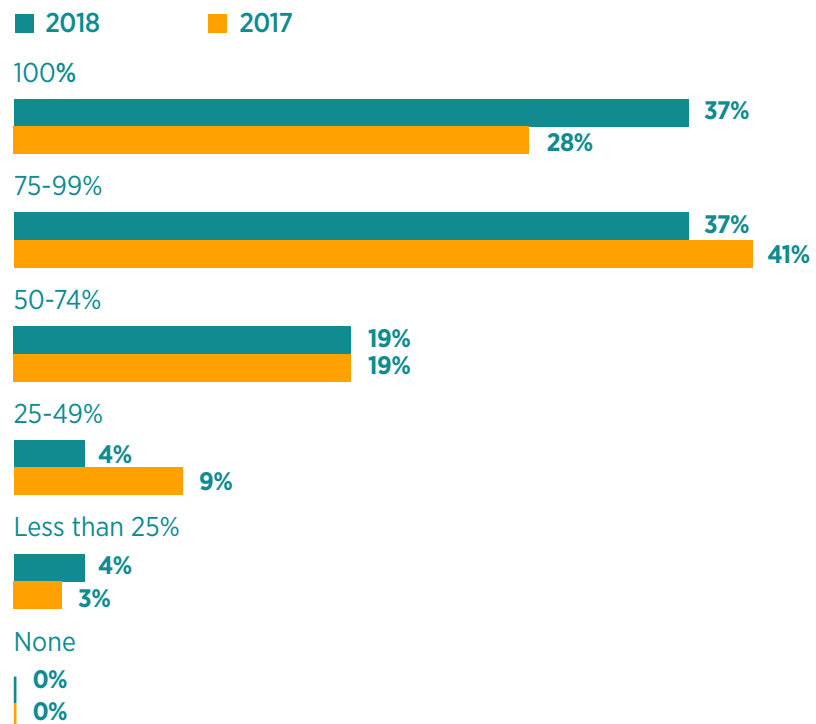
– Ellen Sinclair, Benchmark, a Global Hospitality Company

and build trust among participants. They also provide great touchdown spaces for participants to do a quick check in at home or work and then return to the meeting more productive and engaged.

Venue operators and suppliers tended to agree that break out rooms are used more now than they were three years ago; suppliers are citing an increased demand for smaller rooms for 90 pax. or less. In conjunction with these results, more venues are offering collaborative/networking spaces outside of meeting rooms than they did three years ago.

This year, the number of venue operators with flexible furniture and equipment in 100 percent of their meeting rooms increased significantly from 28% to 37%.

Venue Operator Rooms with Furniture/Equipment Allowing Multiple, Flexible Layouts



Meeting attendees have long extolled the virtues of the ‘hallway conversation,’ many saying that one connection was the most valuable part of the experience. Meeting professionals are now seeking to design for, multiply and ultimately quantify that conversation, and the design of the event space is crucial to their success.”

– Jessie States, Meeting Professionals International



“Meeting professionals are increasingly relying on new and unique ways to connect people to their peers, subject matter experts, and new clients. Traditional room sets, furniture and décor are ill-prepared to handle these types of environments.”

– Jessie States, MPI



MEETING SPACE FURNISHINGS

When asked what types of furniture they are incorporating to help facilitate collaboration and flexibility, operators most often mentioned;

1. Lounge furniture (couches, armchairs, soft-seating)
2. A variety in tables and seating
3. Furniture with wheels
4. Foldable tables
5. Lightweight furniture for easy mobility

Venues report a rise in providing seating styles which help create a fireside chat environment, opening viewing angles and supporting multiple content.

The incorporation of lounge furniture may seem counter to the idea of flexibility, but Heidi Niesen of CMHS clarifies that *“the desire and requirements is that the furniture also helps to create an authentic and visually pleasing environment. Often, the visual aspects of the furniture are equally as important as the flexibility.”* At the core of experience design is the ability to put the participant first which means humanising the experience and focusing on their well-being and comfort. Details such as lounge spaces that evoke feelings of home (i.e., accessories, greenery etc.) help build trust and comfort.

Flexible meeting layouts require a well thought out venue design, providing flexible lighting and acoustics and easily accessible connectivity to broadband and power.

