

Communication Methods Utilized by Convention & Meeting
Planners as They Relate to
Ski Destinations

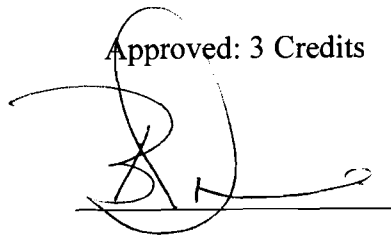
by

Brett Huske

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in

Hospitality and Tourism

Approved: 3 Credits

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Davies', is written over a horizontal line.

Robert Davies

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin – Stout
January, 2006

**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin – Stout
Menomonie, WI**

Author: Huske, Brett R.

Title: *Communication Methods Utilized by Convention & Meeting Planners as they
Relate to Ski Destinations*

Graduate Degree/ Major: MS Hospitality and Tourism

Research Advisor: Bob Davies

Month/Year: January, 2006

Number of Pages: 70

Style Manual Used: American Psychological Association, 5th edition

ABSTRACT

This study outlines the communication methods used by meeting planners and suppliers when working together. The study researched communication methods currently being used and how the communication has changed in the past five years. The communication methods were broken down into several categories including time, solicitation and relationship development.

The study surveyed 240 meeting planners that were all members of Meeting Professionals International. The planners surveyed were selected at random with criteria that included planning meetings in the mountain region. A survey was also submitted to 50 suppliers that were all members of Destination Colorado, an organization comprised of sale people that work in the resort areas of Colorado.

The surveys asked questions about the amount of time each professional has to perform his or her job, the best methods of communication with one another, and the value of relationships in the industry. The results indicated that both planners and suppliers have less time to perform their duties than they did five years ago. The most desired method of solicitation for a meeting planner is a personal sales call while the telephone and email have been the best methods for suppliers. The two top methods of communication for relationship development that planners prefer and have been successful with suppliers include the site inspection and the personal sales call. It was learned that although technology has become very important in the hospitality industry, personal contact remains the preferred method of communication between planners and suppliers.

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout
Menomonie, WI

Acknowledgements

I'd like to offer my thanks to Bob Davies who helped me through this process by encouraging and providing me guidance. I would also like to acknowledge and thank my wife and son, for there were many periods of time during the past three years when I was a part-time husband and father.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

.....	page
ABSTRACT.....	i
List of Figures.....	v
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	9
<i>Research Objectives</i>	10
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	10
Chapter II: Literature Review.....	15
Chapter III: Methodology.....	26
<i>Methods</i>	26
<i>Subjects</i>	26
<i>Survey Instrument</i>	27
<i>Survey Procedures</i>	27
<i>Limitations</i>	28
Chapter IV: Results.....	30
<i>Item Analysis</i>	31
Chapter V: Discussion.....	48
<i>Conclusions</i>	48
<i>Recommendations</i>	50
References.....	53
Appendix A: Survey Cover Letters.....	57
Appendix B: Sample Surveys.....	59

List of Figures

.....	page
Figure 1: Amount of time to Plan Meetings.....	31
Figure 2: Why time has decreased.....	32
Figure 3: Less time, planners function.....	33
Figure 4: Internet effect on planners job.....	34
Figure 5: Most effective way to secure new information.....	34
Figure 6: Likelihood to respond to solicitation.....	35
Figure 7: Comfort booking meeting on-line.....	36
Figure 8: Value of Relationship with Suppliers.....	37
Figure 9: Move meeting for established relationship.....	37
Figure 10: Technology to develop relationships.....	38
Figure 11: Ski destination, value of relationship.....	38
Figure 12: Best method to develop relationship.....	39
Figure 13: Difficulty contacting planners.....	42
Figure 14: Developing relationships vs. five years ago.....	42
Figure 15: Technology.....	43
Figure 16: Solicitation success – no relationship.....	43
Figure 17: Success method for new relationship.....	44
Figure 18: Available time to sell – past five years.....	44
Figure 19: Effect of Internet – suppliers job.....	45
Figure 20: Planner response to solicitation.....	45
Figure 21 Technology to contact planners.....	46

Chapter I: Introduction

Skiing History

The sport of skiing dates back several thousand years. Although there are differing opinions on the inception, the origin was a vital form of transportation. (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2005) By 1868 a man named Sondre Norheim from the Telemark region of Norway had decided to bind his shoes to the skis providing more control. Previously, the shoe was bound only at the toe. This changed the way skiers could maneuver and Norheim is considered the father of modern skiing (Pfeif, 2005).

Scandinavian immigrants who settled in the upper Midwest in the late 1830's introduced skiing in the United States (Pfeif, 2005). By the 1900's skiing became a very popular sport as the first slalom race was held in Switzerland in 1921 ("Skiing History-History of Skiing," n. d.). Shortly thereafter, skiing was introduced into the Winter Olympics, which helped the sport gain popularity. By the 1930's skiing became very popular in the United States particularly after the Winter Olympics held in Lake Placid in 1932 (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2005).

Ski Resort as a Destination

Some of the earliest ski resorts were located in Europe. Among the first in Norway was the Geilo resort that opened in 1909 (Dahl, n. d.). In terms of ski resort development in the United States, the oldest ski resort is Sun Valley in Idaho. This destination ski resort, built in 1936 by Union Pacific Railroad, provided skiing as a leisure sport. The resort was originally built to attract visitors to the west while using the Union Pacific railroad as the conduit (Sun Valley Ketchum Chamber & Visitors Bureau, 2005).

Colorado's oldest destination ski area in continuous use is Howelsen Hill, located in Steamboat Springs that opened in 1915 ("Alpine Skiing and Snowboarding," 2005).

Snowmass Village. In the late 1890's, the area currently known as Snowmass Village was inhabited with ranchers and homesteaders (Town of Snowmass Village, 2000). The city of Aspen, located 12 miles away, had been established as a mining community and by the 1940's and 1950's had begun to develop its infrastructure as a ski resort. It was initially the success of Aspen that led to the discovery of Brush Creek Valley, currently known as Snowmass Village.

In May of 1955 the county zoned the Brush Creek Valley area for agriculture, forestry and residential (Town of Snowmass Village, 2000). By 1958, Bill Janss the former Olympic skier had already dreamed of Brush Creek being a ski resort, and he had also purchased 3,400 acres within the Valley (Lutz, 2001). Janss came from the Janss family that had made a fortune in California real estate, construction and cattle.

Snowmass Village opened as a ski resort on December 16, 1967 (Lutz, 2001). Before the season started, there were almost 1000 people who had made reservations in town. The opening day was highlighted by Stein Eriksen, the first ski school instructor for Snowmass and skiing legend as he jumped through a ring of fire. Ten years later in 1977, Snowmass-at-Aspen the officially incorporated town became the town of Snowmass Village (Town of Snowmass Village, 2000) Along with becoming a municipality, Snowmass Village developed a master plan to further develop the ski resort and create a year round community. This plan addressed the land use along with transportation, housing and other necessities of the community. The original incorporation of Snowmass Village included 50 acres whilst there are more than 16,000 acres today.

Ski Resort as a Meeting Place

As the Snowmass destination grew, so did the competition. By 1977 there were 22 other Colorado resorts open ("Resort Opening Years," n. d.) and all of them were actively pursuing the

ski tourism market. As such, the demand to attract more and more visitors was necessary; not only in the peak ski season, but also in the summer and shoulder seasons (K. Owen, personal communication November 21, 2005). The solution to this was to call upon the group travel market to help increase winter numbers, and also to establish the summer as a true vacation destination for visitors.

Ski Resort Conference Center Development

To support the more than 1200 condo and hotel rooms in Snowmass Village, the need for meeting space became evident to secure the group meetings market. This decision to more aggressively pursue groups was followed in 1985 by the completion of the Snowmass Conference Center (K. Owen, personal communication November 21, 2005). The Snowmass Conference Center was the first of its kind in the Rocky Mountains and because of such; the group market received the destination of Snowmass Village very well.

The meeting space provided a venue for the groups to meet while occupying lodging in and around Snowmass Village. The group business was supplementing the winter travel season and was beginning to support the summer season and lead the mountain resorts into becoming “year-round” destinations. (K. Owen, personal communication November 21, 2005)

Convention and Meetings Industry Growth

In 1983, there were \$19.5 billion dollars expended in the corporate, association and convention meeting business combined (“Meetings Market Report,” 2004). Although there has been fluctuation since 1983, the expenditures for these markets represent over \$44 billion dollars in 2003. During the period from 1994 to 2004, the number of meetings and attendees of meetings has grown from 187,000 and 63 million to 1,058,800 and 84 million respectively.

