

Meeting Activity Up, But Some of It is Virtual

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Corporate and other conference activity is increasing in 2011 after two years of decline, *Meetings Focus* magazine reports. That's especially good news for colleges and universities with conference centers that cater to off-campus groups.

There appears to be a pent-up demand for meetings to build relationships and for employee training, the magazine says.

A report by Meeting Professionals International (MPI), a trade association, projects "an 8% increase in the number of meetings planned for 2011 and a 5% increase in average spend."

Threat and Opportunity

Virtual meetings are steadily increasing as an important factor, cited by 13.7% of meeting planners surveyed by *Meetings Focus* as a "threat" to on-site events.

"Emerging technologies – virtual conferencing, social media and mobile services – are serving up new threats and offering immense opportunities," according to PhoConWright, a meeting consulting firm.

"Industry forays into virtual events and collaboration through social media will become increasingly mainstream," says Bruce MacMillan CEO of MPI. "Thinking outside the room to drive performance through connectivity is becoming entrenched."

Cost Control Important

"Virtual events are becoming more of an added-value strategy, after there was an initial reaction that they might be a threat to live events," the MPI report says. "Strategic meeting management [has become] even more crucial as planners . . . take a hard look at their budgets and put more emphasis on providing more return on investment for their meetings."

"We're seeing a rise in meetings, but a lot of people are doing their own tech and in-house audio/visual for cost savings," notes Jessica Schanbaum, a hotel meeting director, quoted in *Meetings Focus*.

Cost consciousness can be an advantage to the campus conference center with good facilities, lodging and amenities and lower costs than a hotel.

Clarion can help improve your conference services and lower costs. Contact Ernie Wilder, 703/282-3030 • EWW@clariongp.com