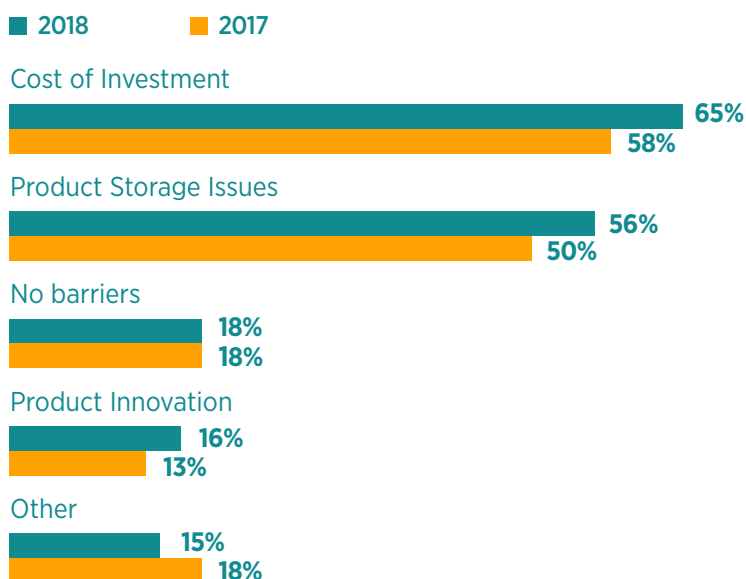
Bringing power to tabling in meeting rooms has been tricky as it often results in tables needing to be located and kept in proximity to a floor power socket. This does not allow for easily changeable layouts of rooms. With the increase of rechargeable battery solutions in chairs and tabling, this takes away the barriers that existed previously and allows for maximum flexibility.

BARRIERS AND TENSIONS

Cost of investment and product storage issues remain the greatest barriers to investing in new furniture/equipment for more flexible, creative spaces. As Steelcase notes, “We know that tension exists between participant demand and the meeting owners desire to create custom, curated experiences within meetings and the investment and storage requirements that are placed on venue operators. The tension is real and will continue to grow as participants continue to demand new experiences.”



Barriers to Venues Offering More Flexible Meeting Space



By understanding the function of different types of furniture, venues can overcome these barriers. Hendrik Karsten, of Karstens Conference Centres in Australia and New Zealand cites the importance of the growing range of stackable conference chairs offering ergonomic seating now available from leading suppliers.

While still in its infancy, outsourced rental of furnishings offers an opportunity to address existing challenges (i.e., flexibility vs. cost/storage) and enhance the experience creation for attendees. Industry leaders are seeing this opportunity and are augmenting their portfolio with accessories in order to show grouped “applications” of products to convey a certain message or a theme.

Tight budgets and tight spaces can be difficult for venues to overcome, but operators repeatedly cite the growing importance of multi-functionality, both in the use of space and furniture.

TECHNOLOGY TRENDS

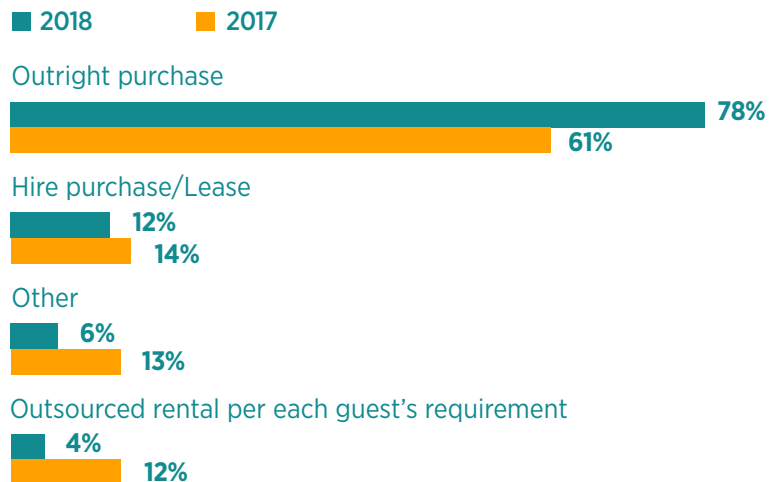


BUYING MORE POPULAR TO HIRING IN EVENT TECHNOLOGIES?

Despite the constant evolution of technology, venue operators continue to opt for outright purchasing new technology equipment.