Another indicator of the growth of the meeting industry from the 1970's until today is represented in the continual year over year growth of Meeting Professionals International (MPI) members. In 1972 MPI started with 159 members and today the organization represents more than 19,000 members in 66 chapters and clubs worldwide (Meeting Professionals International, 2006).

Destination Selection

At the core of the professional meeting planning is the responsibility for researching and selecting the meeting destination for his/her company or organization. Sharon Chapman, meeting planner for Berkshire Life Insurance Company of America says that to assist her with site inspection, hotel chain national sales offices are a "real time saver" (Baraban, 2005c). She can deal with one person rather than calling each hotel.

In the reader survey "Insights 2005", 46% of planners said they used a third party for site searches always or occasionally (Baraban, 2005c). As planners need to save time, third party planning companies can be of assistance. Conferon, a meetings management company that was established in 1970, conducts over \$12 million in client group travel per year (Conferon, 2005a). Site selection is among one of the many services they provide planners.

According to Heather Kreider of Navigant International, a travel management firm that handles group business for Fortune 500 companies, she would prefer to select her site based on working with a supplier she has a successful relationship (Sturken & Lynch, 2004).

Contact and Contracting Methods

Thirty years ago, the group sales solicitation process consisted of personal contact, telephone calling and mailing information to planners. Since then, technology has changed this process. Technology has assisted with enabling the planner to do more with less time and less

staff. The development of overnight delivery, voicemail, cell phones, specialty and industry specific software and Internet connectivity have changed the way we communicate in the industry.

“The do more with less mantra adopted by businesses during the economic crisis of 2002 and 2003 – and shortened lead time for planning and booking meetings – has in large part, become the standard operating procedure, despite economic recovery” (Meeting Professionals International, 2005, p. 2). In essence, the economic crisis has created a situation where planners get less time to plan thus impacting the way they do their business. In a recent meeting between planners and suppliers sponsored by Insurance Conference Planner magazine, it was stated “everyone is wearing lots of hats, and the responsibilities have expanded way beyond getting people from point A to point B” (Baraban, 2005a, para. 2).

Associations are not downsizing because there is too much fat in the company, they are doing it to consolidate positions and restructure so that they can do the same or more work with fewer people. In addition, if staff leaves, they are often not replaced. (Pelletier, 2002, para. 2)

At American Fidelity Assurance, a two-and-a-half staff department in the meeting-planning arena has increased their workload from four years ago when they operated four incentive programs, to 10 totaling over 65 corporate and training meetings per year. To manage the workload, it was stated that an experienced staff at American Fidelity was a plus, and also working with suppliers that can work efficiently. This is another way that planners are dealing with the additional workload, and reduced time to perform (Baraban, 2005c).

As technology tools were thought to make workers more efficient or to save time, it seems the industry viewed the progress through different eyes noticing the challenges of locating “people” to communicate with as technology replaced the human factor.

In a Meetings and Conventions pole in 2004, 47% of the planners said electronic Requests for Proposals (RFPs), email and on-line travel sites made it “somewhat or a lot more” difficult to establish one-on-one relationships (Sturken, & Lynch, 2004).

As the amount of time available to plan meetings escapes the professional meeting planner, there is another solution that is being considered. The independent meeting planner or the third party planner provides services to the planner as a partner in the meeting process. The third party planner can provide a full range of meeting planning services (Conferon, 2005b). The third party planner acts as a contractor to assist the meeting planner to handle details, find venues and negotiate contracts (Conferon, 2005c). The third party planner can be contracted to produce the entire meeting or provide any of the services needed to support the planner and their staff (Classic Meetings, n. d.).

Technology in the Industry

Technology in the ski industry has evolved significantly over the past twenty years. This is evidenced by ski equipment such as the down parka, 2 piece ski boot, mirrored sunglasses and high altitude sunscreen (Obermeyer, n. d.). Technology that allows ski companies to make artificial snow at their respective resort was also a significant advance (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2005).

Convention and meeting planning technology has made the meeting planning business more productive in some ways and in others, more complicated.

The Internet has provided another way to learn about potential business opportunities. By using search engines, a supplier can learn very detailed information about meetings that planner's schedule. The Internet allows information such as past meeting minutes, attendance figures and the location of past meetings to be learned without interacting with the planner. This affords the supplier the opportunity to be more informed before attempting to contact the planner. This process also reduces the amount of time the planner and supplier spend together developing a relationship (L. Barham, personal communication, October 12, 2005). This new concept is directly contrary to the phone conversations; business lunches and one-on-one face time that has been the backbone of the hospitality industry (Sturken, & Lynch, 2004).

Outsourcing and downsizing is what has been heard in the association market, which puts pressure on planners from a time perspective (Pelletier, 2002). As planners have their time for planning reduced they find other means to satisfy their requirements to attain information for meeting planning. One way is for a planner to use technology where a destination can be researched with a personal computer. Another is to visit hotel chain web sites to identify potential hotels that meet their meeting criteria (Baraban, 2005b).

One hotel company has developed a site for the meeting planner to secure availability online. The program is offered by Hyatt Hotels and is called "E-mmediate Response Meetings" ("E-mmediate Response Meetings," 2005). This program allows the planner to review availability and book a meeting, real time from anywhere in the world, with Internet connectivity.

The Starwood Hotel Company has taken the ability to book a small meeting to a new level. The process is called "Meetings in a Moment" and allows the planner to book the meeting

room, food and beverage and audiovisual needs. All of this can be booked on line, up to 30 days in advance for groups up to 25 people (Baraban, 2005b).

There are also web sites that compile information on meeting destinations that provide a place for planners to review options in specific locations. An example of this is Convention PlanIt (n. d.) found at www.conventionplanit.com. At this site planners may view specific accommodations by location, specific meeting facilities by destination or contact convention bureaus. Planners also have the ability to fill out a request for proposal to be submitted to a specific destination. This site provides a time saving feature to view meeting availability 24/7 from any where in the world.

In the 2004 Meetings and Conventions magazine biennial study called the Meetings Market Report reported that 70% of corporate meeting planners use the web site in planning meetings. Of the 70% that responded, 27% said they used specific hotel sites for information, 7% use Plan Soft, 6% used a Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) site, 4% used city sites, 2% used Google or Travelocity, 1% used Yahoo or Expedia and 18% used “other” sources (“Meetings Market Report,” 2004). Fifty-nine percent of the association planners surveyed indicated that they used the Internet to plan meetings. They used hotel sites in 23% of the cases, CVB sites in 15% of the cases, Google 2% of the time, RegWeb and Plan Soft 1% and 30% responded as other.

It was also reported that 45% of corporate meeting planners said that they had their own web page for their meetings. Of those meetings, 86% of the attendees could register on line (“Meetings Market Report,” 2004). The Internet provides an efficient tool to communicate with meeting attendees. The planner can disseminate the meeting agenda, as well as any instructions that would assist the attendee in being prepared for the meeting.

The Meetings Market Report (2004) also indicated that corporate planners found other elements of internet planning important such as meeting space specifications (52%) and photographs of the properties (49%). The planners also said that 48% thought that destination information was important and 42% said they explored possible venues through virtual tours.

Statement of the Problem

Through a combination of reduced time for meeting planners and advances in technology, it has become increasingly difficult to identify the best method for suppliers to communicate with meeting planners from Snowmass Village, Colorado. Planners have less time available yet still need to plan meetings. As such, the planner uses methods that will allow him/her to perform their job as efficiently as possible. Some planners turn to technology to secure information for meeting planning, while others will use the services of a third party to operate some or all of a meeting. As these changes take place, the sales person or supplier has more difficulty than ever in reaching the meeting planner. As the planner has less time to plan, they in turn have little or no time to develop relationships or spend time with suppliers. It is at this point in the industry that the breakdown begins to take place. Should suppliers attempt to inform and sell their product by placing endless unanswered telephone calls? Perhaps an email a day will get the attention of the busy planner. Will the traditional mail system with a postcard or formal letter garner a response? If these methods of contact are futile, then how can one schedule to meet personally with these planners? How do planners get the information they need to plan their meeting(s)?

As Snowmass Village embarks on a $\frac{3}{4}$ billion-dollar development, the desire of the sales people is to share this redevelopment news within the group travel industry. The best method of contact to be used with the most success needs to be determined from this research.

