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Risky Business

Include security measures now

— Kristi Casey, Staff Writer

APPREHENSION ABOUT FLYING has curtailed business in some traditional fly-in meeting markets, but how concerned should planners or attendees be about on-the-ground safety? Are safety concerns changing the way business is being done outside the office? What is being done to make meetings and event more secure? And, are meetings even potential targets?

Deidre Underwood, director of business theater for M.E. Productions, a national corporate and social event planning firm, doesn't think so. "Corporate people are at no greater risk to go to a corporate meeting than they are going to a grocery store in their own home town," she says. "How would terrorists target a corporate meeting? How would they find out the dates, the venues, unless they were targeting a certain corporation? That's why [companies] are not using their name on meeting signage."

Underwood says hotels are requesting more paperwork about deliveries. "You're not going to get close to a hotel with a truck without credentials. And that's the biggest threat," Underwood says, referring to the pre-9/11 Timothy McVeigh bombing in Oklahoma City.



Deidre Underwood
Dir. Business Theater



"Security used to be something that was really low-key. There always security there, but we were instructed that it was not to. Often, we used plain-clothed security. Now we have uniformed security. The idea is if you see these guys, everything's OK.

Underwood also says many meetings are getting really strict w name badges. "You have to have one or else you won't have a to anything." But, Underwood continues, "You do not want to b freak about it or you will hurt attendance."

For the most part, business has gone on as usually — as much can in unusual times. The International Association of Airport [Free Stores' annual trade show ended up accidentally coincidi with the beginning of the war on Iraq. On the eve of war, the association's Executive Director Michael Payne said, "We're in business [of travel]. I'm not sure what the message is if we car the event. Our attendees are frequent travelers from around th world. As far as getting here, they can pretty much take care o themselves.

"But people have to do what they're comfortably doing," Payne "If they don't feel safe, don't feel comfortable, then I don't know there's anything you can do to make them get on a plane."

Nationwide apprehension about flying has sent planners looki sites accessible by train, bus or car. They've also turned to see and third-tier cities that seem less likely targets for terrorism th New York City.