Jeff Loether of Electro Media Design Ltd explains that the cost of high quality audio-visual technologies is decreasing because of consumer product demand, while the staffing costs associated with out-sourced services are increasing, making these options less cost-effective for venues.

Acquisition of Technology Among Operators



When it comes to purchasing new technologies, venues most heavily rely on their on-site staff to evaluate potential new equipment.

Andries Brys of Barco speaks from first-hand experience; *“Onsite staff operators face the consequence of their purchase decisions on tech every day. In meeting rooms their concern is clearly to have a clutter free environment with few cables.”*

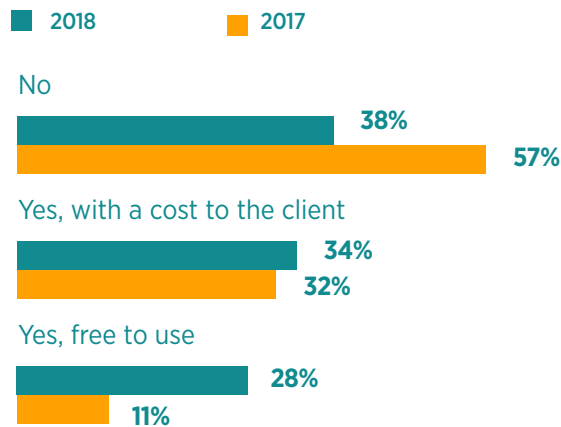
Jeff Loether, Electro Media Design Ltd, notes that on-site tech staff are more likely to use the venue's built-in technologies, while reducing the clutter of temporary audio-visual setups – making them the preferred consultant for evaluating new technologies. *“When combined with great Wi-Fi and portable/cloud-based interactive technologies, excellent bespoke experiences can be provided,”* says Jeff.



“Having collaborative technology is changing from a nice to have differentiator into a must have for venues. Important to keep key criteria for the venue in mind when selecting, whether that’s security, integration, wireless, usability or TCO (total cost of investment).”

– Andries Brys, Barco

Venues Offering Collaborative Technology to Clients



“People want a bespoke experience, technology is the main driver as meetings numbers are decreasing and streaming to other locations is becoming more important, saving on travel and accommodation costs,” adds Professor Danny Han of NHTV University of Applied Sciences.

More venues are offering collaborative technologies to their clients, with some opting to offer these services “free to use” for clients.

Video conferencing hardware and screen sharing technology continues to be the leading collaborative technologies venues offer.

However, operators report a significant decrease in their offering of video conferencing hardware, and even named the technology as an investment that has NOT been worth it based on client feedback. Alistair Stewart, MD of etc. venues, believes investment in this technology has largely been a waste of money for venues.



The jump in conference venues that offer virtual reality technologies is refreshing, though hardly surprising. Meeting professionals continue to look for ways to use technology to enhance the learning experience, connect attendees in unique ways or even offer a Wow Factor that triggers an emotional response from their audience. Virtual reality is a way to accomplish these things, and venues that offer it will find themselves with a distinct competitive advantage.”