Research Objectives

- 1) Verify and substantiate the challenges that meeting planners have with time as it relates to the performance of their job.
- 2) Determine the value of relationships between planners and suppliers and the role it plays in planning meetings.
- 3) Examine the role of the third party planner and how they support the meeting planner to select sites.
- 4) Model new approaches or techniques to work with meeting and convention planners.

Definition of Terms

Association. “An organized group of individuals and/or companies who band together to accomplish a common purpose, usually to provide for the needs of its members. Usually nonprofit” (Convention Industry Council, 2003a, para. 1)

Audiovisual (AV). “Equipment, materials, and teaching aids used in sound and visual presentations, such as television monitors, video, sound equipment, etc.” (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1).

Continuing medical education (CME). “Structured educational and training experiences for personal or professional development” in the medical field (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1).

Conference center.

Facility that combines an exhibition space with a substantial number of smaller event spaces. The purpose of these buildings is to host trade shows, public shows, conventions, large food functions and other functions related to the convention industry. They may be purpose built or converted and municipally or privately owned. (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1)

Convention. An event where the primary activity of the attendees is to attend educational sessions, participate in meetings/discussions, socialize, or attend other organized events. There is a secondary exhibit component (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1).

Convention and visitors bureau (CVB). “Convention and visitor bureaus are not-for-profit organizations charged with representing a specific destination and helping the long-term development of communities through a travel and tourism strategy” (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1).

Corporate meeting. “Gathering of employees or representatives of a commercial organization. Usually, attendance is required and travel, room and most meal expenses are paid for by the organization” (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1).

Familiarization tour (FAM). “Offered to potential buyers of a venue, a program designed to acquaint participants with specific destinations or services and to stimulate the booking of an event. Often offered in groups, but sometimes on an individual basis” (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1).

Independent contractor.

Person contractually retained by another (other than as an employer) to perform specific tasks. The other person has no control over the independent contractor other than as provided in the contract. In the context of group travel, a tour manager or tour brochure designer/writer might be retained in this capacity. (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1)

Meeting. “An event where the primary activity of the attendees is to attend educational sessions, participate in meetings/discussions, socialize, or attend other organized events. There is no exhibit component to this event” (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1).

Meeting professionals international (MPI).

...is the largest association for the meetings profession with more than 19,000 members in 66 chapters and clubs across the USA, Canada, Europe and other countries throughout the world. As the global authority and resource for the \$122.3 billion meetings and events industry, MPI empowers meeting professionals to increase their strategic value through education, clearly defined career pathways, and business growth opportunities. (MPI, 2006. para. 1)

Plan soft. “OnVantage operates the premier online market place for meetings-connecting the largest universe of buyers and sellers-and supporting them with the most comprehensive set of tools and services” (OnVantage, 2006b, para. 1).

Planner or meeting planner.

Person whose job it is to oversee and arrange every aspect of an event. Person can be an employee or hired ad hoc by large companies, professional associations, or trade associations to plan, organize, implement, and control meetings, conventions, and other events. (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1)

Reg web. A web based attendee management tool for meeting planners.

Request for proposal (RFP). “A document that stipulates what services the organization wants from an outside contractor and requests a bid to perform such services” (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1).

Shoulder season. “Period when the demand for a supplier’s product or service is neither high nor low” (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1).

Supplier. “Purveyor, provider, vendor, contractor offering facilities, products and/or services” (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1).

Third party planner. “A person other than the principals that plan meetings” (Convention Industry Council, 2003, para. 1).

Limitations of Study

This study is limited to meeting planners that plan meetings in the mountain region and are members of Meeting Professionals International and suppliers that are members of Destination Colorado. The responses from these groups will not necessarily reflect the feelings of the entire meeting planning or hospitality sales supplier industry in the United States.

This study is also limited to the interpretation of the questions by each sample group.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Skiing History

The sport of skiing dates back several thousand years. Although there are differing opinions on the inception, the activity was originally a form of transportation (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2005). This method of transportation was used in the northern latitudes of Europe and Russia. The Rodoy rock carvings above the arctic circle in Norway are over 4500 years old and show a man on runners with a hunting device in hand (Pfeif, 2005). Another theory is that early skiers used bones of large animals strapping the bones to the toe of their boots using leather straps ("Skiing History-History of Skiing," n. d.). This transportation source in the early days was used for travel and in warfare. In 1206 skis were used in the Norwegian civil war and they were also used by Norway and Sweden in the 18th and 19th centuries during war (Pfeif, 2005).

By 1868 a man named Sondre Norheim from the Telemark region of Norway had decided to bind his shoes to the skis providing more control. Previously, the shoe was bound only at the toe. This changed the way skiers could maneuver and Norheim is considered the father of modern skiing (Pfeif, 2005).

Scandinavian immigrants who settled in the upper Midwest in the late 1830's introduced skiing in the United States (Pfeif, 2005). The gold rush lured many of those immigrants to the Sierra Nevada where the skis were adopted for travel through snow.

By the 1900's skiing became a very popular sport as the first slalom race was held in Switzerland in 1921. Shortly thereafter, skiing was introduced into the Winter Olympics, which helped the sport gain popularity ("Skiing History-History of Skiing," n. d.).

By the 1930's skiing became very popular in the United States particularly after the Winter Olympics in Lake Placid in 1932. (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2005)

Ski Resort as a Destination

Some of the earliest ski resorts were located in Europe. Among the first, Geilo resort was opened in 1909 in Southern Norway (Dahl, n. d.). Another ski resort that began by building lodging in 1877 is the Arosa village in Canton Graubunden, Switzerland. Originally opened as a summer retreat, the town soon decided to invest in winter activities to survive. By 1911 the resort was a winter destination offering skiing along with skating and tobogganing (Imboden & Imboden, n. d.).

The oldest ski resort in the United States is Sun Valley, Idaho. This ski resort, built in 1936 by Union Pacific Railroad, provided skiing as a leisure sport as a destination. The resort was originally built to attract visitors to the west while using the Union Pacific railroad as the conduit (Sun Valley Ketchum Chamber & Visitor's Bureau, 2005).

Colorado's oldest continuous ski area is Howelsen Hill, located in Steamboat Springs. This area opened in 1915 as a sport even though it is said that skiing in Colorado dates back to the 1860's when mailmen used skis to deliver the mail (Foster, n. d.).

Snowmass Village. In the late 1890's, the area currently known as Snowmass Village was inhabited with ranchers and homesteaders. The city of Aspen, located 12 miles away, had already been established as a mining community and by the 1940's and 1950's with a downturn in mining, Aspen had begun to develop it's infrastructure as a ski resort. It was initially the success of Aspen that led to the discovery of Brush Creek Valley, currently known as Snowmass Village (Town of Snowmass Village, 2000).

In May of 1955 the county zoned the Brush Creek Valley area for agriculture, forestry and residential (Town of Snowmass Village, 2000). By 1958, Bill Janss the former Olympic skier had already dreamed of Brush Creek being a ski resort, and he had also purchased 3,400 acres within the Valley (Lutz, 2001). Janss came from the Janss family that had made a fortune in California real estate, construction and cattle.

By 1961, Janss had contracted with the Aspen Skiing Corporation to operate a ski area around the resort Janss had in his mind. By 1964 the master plan for the resort had begun. Although many considerations for Snowmass were to resemble a European ski village, it was finally determined that Snowmass would be a Rocky Mountain resort (Lutz, 2001).

In the fall of 1966 much of the preliminary real estate efforts had paid off and the village was beginning to take shape. The following year, 1967, Snowmass had all of its utilities, five lodges, 120 condominiums, a dozen private residences, a meeting room, four outdoor heated swimming pools, 21 shops and six restaurants (Lutz, 2001).

Snowmass Village opened as a ski resort on December 16, 1967 (Lutz, 2001). Before the season started, there were almost 1000 people who had made reservations in town. The opening day was highlighted by Stein Eriksen, the first ski school instructor for Snowmass and skiing legend as he jumped through a ring of fire. National magazines had previewed Snowmass and there were many travel industry press on hand along with some celebrities for the opening day.

Ten years later in 1977, Snowmass-at-Aspen the officially incorporated town became the town of Snowmass Village. Along with becoming a municipality, Snowmass Village developed a master plan to further develop the ski resort and create a year round community. This plan addressed the land use along with transportation, housing and other necessities of the

community. The original incorporation of Snowmass Village included 50 acres whilst there are more than 16,000 acres today (Town of Snowmass Village, 2000).

