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**ME PRODUCTIONS**

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## Meetings and Exhibitions Maintain Competitive Edge

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The head of a US event production company says the corporate meeting is still the most economic way to reward employees while expressing the corporate message. Hal Etkin, chief executive officer of Florida-based ME Productions, was commenting on statistics put out by the US Department of Labour, which showed that meeting and convention planners held about 51,000 jobs in 2006. According to the department, it was a virtual “bull market” for the industry. But, that was then and this is now, with the main question being whether the corporate meeting sector can survive the current economy?

Etkin believes it can. “Meetings generally feature chief executive officers and upper management reports on the bottom line in a unified setting. The meeting encourages interaction among attendees from various company divisions, some which may be separated by large geographic disconnection. It might be only once or twice a year the divisions meet face-to-face. And break-out sessions address important areas of corporate goals.

“The value is how that message is delivered,” said Etkin. “The corporate event will last as one of the few methods to unify the company and its employees in a setting that rewards rather than sets the impression of corporate commands in a time of increasing stress. It motivates rather than deflates.”

This holds true for exhibitions as well. According to Steve Hacker, president of the National Association of Exhibition Managers (IAEE), in 2006-07 there were 10,000 exhibitions in the US and Canada

And a study by the International Association of Exhibitions and Events, reveals that 85 per cent of tradeshow producers projected a total gross revenue increase of 6.5 per cent in 2007 over 2006 – a number that probably held true for true for 2008 – events are planned at least a year in advance. “Not only is the sales team last to go, and essential to motivate,” added Etkin, “but the need to market and stay current with competitors is a budget cost that is most immune to cut-backs. Cut back your marketing

and you've lost your competitive edge.”