– Jessie States, MPI

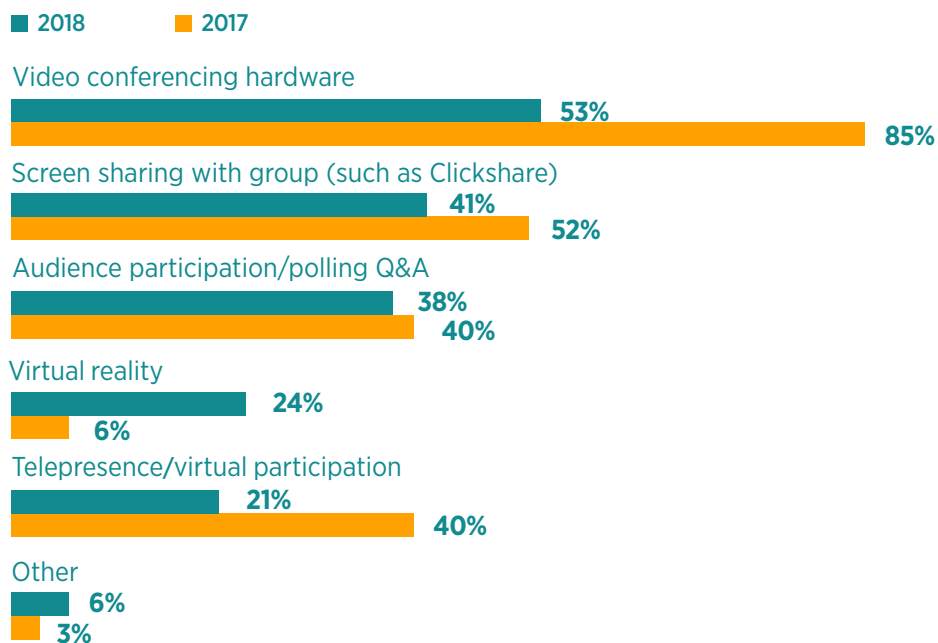


If these devices are indeed used for presentations only to project PowerPoint slides, they might not be used to their full capacity and purpose. There seems to be a misalignment between the ‘collaborative atmosphere’ that seems to be desired in meetings and the perceived ‘false investment’ in smartboards, as their purpose is exactly that of opening collaboration and making participation more flexible.

– Danny Han, NHTV



Collaborative Technologies Offered by Venues



Jeff Loether, Electro Media, is also not surprised by the decrease in videoconferencing hardware either. As he describes it, “most conferencing today is using cloud-based services such as Zoom and WebEx and GoToMeeting, so no hardware except for a laptop or tablet is required. And, of course, really good Wi-Fi.”

SMARTBOARDS FALLING IN POPULARITY

In addition to video conferencing hardware, venues also point to smartboards as a new technology investment not worth it based on client feedback.

The reluctance to invest in smartboards/digital whiteboards is problematic when considering the investment in this area by major technology companies, i.e. Microsoft with their SurfaceHub technology. Danny Han, NHTV, speculates this reluctance may arise from venue operators not being trained to use smartboards efficiently.

Andries Byrs, Barco, echoes the same concern. Barco believes that ease of use is crucial for content sharing, and that users rightfully expect their meeting tech to be usable without training or external support. Given that smartboards are not as intuitive as many other wireless collaboration solutions, depending on the audience, they may require onsite training.



Additional training is an added cost to the venue; suppliers report an increasing number of clients expecting free training for new technologies. With improper training, or difficult to use equipment, clients and meeting attendees quickly become frustrated. Barco research shows that 67% of meeting attendees get irritated by tech failures, and 41% say that tech-failures affect their engagement.

As operators and suppliers move away from smartboards and video conferencing hardware, they are continuing investment in screen-sharing technologies and increasing investment in virtual reality.

Screen-sharing technologies advance attendees to easily share content from their smartphones, tablets and laptops instantly without interruptions to the meeting. Clickshare offers one click content sharing across all the different platforms. The technology is easy to use, and guest friendly. Andries Byrs, Barco, reports that *“with Clickshare we have reached that zero-learning experience where new users can walk in the meeting room and intuitively use the technology.”*

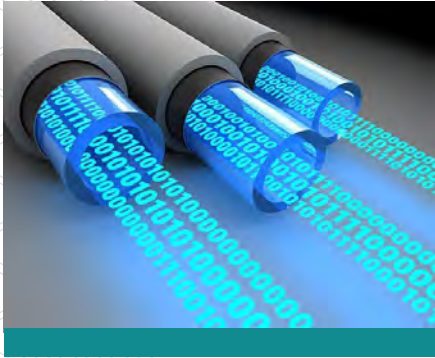
As more venues bring in collaborative technology to support their client’s bespoke experiences, venue bandwidth capacity will become vital to the success of meetings.



CCS Insight estimates the value of the wearables marketplace will be US\$29 billion by 2022 with 243 million device sales (February 2018). The impact on the bandwidth necessary to sufficiently support this growth will be a continued pain point for meeting professionals and the conference venues that support them. Understanding the habits and demographics of different audiences, as well as their device use, will be crucial to identifying how much bandwidth is necessary to truly support the needs of individual attendees.

– Jessie States, MPI

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COLLABORATION



Venue operators and suppliers feel that high quality internet will be the most important meeting element in the coming years.

The success of meetings today depends on the quality of a venue's internet infrastructure. Meeting and event planners are spending more time specifying and seeking guarantees over this element. Some are even creating disaster recovery plans in the event of internet outages mid-event. The role internet connectivity plays in achieving overall meeting success is only expected to grow in importance.