Ski Resort as a Meeting Place

As the Snowmass destination grew, so did the competition. By 1977 there were 22 other Colorado resorts open ("Resort Opening Years," n. d.) and all of them were attempting to benefit from the skiing tourism market. As such, the demand to attract more visitors was necessary; not only in the peak ski season, but also in the summer and shoulder seasons. (K. Owen, personal communication November 21, 2005). The solution to this was to call upon the group travel market to help increase winter numbers, and also to establish the summer as a true vacation destination for visitors.

Ski Resort Conference Center Development

To support the now more than 1200 condo and hotel rooms in Snowmass Village, the need for meeting space presented itself so that the group market could be pursued vigorously. This decision to more aggressively pursue groups was followed in 1985 by the completion of the Snowmass Conference Center (K. Owen, personal communication November 21, 2005). Snowmass Conference Center was the first of its kind in the Rocky Mountains and because of such; the group market received the destination of Snowmass Village very well.

Jeff Tippet, former Mayor, Snowmass Resort Association employee and long time Snowmass resident said,

But what really changed Snowmass was the conference center, built in 1985. It exceeded the quality of the resort, and was the incentive for Burwell to buy the Silvertree (hotel) and take it down to a skeleton (and rebuild). Then the other lodges remodeled and added. (Lutz, n. d., para. 18)

The meeting space provided a venue for the groups to meet while occupying lodging in Snowmass Village. The group business was adding to the winter travel season and was beginning to support the summer season and lead the mountain resorts into becoming “year round” destinations (K. Owen, personal communication November 21, 2005).

It was during that time of growth in the meetings business from the mid 80’s that Snowmass began to develop a very unique niche. Jack Vogel MD discovered that a medical meeting for continuing education on behalf of the American College of Cardiology in Snowmass was an opportunity to unite education with a location the attendee’s family could enjoy in 1968. (Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions, 2004) As Jack Vogel envisioned, scheduling seminar sessions from 7:30 am till 9:30 am and then again from 3:30 pm to 6:30 pm allowed the family to ski together in the middle of the day. A schedule and concept that continues today whereby doctors and lawyers needed to earn their continuing education credits each year and combining such with a family vacation was a success. As Jack Vogel said,

...Of course now everyone is copying this format. There are lots of extramural programs with this set-up, but as far as I know, Snowmass was the first. And while I don’t have any data, I suspect the Snowmass conference has saved a lot of marriages! (para. 3)

Examples of continuing medical education programs in Snowmass Village consisted of programs in Anesthesia, Rheumatology and Dermatology to name a few. Other group market segments that were attracted to Snowmass included regional and state associations, ski groups, corporations, government and scientific groups.

Convention and Meetings Industry Growth

In 1983, there were \$195 billion dollars expended in the corporate, association and convention meeting business combined (“Meetings Market Report,” 2004). Although there has

been fluctuation since then, the current expenditures for these markets represent over \$44 billion dollars. During the same period from 1994 to 2004, the number of meetings and attendees of meetings has grown from 187,000 and 63 million to 1,058,800 and 84 million respectively.

Another indicator of the growth of the meeting industry during the mid 1970's until today is represented in the continual year over year growth of MPI (Meeting Professionals International, 2006). In 1972 MPI started with 159 members and today the organization represents almost 19,000 members in 66 chapters and clubs worldwide.

Destination Selection

At the core of professional meeting planning is the responsibility for researching and selecting the meeting destination for his/her organization. A full time or part time meeting planner may select a destination for a number of reasons. Another option for destination selection would be to hire a third party planner. The third party planner can perform all aspects of planning a meeting in addition to destination selection (Conferon, 2005a).

Sharon Chapman, meeting planner for Berkshire Life Insurance Company of America says that to assist her with site inspection, hotel chain national sales offices are a "real time saver." She can deal with one person rather than calling each hotel (Baraban, 2005c).

In the reader survey "Insights 2005", 46% of planners said they used a third party for site searches always or occasionally (Baraban, 2005c). As planners need to save time, third party planning companies can be of assistance. Conferon, a meetings management company that was established in 1970, conducts over \$12 million in client group travel per year (Conferon, 2005a). Site selection is among one of the many services they provide planners.

According to Heather Kreider of Navigant International, a travel management firm that handles group business for Fortune 500 companies, she would prefer to select her site based on working with a supplier she has a successful relationship with (Sturken & Lynch, 2004).

Contact and Contracting Methods

Thirty years ago, the group sales solicitation process consisted of personal contact, phone calling and mailing information to planners. This communication included learning the meeting planner's needs and developing a relationship.

Technology has assisted with enabling the planner to do more with less time and less staff. The development of overnight delivery, voicemail, cell phones, specialty and industry specific software and the Internet connectivity have changed the way we communicate in the industry.

As all of these tools were thought to make workers more efficient or to save time, it seems the industry viewed the progress through different eyes noticing the challenges of locating "people" to communicate with as technology replaced the human factor.

In a Meetings and Conventions pole in 2004, 47% of the planners said electronic RFP's, email and on-line travel sites made it "somewhat or a lot more" difficult to establish one-on-one relationships (Sturken, & Lynch, 2004).

"The do more with less mantra adopted by businesses during the economic crisis of 2002 and 2003 – and shortened lead time for planning and booking meetings – has in large part, become the standard operating procedure, despite economic recovery" (Meeting Professionals International, 2005, para. 3). In essence, the economic crisis has created a situation where planners get less time to plan thus impacting the way they do their business. In a recent meeting between planners and suppliers sponsored by Insurance Conference Planner magazine, it was

stated “everyone is wearing lots of hats, and the responsibilities have expanded way beyond getting people from point A to point B” (Baraban, 2005a, para. 2).

Associations are not downsizing because there is too much fat in the company, they are doing it to consolidate positions and restructure so that they can do the same or more work with fewer people. In addition, if staff leaves, they are often not replaced. (Pelletier, 2002, para. 2)

Technology in the Industry

Technology in the ski industry has evolved significantly over the past 20 years. This is evidenced by ski equipment such as the down parka, two piece ski boot, mirrored sunglasses and high altitude sunscreen (Obermeyer, n. d.). Technology that allows ski companies to make artificial snow at their respective resort was also a significant advance (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2005).

Convention and Meeting Planning technology has made the meeting planning business more productive in some ways and in others, more complicated. The Internet has changed the way that meeting planners research meeting sites, communicate with suppliers and also communicate with meeting attendees.

By using search engines, a supplier can learn very detailed information about meetings that planner’s schedule. The Internet allows information such as past meeting minutes, attendance figures and the location of past meetings to be learned without interacting with the planner. This affords the supplier the opportunity to be more informed before attempting to contact the planner (L. Barham, personal communication, October 12, 2005). This process also reduces the amount of time the planner and supplier spend together developing a relationship.

This new concept is directly contrary to the phone conversations; business lunches and one-on-one face time that has been the backbone of the hospitality industry (Sturken, & Lynch, 2004).

Outsourcing and downsizing is what has been heard in the association market, which puts pressure on planners from a time perspective (Pelletier, 2002). As planners have their time for planning reduced they find other means to satisfy their requirements to attain information for meeting planning. One way is for a planner to use technology where a destination can be researched with a personal computer. Another is to visit hotel chain web sites to identify potential hotels that meet their meeting criteria (Baraban, 2005).

Looking at avenues to search, one hotel company has developed a site for the meeting planner to secure availability on-line. The program is offered by Hyatt Hotels and is called "E-mmediate Response Meetings" ("E-mmediate response meetings," 2005). This program allows the planner to review and book a meeting, real time from anywhere in the world with Internet connectivity.

The Starwood Hotel Company has taken the ability to book a small meeting to a new level. The process is called "Meetings in a Moment" and allows the planner to book the meeting room, food and beverage and audiovisual needs. All of this can be booked on line, up to 30 days in advance for groups up to 25 people (Baraban, 2005b).

There are also web sites that compile information on meeting destinations that provide a place for planners to review options in specific locations. An example of this would be the site called Convention Planit (Convention Planit, n. d.). At this site planners may view specific accommodations by location, specific meeting facilities by destination or contact convention bureaus. Planners also have the ability to fill out a request for proposal to be submitted to a specific destination. A planner can also view hot dates that are put on the site by listed facilities /

properties that have special rates to offer. This site also provides planners a calendar of industry events and up to date industry news. The concept of the developers of Convention Planit is to provide a time saving option to view meeting location availability 24/7 from any where they can secure Internet connectivity.

