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Is Your Meeting Running Out of Gas? Spice Up Local Meetings in times of Economic Downturn

(May, 2008 – Ft. Lauderdale, FLA) -- Growth in the meetings industry could headed for a severe slowdown as record-high fuel prices and other factors curb demand, some insiders warn. "That slowdown just might affect your next meeting or corporate function," adds Jim Etkin, president of South Florida's largest event company, ME Productions.

"Take into account the added pressure of airline passenger security-screening delays and capacity constraints at airports, and meeting planners might soon be feeling a greater pinch, too," says Etkin. As airlines look to pass on increased fuel costs and companies cut back on business travel due to weaker economic conditions, passenger demand is expected to suffer.

The solution, says Etkin, is to start aggressively looking in one's own backyard for both clients and venues of choice. "We're fortunate in that Miami is an international destination. As the American dollar is affected by recession, conversely, the buying power is up for international travelers. In my book, the expectations are that Miami will remain an active destination, and become even more attractive to Latin American businesses."

However, for markets that rely more on the U.S. traveler, Etkin offers some additional advice:

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1. **Focus on regional meetings.** It might be more cost-effective to use third tier destinations and boutique locations for events and break that meeting for 500 people into regional events of 100 each. And, use local vendors. Preferably find a DMC company that offers more “under one roof” as opposed to shopping around for independent vendors. A company like ME Productions is actually more cost effective in that clients don’t spend time and energy shopping for vendors in florals, entertainment, sound, lighting, et cetera. In addition, vendors are pre-screened so quality is maintained. This is more often available through larger DMCs, but smaller companies might also have a preferred vendor list, saving clients cost, energy and effort.
2. **Don’t skimp on quality.** That is one area where being cost-effective could backfire. “You still need to deliver all the content in a meaningful and entertaining way, or risk losing your message entirely.”
2. **Promote using events.** Etkin suggests that the ad budget, while necessary, could be replaced by other media approaches that include direct messaging and public relations.
4. **“Go Green” when it make sense.** “Going green” can be affordable when “done right,” says Etkin. “For example, when our team went to Jamaica for one client, they made certain to ship less material and use local products. Even the centerpieces were made from local vegetation and island artists. This saved having to ship enormous amount of material and ornaments, and resulted in a considerable cost savings.
5. **Provide a “gas allowance” for potential clients.** Why not consider an incentive for a tank of gas to clients who come “on site” for a visit? Auto dealerships have been doing this for years, along with other promotions. Those ad dollars might be better spent used as an incentive for face-to-face client meetings rather than blind pitches to a mass audience.

About ME Productions

Florida's largest meeting and special events firm, ME Productions, is an award-winning full-service destination management and event production company specializing in national and international corporate and social events, décor, floral design, destination management services, business theater, staging, audio-visual, music and entertainment. For further information, contact Hal Etkin at (800) 544.0033, extension 121. The company web site address is www.meproductions.com, or send e-mail inquiries to oncallpr@aol.com.

ME Productions is headquartered in Pembroke Park, Florida. The company’s Central Florida Office is located at 6220 South Orange Blossom Trail, Suite 140, Orlando Florida 32809, 877.888.4436.

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