Venue Operator Perceptions of the Meeting Venue Elements that will be MORE Important in the Next Three to Five Years

High Quality Internet Infrastructure

71%

Flexibility of meeting space (ability to move furniture etc.)

60%

Access to interactive technology (i.e. audience participation, collaborative communication platforms, etc.)

53%

Multiple options for food and beverage service styles and spaces

53%

Enhanced public spaces to accommodate increased social/networking

40%

Access to authentic local area experiences

11%

Availability of team building activities

7%



This is a clear reflection of the direction clients are heading, with the mobile technological experience being an intrinsic part of meeting design, and making a high-quality tech set-up a key part of venue selection.

– Mike Piddock, Glisser



COLLABORATIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Coupled with the growing need for high quality internet, operators and suppliers also feel strongly that access to technologies that foster collaboration and interaction will continue to grow in importance. According to Mike Piddock, Glisser, the qualifier “interactive” technology relates to products and services which are intrinsically either portable or cloud-based.

Research supports the widely held belief that the current dependency on internet for meetings will grow. Event Marketing Institute and Cvent cloud-based event management platform unveiled the results of its new research collaboration project: “Momentum of Mobile Event Apps.” The report states that 88% of planners expect their attendees to consider mobile event apps as critical to their event experience.

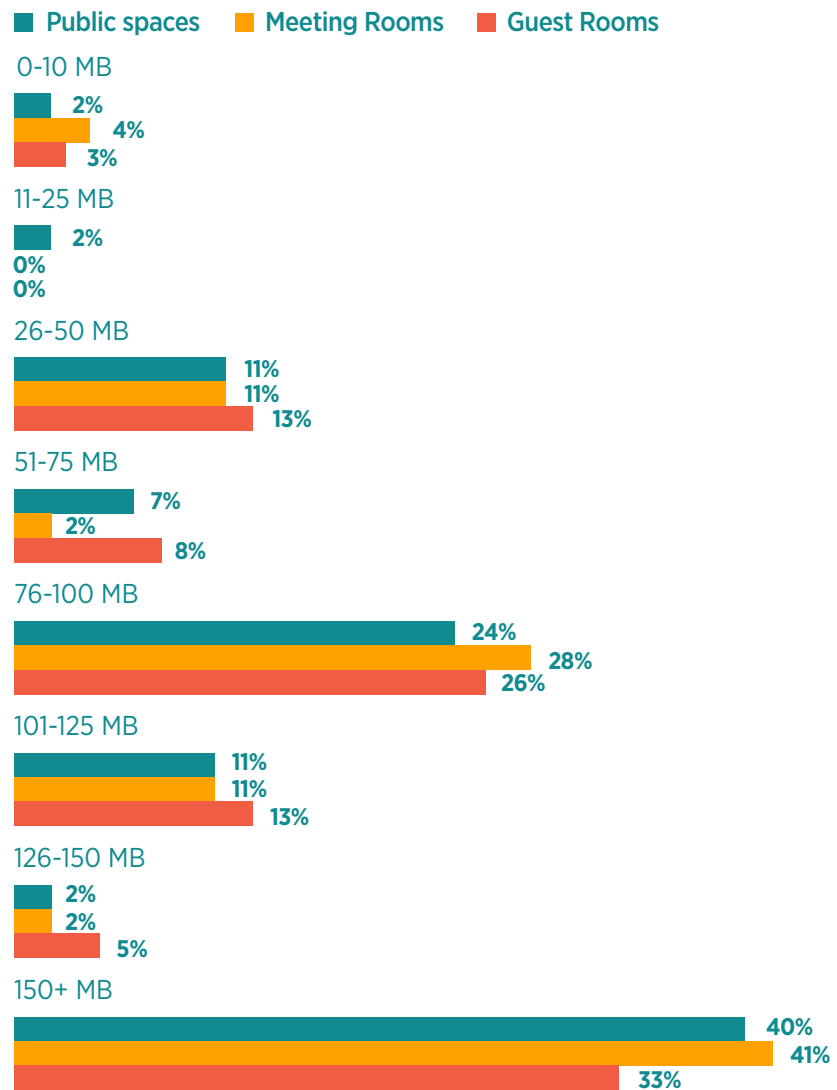
100% of our responding suppliers report experiencing greater demand for portable LCD flat panel technology and data projectors. Conversely, suppliers see a decrease or stagnant demand for built-in versions of the same technology.