Two third party sources used in the industry are Plan Soft and Star Cite (OnVantage, 2006a; StarCite, 2005). These two sites provide planners the ability to research availability much like Convention Planit however they also have a sophisticated RFP system. The RFP system is used to distribute requests for multiple locations at one time. The suppliers that receive this RFP are allowed the ability to “input” the required information on the RFP, and return the information to the sender. All of this is often done without picking up the telephone.

In the 2004 Meetings and Conventions magazines biennial study called the Meetings Market Report reported that 70% of corporate meeting planners use the web site in planning meetings. Of the 70% that responded, 27% said they used specific hotel sites for information, 7% use Plan Soft, 6% used a CVB site, 4% used city sites, 2% used Google or Travelocity, 1% used Yahoo or Expedia and 18% used “other” sources.

In the 2004 Meetings Market Report, 45% of corporate meeting planners said that they had their own web page for their meetings. Of those meetings, 86% of the attendees could register on line.

Corporate planners found other elements of internet planning important such as meeting space specifications (52%) and photographs of the properties (49%; “Meetings Market Report,” 2004). The planners also said that 48% thought that destination information was important and 42% said they explored possible venues through virtual tours. These electronic tools impact the way meeting planners work.

In the 2004 Meetings Market Report, 59% of the association planners surveyed indicated that they used the Internet to plan meetings. They used hotel sites in 23% of the cases, CVB sites in 15% of the cases, Google 2% of the time, RegWeb and Plan Soft 1% and 30% responded as other.

The report also noted that among association planners, floor plans were the most important feature they used on the website as reported by 74% of those surveyed. The second most important aspect of the site was meeting specs used by 66% ("Meetings Market Report," 2004). Association planners indicated 83% of their attendees could register on-line indicating wide acceptance of this method.

Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to develop and substantiate that meeting planners that plan meetings in the mountain region have less time to perform their job than five years ago. The intent is also to show how planners use technology to address the reduced amount of time they have available to perform their job and the method of communication they prefer. Finally, the research will indicate that the value of relationships with sales people (suppliers) in Colorado is important to planners considering a mountain meeting.

The second part of the research will include a survey distributed to suppliers in Colorado to determine if they have had a more difficult time contacting meeting planners in the past five years. Supplier responses will also indicate their feelings in their ability to develop relationships with planners and the change in technology. Finally, suppliers will indicate the most successful methods of communication they have experienced when contacting meeting planners.

All responses are reported as percentages of the total responses cast with the exception of figures 6, 7, and 8. In these figures, the responses were awarded a value from 4 points to 1 point. Each response was awarded a value and the total value of the responses was added for each question with a total maximum of 144 possible points and a minimum of 36 points.

Subject Selection and Description

There was a total universe of 240 meeting planners surveyed for this project. The planners surveyed comprised a population of association and corporate planners from 13 of 15 industry types that plan conventions, seminars and meetings at resorts in the mountain region, that are members of Meeting Professionals International.

The total universe of suppliers was 50 sales executives who were all members of Destination Colorado, an organization of sales and marketing people from the resorts of Colorado that represent ski destinations.

Instrumentation

Both surveys for the planners and suppliers were developed specifically for this research project. The instruments combine a 4-point Likert scale, a simple category scale and a multiple-choice scale. The instruments were broken down into categories of time, solicitation and relationship.

Data Collection Procedures

A pre test was sent to 10 meeting planners in an effort to determine the value of the questions and layout of the instrument. The cover letter to the pre test noted that their review of the survey was requested to ensure clarity of the questions and to allow them to ask questions or suggest changes. Three pre tests were returned and there were no suggestions, comments or concerns noted.

A second pre test was administered to 10 of the suppliers with a cover letter that explained the intent of the pre test. They were asked to advise of any questions that may have been confusing or unclear. One pre test was returned with no suggestions, comments or concerns.

The 20-question planner survey was mailed to 240 planners that were selected through the data analysis procedure. The survey included a cover letter explaining the intent of the research. The cover page advised the planner that his/her survey was voluntary and anonymous and should take no more than 15 minutes. The researcher's contact information was also included on the letter listing phone number, email address and physical address. Ten days were

allowed for return receipt of the surveys and each survey had a return addressed, postage paid envelope.

The 10-question supplier survey was administered via email to 50 suppliers with a description of the intent of the research and the benefit. Each email also contained information to the recipient that this project was voluntary, confidential and would take no more than 10 minutes. Responses were either emailed or faxed.

Data Analysis

Each figure in the results section represents one planner's response and the data is reported in percentages of responses. There are three figures (6, 7, & 8) that reflect a value that is based on a 4-point scale where the corresponding value was multiplied by the respondent's response and then all values were added for each category to attain an overall score.

Limitations

The respondents in this study were limited to hospitality professionals in the industry of planning meetings. This research is limited to those random samples of planners that plan conventions, seminars and sales meetings of the association /corporate nature, represented by 13 of 15 industries in MPI, use resorts in the mountains for the aforementioned meetings. As such their opinions may or may not reflect the overall feeling of the industry.

The supplier respondents in this study were all members of Destination Colorado, a sales and marketing organization of Colorado resorts. These random responses represent their feelings however do not represent the overall feelings of suppliers industry wide.

The time allowed for each survey to be returned may have also created an unintentional limitation as respondents may have been out of town or unable to respond. The data collected relied on each individual self-reporting to attain the overall data.

Several meeting planners took it upon themselves to answer more than one response on several questions particularly on questions 5 and 20. Each response was counted and explains why there were more responses on some questions than others. One planner questionnaire only answered questions 8-20 and this was determined to be a willful act of the planner.

Chapter IV: Results

The results of the survey included a pre-test and the final survey for both meeting planners and suppliers. The ten meeting planner pre-tests were mailed on November 25, 2005 with a requested return date of December 5, 2005. The ten supplier pre-tests were electronically mailed on December 5, 2005 with a requested return date of December 9, 2005. There were three meeting planner pre-tests returned and one supplier pre-test returned. Neither test group made any suggestions for the survey so the same survey was administered to the entire universe of both meeting planner and supplier.

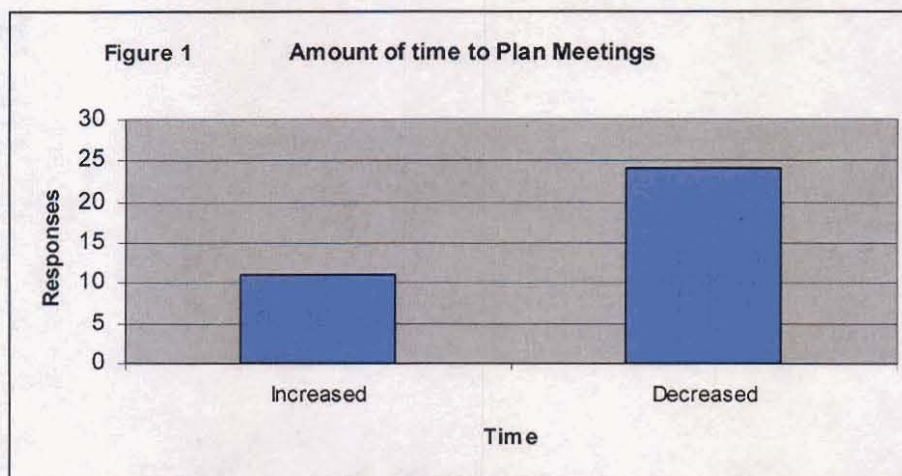
There were 240 meeting planner surveys mailed on December 8, 2005 with a requested return date of December 20, 2005. There were 36 responses received by the due date of December 20, 2005. The supplier list included 50 surveys that were electronically mailed on December 12, 2005 with a requested return date of December 19, 2005. There were nine surveys returned by the date of December 19, 2005.

Since the correspondence took place during the Thanksgiving and Christmas Holidays, there may have been some delays with the mail and there may have been some planners and suppliers that were taking vacation time during this period as well.

One meeting planner form was only 2/3's completed so the figures were incorporated into the overall statistics and it was assumed the planner did not want to complete a specific portion of the survey. Some of the meeting planners decided to make multiple responses to specific questions. All of the responses were recorded in the overall statistical reporting.

Planner Survey

Almost 70% or over 2/3's of the respondents noted that they had less time to perform meeting planning than they did five years ago as noted in figure 1. This clearly substantiates that meeting planners surveyed for this report has less time to plan meetings than in the past.