As the use of portable technologies grows, internet just fast enough to check e-mails and browse the web won’t cut it. When planning for internet improvements, it will be increasingly important for venues to understand the connectivity requirements of new technologies. Jessie States, MPI points out that understanding these needs and *“ensuring that the infrastructure is in place to handle (them) will provide a competitive advantage to venues moving into 2020 and beyond.”*

This year, more venue operators are offering bandwidth of 150+ MB in their public spaces, meeting rooms and guest rooms than in 2017.

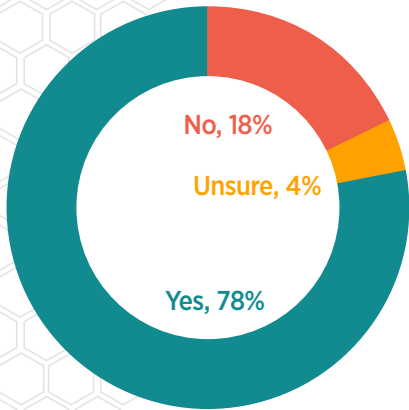
IACC members are making a concerted effort to support client programming through increased internet capacity; 90% of operators indicated they have invested in their internet hardware within the past two years. Their hard work and investment are paying off; venue operators are feeling more confident in their bandwidth offering this year, with a 10% increase in the percent of operators indicating ‘yes’ they are currently offering sufficient bandwidth.

Venue Bandwidth Available in Public Spaces, Meeting Rooms and Guest Rooms



In 2018, audience interaction is much more than a 5-min Q&A at the end of a session. To deliver an engaging experience, we need to align flexible meeting space, conversational presentation formats and collaborative technology. When they're glued together by a skilled moderator, that's when magic happens" ~ Juraj Holub, Slido

Venues Perception of Offering Sufficient Bandwidth to Meeting Delegates



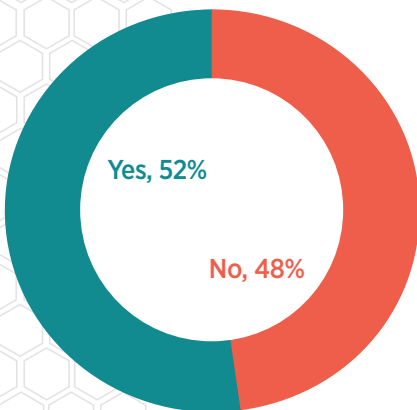
NO COST INTERNET FOR MEETINGS

Venues are also increasingly offering internet access free of charge to clients or included as part of a meeting package. Good quality internet service without cost is not only seen as a competitive advantage, but the preference among meeting planners when selecting a venue.

As internet quality and bandwidth remain number one for both planners and delegates, it is no surprise to see continued investment in this area. 52% of venue operators are planning to invest more in their internet bandwidth in the next 12 months.

In addition, 45% of operators are planning an increased investment in audio-visual technology in the coming year versus previous years.

Venue Operators Planning to Invest in Internet Hardware in the Next 12 Months



	Less investment in 2018 versus 2017	More investment in 2018 versus 2017	About the same investment in 2018 versus 2017
A/V Technologies	8%	45%	47%
Collaborative Technologies	13%	15%	72%
Internet	10%	33%	56%

“Building audio-visual equipment into the meeting, event and break-out spaces and “tech-orating” public areas with digital signage, RSS and twitter feeds has become trendy. As costs for technologies continue to fall, more technology will be built-in and used as design features” says Jeff Loether, Electro Media Design Ltd.

However, Jeff adds that *“the key to planning technology investments is to remember that the intent is to accommodate guest requirements.”*

INVESTMENT AND VENUE INNOVATION



Venue operators continue to rely heavily on customer feedback when deciding to invest in resources in a venue's meeting experience.

Compared to last year, venue operators are looking more to their competitors than industry research when deciding which resources to invest in. This is a risky approach as if only taking into consideration what's available today, it is difficult to imagine future possibilities.