The reason planners noted they had less time available to plan meetings was because they have had additional responsibilities added to their job beyond the scope of meeting planning. Almost 48.7% of the respondents noted this. The second most frequent answer for meeting planner's time having decreased is because of increased meeting planning without additional staff (36.5%). Of the respondents, 12% mentioned that they were impacted because of staff reductions while 2% said they were no longer able to engage the service of a third party planner. Figure 2 outlines the results of these statistics.

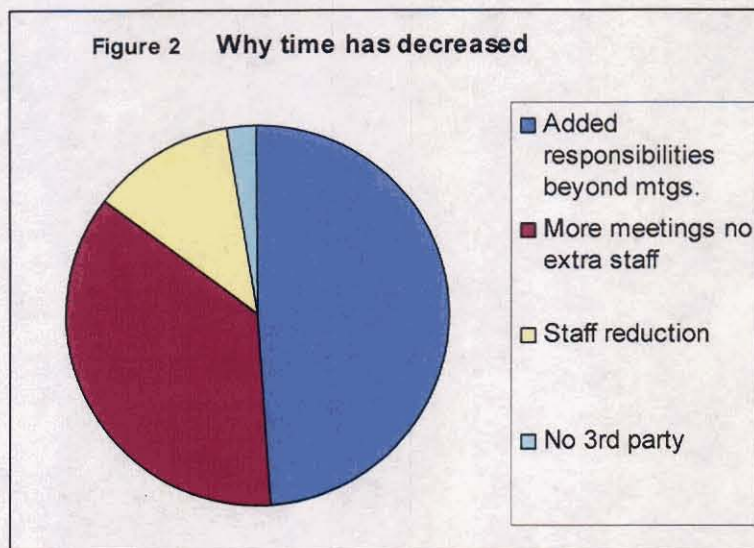
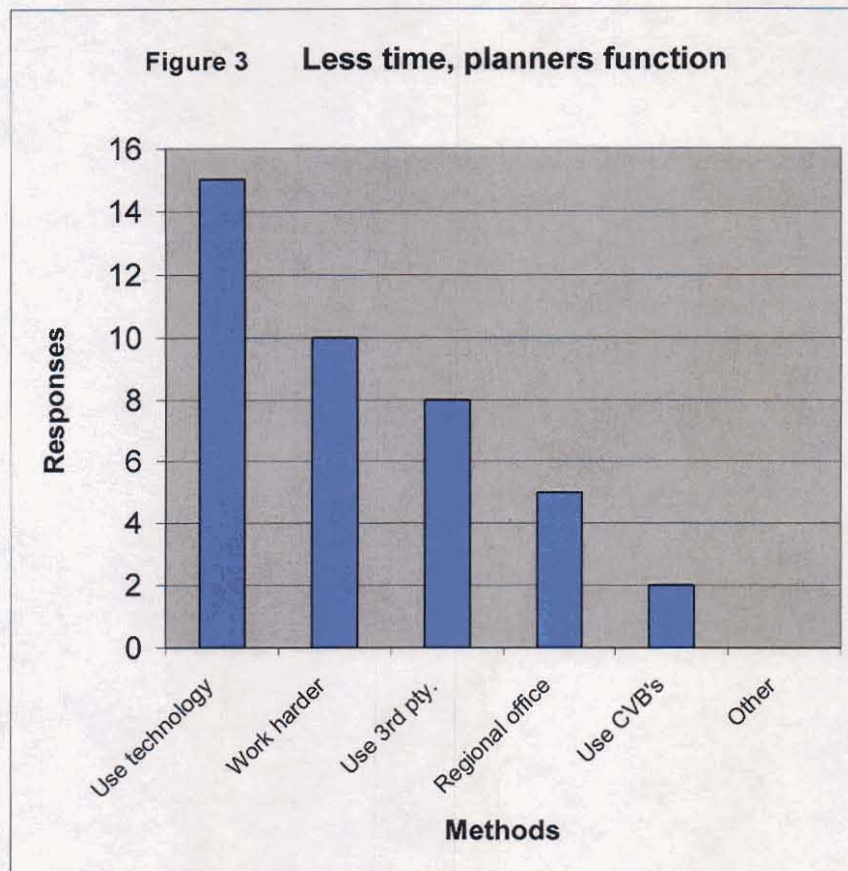
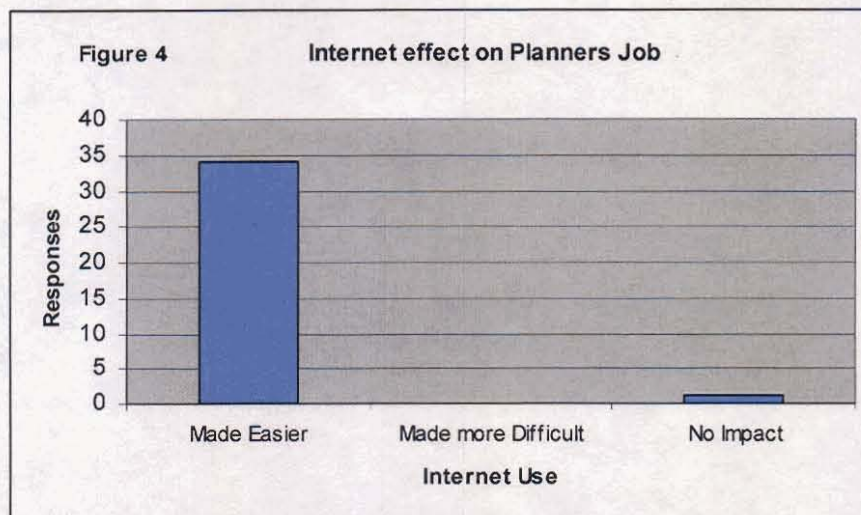


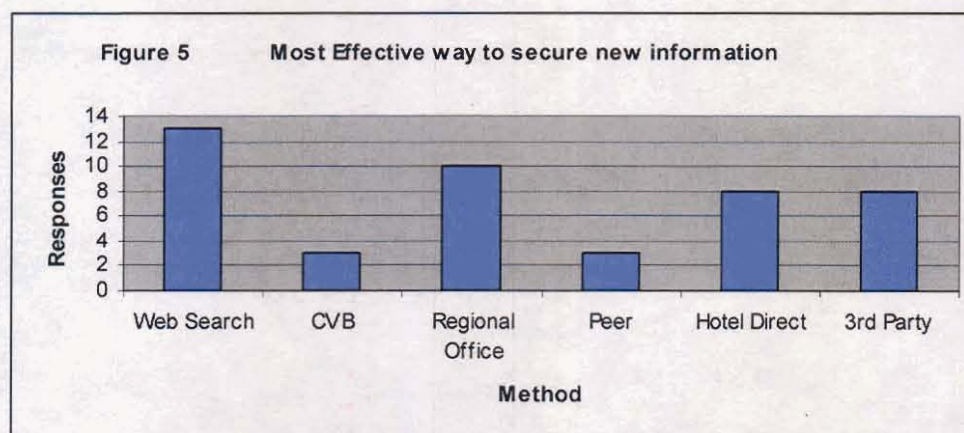
Figure 3 shows how the planner deals with the reduction of time to plan, and how they function. The number one response was 37.5% of the planners said they use technology to accomplish their job, 25% of the respondents said they simply worked harder and longer to accomplish the same amount of work, 20% said they rely on third party planners to assist them with their responsibilities, while 12.5% rely on corporate or regional sales offices.



When asked about the effect of the Internet on their job, 97% of the planners said the Internet made their job easier while only 2.8% said it had no impact on their job as noted in figure 4.



The most effective way for a planner to learn new information on a destination was by doing a web search (figure 5). This was noted by almost 29% of the respondents while 22% of the planners said that using a hotel regional sales office was most effective and contacting the hotel direct or using a third party planner both were recognized by 17% of the planners.