2017	2018
1. Customer feedback	1. Customer feedback
2. Industry research and trends reports	2. Competitor product and service offers (nationally)
3. Competitor product and service offers (nationally)	3. Other Industry research and trends reports
4. Other (local economy, local competitors, budgetary resources)	4. IACC Research/Trends/ White Papers
5. Supplier marketing, sales and introducing product innovations	5. Supplier marketing, sales and introducing product innovations
6. Competitor product and service offers (globally)	6. Competitor product and service offers (globally)

However, operators might be best placed to look further afield than their immediate competitors when considering how to invest in developing their meetings experience. Looking both nationally and internationally, should be considered.

Alastair Stewart, MD, of etc. venues in the UK says their approach is to look at what is happening globally; *“Businesses thinking globally and those that are not afraid to introduce new ideas their customers have not even thought about asking for, is the best way forward in my view.”*

In the age of shifting delegate demographics, venues must continue to refer to new research, ideas and insights on how incoming generations will continue to change the format of meetings.



MILLENNIAL INFLUENCES

Research conducted by Meetings Mean Business (What Millennials Want in Meetings), reports that meetings and events offer the best possible platform to help Millennials expand their networks, take a custom approach to their self-education, and personal course of action for their career paths. That is why Millennials are advocating for more effective meeting design and better ways to connect, both physically and virtually, in a shifting and highly competitive global marketplace.

Major meeting industry groups are supplying the research about why companies and associations should implement new meeting strategies. The recently released American Express Global Meetings Forecast reports meeting planners continuing to focus on the quality of the experience over the length of meetings. A growing trend is reported in developing pre-meeting prep work and post meeting knowledge checks rather than extending the length of the event.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE



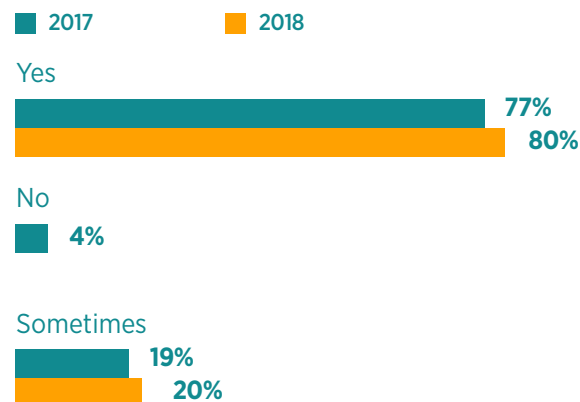
REFRESHMENT BREAKS

Venues continue to develop their offering of continuous break stations, but at the same time are trying to remain flexible in their offerings to accommodate the needs of meeting planner and delegate requests.

Meeting planners agree that the format of break and meal times should change in the future. However, planners are divided on whether the trend should move towards shorter, more frequent breaks or longer breaks and meal times.

Slightly more operators are offering continuous refreshment break services this year, than the previous year.

Venues Offering Continuous Refreshment Break Services



This year, more venue operators agreed with the phrase on sustainability and sustainable practices regarding their food & beverage offerings. Venues are aware of the high value placed on sustainability by incoming generations.

Mike Van Der Vijver, Mind Meetings, points out that trends revealed by this survey naturally reflect the world at large, with meeting participants over-representing the public trend towards wellness and healthy food.

“Today more than ever, meeting and conference guests have sophisticated tastes. They’ve become accustomed to experiencing a variety of ethnic cuisines and trying unique new culinary creations. It’s also likely that many attendees are health or eco-conscious, and many have dietary restrictions, such as dairy or gluten sensitivities.”

Changes Implemented in Food & Beverage Offerings

Sustainability and sustainable practices are more important to our venue now than they were three years ago.

90%

We are implementing more initiatives around health and wellness.

87%

We incorporate locally sourced food and beverage items to create unique local experiences.

79%

Our venue promotes healthy eating and active living and this is reflected in the food and beverage we serve.

77%

We have made significant changes overall to our food and beverage offerings.

62%

We provide nutritional information on most of our food and beverage offerings.

54%

We offer more themed-specialty events than we have in the past

45%

We offer more outdoor dining options currently than we have in the past

32%

CULINARY PERSONALISATION

Choosing a menu that will please an increasingly particular and complex audience is no easy task. Today's chefs and meeting planners must consider several factors beyond just presenting a pretty plate. As Ron Stoddard, Head Chef at Summit Executive Centre in Chicago says, "*Special requests are becoming the new normal.*"

What are some of the important issues you should keep in mind when designing your meeting menus? Consider these culinary trends our members are seeing.