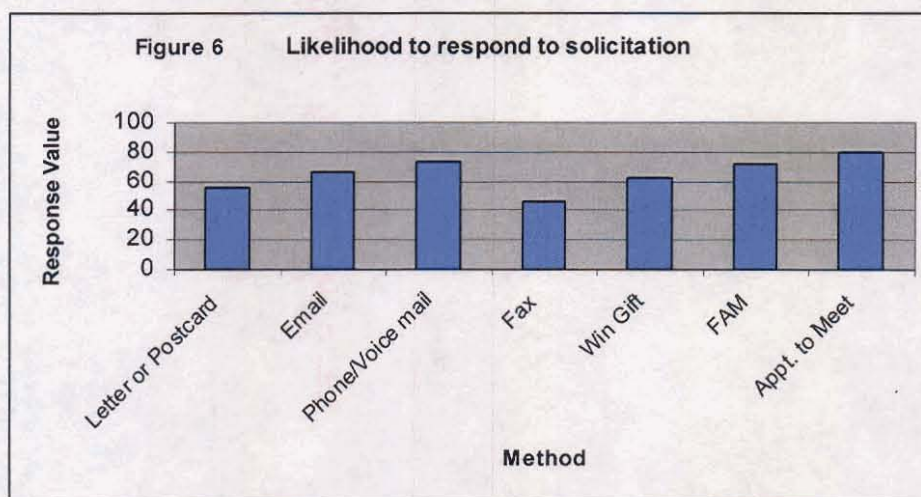


In figure 6, each category had a weighting, which was multiplied by the number of responses. The value for a response of “very likely” was 4 points, “somewhat likely” 3 points,

“somewhat unlikely” 2 points and “very unlikely” 1 point. This process could yield a total possible maximum of 144 points and a minimum of 36 points.

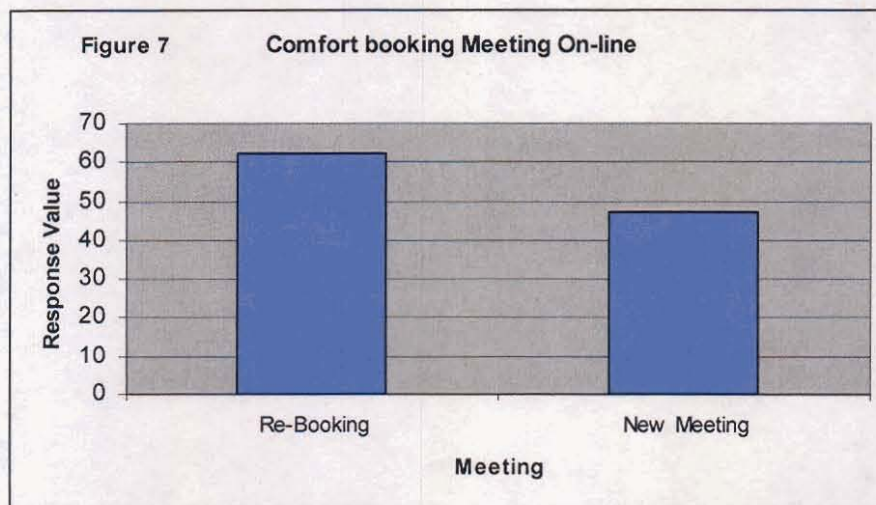
Upon completion of the computations, the solicitation method most likely to receive a response was a request to make an appointment to meet. This method recorded 80 points as seen in figure 6. A phone call was the second most effective solicitation method with 73 points followed closely by attending a FAM (familiarization trip) with 72 points.

The least effective method by a significant margin was a response from a fax solicitation at 46 points.



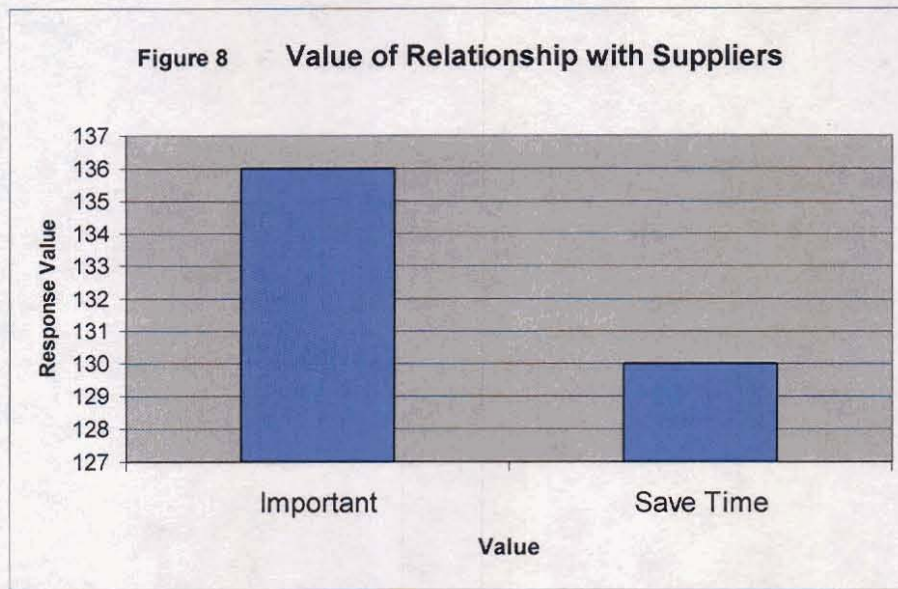
Using the same computations used in figure 6, figure 7 used 4 points for “very comfortable,” 3 points for “somewhat comfortable,” 2 points for “somewhat uncomfortable,” and 1 point for “very uncomfortable,” with the highest possible value to be 144 points and the lowest possible value to be 36 points. Computing the totals for technology, only 62 points were registered for planners that said they would be comfortable booking a meeting on-line at a location they had held a meeting in the past (figure 7). This number dropped to 47 when planners

were asked how comfortable they would be booking a meeting at a new location completely on-line, almost at the bottom of the scale.



Using the scale from 4 points for “very important,” 3 points for somewhat important,” 2 points for “somewhat unimportant,” and 1 point for “very unimportant,” the computation in figure 8 showed that an overwhelming majority of planners felt a relationship with suppliers was important by a score of 136 out of a total possible of 144.

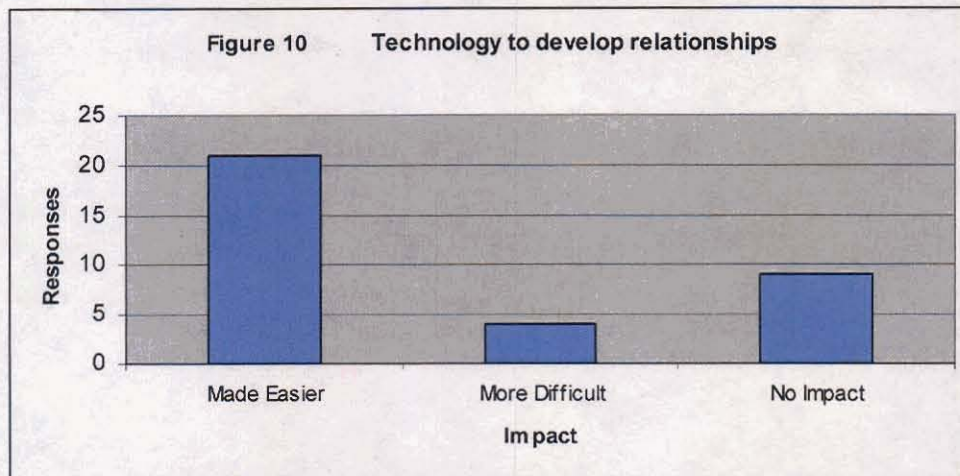
When considering a relationship and the ability to save time, 130 points were computed out of a possible 144 points also seen in figure 8.



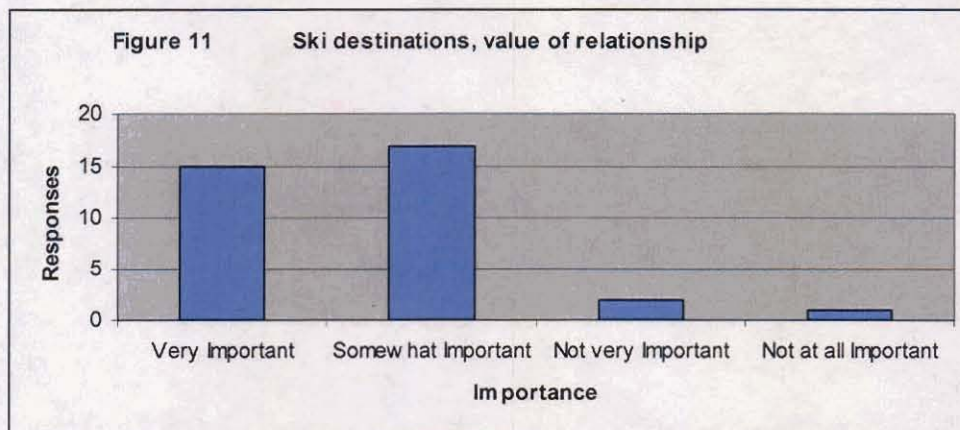
When asking planners if they would move a meeting to work with a supplier they had a good relationship with, 54% said “maybe,” while 42% said “no.” Only 2.8% of the respondents said they would absolutely move their meeting to work with a supplier in which they had an established relationship (figure 9).