Less Meat. More Veg. A report from the European Fresh Product Association showed a distinct rise the number of vegetable-related food trends around the world in the last several years. In addition to offering selections for the growing number of people who stick to a strictly vegetarian or vegan diet, putting the spotlight on vegetables has become more and more of a mainstream approach



to menu design. In some top restaurants in LA or Chicago, for example, meat has become the side dish while vegetable-based dishes from Brussels sprouts to butternut squash have become the main course. Grilled cucumber, roasted cauliflower and beets are getting a new place on today's menus. In fact, cauliflower has been called "the new kale." Guests are eating up spiraled vegetables, cut into long and thin ribbons, added to menus in place of pasta, and ordering main dishes focused on vegetables first.

Plus, featuring seasonal vegetables lets chefs keep their menus fresh and inspired throughout the year (which is in itself another trend: Seasonal locally sourced menus). "We are becoming more vegetable forward and putting the meat secondary," agreed Stoddard. *"In the past, the idea was always to have at least two meat options and maybe more. Now, we can serve one meat option with a bounty of vegetable based items and everyone is happy."*

Increasing the consumption of veggies has the approval of public health officials. A UK study last year projected that up to 7.8 million deaths per year could be prevented if people were to eat 10 portions of fresh fruits and vegetables a day rather than following the standard "five-a-day" advice.

Locally Produced. House made and locally sourced. It's not just soups and sauces that are made fresh from local ingredients anymore. Everything from scratch baked bread to house churned butter to fresh mozzarella and granola bars are making their way onto break tables and buffet bars. Meeting delegates gravitate to the freshly made artisan items with wholesome ingredients that provide a pick me-up and energy throughout their day.



Keep in mind that seasonal availability greatly affects menu planning for kitchens that make a conscientious effort to offer locally sourced products. *“We have to stay somewhat in the season and be responsible in what we are ordering,”* said Stoddard. *“Fruit is a big obstacle. Everybody loves fruit and the demand for berries in winter are just taken for granted. Obviously, there are no fresh berries being grown anywhere close to Chicago. The big question is how far do we want to take this? Right now, we try and be responsible in our purchasing without shorting the client.”*

Dining as entertainment. Today’s dining experience has become just that: an “experience.” Guests are looking for new ways to interact socially during the dining experience. This might include participating in meal preparation, picking their own food (a literal farm-to-table experience in which diners visit the fields first to pluck vegetables) and touring the kitchen while chefs and staff explain the culinary choices and methods.

The popularity of artisanal food markets and food truck festivals are examples of this sort of social interaction. According to a 2017 U.S. survey by the Culinary Visions Panel, 85% of consumers say they love to attend food focused events and food festivals.

“Modern commercial dining has become more than just feeding people; it has evolved into a fashion of food as entertainment,” says George Hill, Executive Chef based in Australia. *“We have emerged into eating to be entertained. The modern dining room is a theatre more than ever before. The professional chef is like an actor playing to an audience, and the diner absorbing the atmosphere, interpreting the content and loving just being the spectator.”*

Mark Ralph, Head of Food, Warwick Conferences comments that they have been focusing on Gut Health, with research shows that gut health has a direct link to brain activity, including better mental health, and a decrease in diseases such as cancer and Alzheimer’s. Mark further comments that he feels we will see an increase in food such as Kimchi and sauerkraut, and drinks like kombucha. Also, cultured foods yoghurts with probiotics and foods with prebiotics like chicory root and Jerusalem artichoke. *“Recently we have served Korean burgers with Korean BBQ sauce and kimchi slaw which was very well received!”*

Our chefs are focusing on bright and attractive in 2018, using cresses, herbs, beets and edible flowers. We know delegates like our artisan breads and we are always looking for interesting and daring vegan and vegetarian dishes!

REPORT SUMMARY



The global meetings industry continues to develop at a fast rate, as venues adapt to the changing demands of meeting planners and delegates in all areas, but especially in food & beverage and internet infrastructure.

The experience for delegate is improving year on year and as long as investment continues in 2018, companies will continue to find more options when considering venues which have an edge, a great experience for all.

Change for the sake of change is at risk of not adding value and new meeting spaces and how delegates will use them to interact, will require planning and advice from those who understand human interaction.

Internet infrastructure will become more important, as will the ability to measure usage for a meeting and this in turn may lead to venues being able to guarantee internet services.

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