Looking at the ability for technology to assist with the development of relationships, 61.7% of the planners said that technology has made it easier, while 11.7% say it makes the development of relationships more difficult (figure 10). Technology had no impact on the development of relationships according to 26.4% of the respondents.

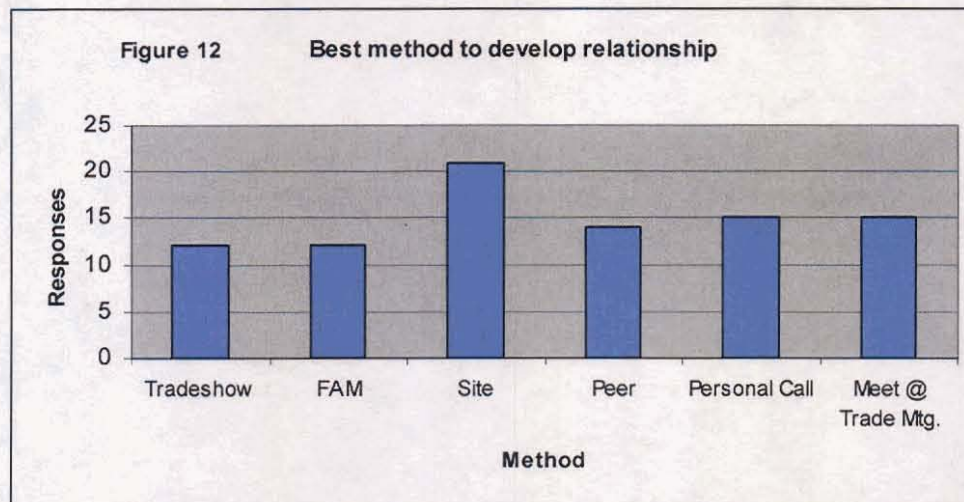


When considering a ski destination and the value of a good relationship with a supplier, 42% said it was very important, 48.5% said it was somewhat important while only 8.5% felt it was either not very important or not important at all (figure 11).



When planners were asked to identify the best method or environment to develop a relationship with a supplier, 23.5% of planners felt that an on property inspection trip was most effective. A personal sales call or to meet at a trade association meeting was the next best method according to 16.8%, and 15.7% of planners suggested that a peer introduction was the best

method. Attendance at a trade show or on a FAM was the best method as noted as by 13.4% of planners for each (figure 12).



Time

As an overall observation, planners indicated they have less time than they did five years ago to plan meetings as seen in figure 1 (68.5%). With less time, they function by using technology in the majority of the cases as noted by 37.5% of the respondents in figure 3. Over 90% say that the Internet has made their job easier as seen in figure 4. As a conclusion, planners have less time available to plan meetings and the majority use technology to make up for the lost time.

Solicitation

In terms of solicitation, the method most preferred by planners is by an appointment to meet as noted by a score of 80 of a possible 144 points in figure 6. The second most accepted method of solicitation was the telephone call where 73 points out of a possible 144 were registered also noted in figure 6.

Although planners rely on technology and the web to make up for lost time and for information, they are not completely comfortable with booking meetings on-line. Only 16% of the planners said they were somewhat or very comfortable planning a meeting at a location they had been to before (figure 7). When considering booking a new meeting, where the planner had not been to the location in the past, the comfort level dropped to 2% as seen in figure 7.

Therefore, planners are using technology in several aspects of their job, but not specifically booking the meeting.

Relationships

Looking at relationships between supplier and planner, the planners suggested that the importance of relationships was important as noted by a score of 136 points of a possible 144 points (figure 8). The relationship can also assist the planner in their need to save time that they have had reduced in the past five years. Planner responses recorded 130 points out of a possible 144 points in favor of a good relationship to save the planner time.

It is clear that a relationship will not definitely get a planner to move to a site that is not be the best location for a meeting. However, it was noted by 54% that they “may” move to be able to work with someone in which they have a good relationship (figure 9). Almost equally as clear, 42% said they would not move the meeting site as seen in figure 9. Although a strong relationship is important to the planner, and it can save the planner time, the planner is not very likely to move business to a destination that is not the best location for the meeting solely based on the relationship.

Somewhat confusing, is that 61% of the planners said that technology has made it easier to develop a new relationship as seen in figure 10. Based on the earlier findings one might think that the relationships would be harder to develop with technology particularly because the

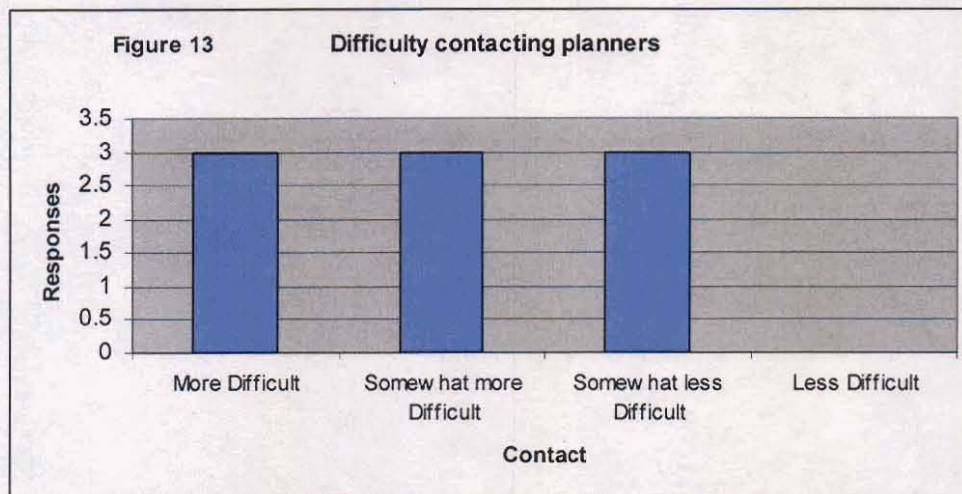
solicitation process, which is essential to the relationship development, had face-to-face or voice methods as the preferred interaction. As such, this result could warrant further research to determine the exact meaning of the information. The planner may have been thinking that technology allows a “new relationship” to grow, or meaning develop. If this is the case, this planner assumption has skewed the information.

When considering a ski destination, it was clear that a relationship was important as noted by 42% and 48% that felt it was very important or somewhat important respectively (figure 11).

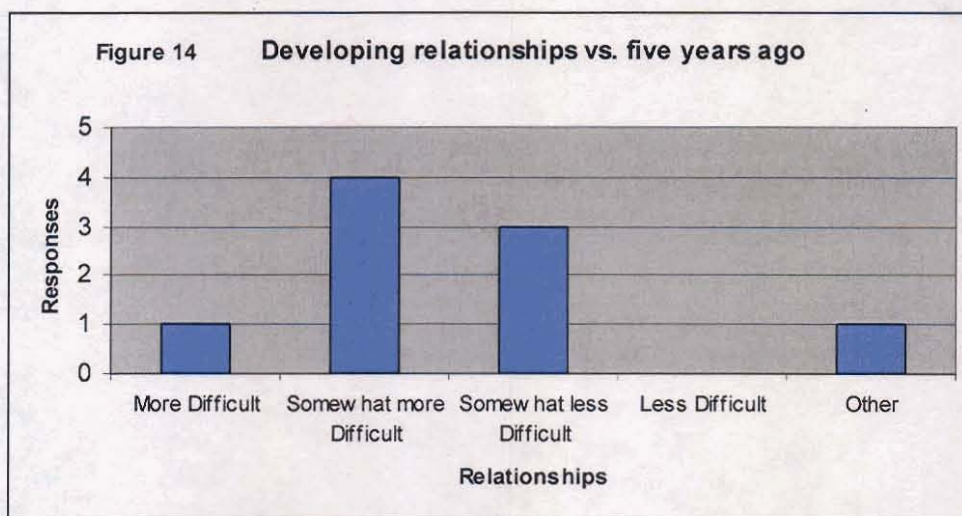
As we look at the different types of contact that planners prefer to develop a relationship with suppliers, property inspections was most important, personal call & trade meeting attendance were the second most important, followed by the introduction from a peer as seen in figure 12.

Supplier Survey

In the supplier survey the first question is based on the ability for suppliers to contact meeting planners now versus five years ago. The findings were that it has been either more difficult or somewhat more difficult than in the past. This can be seen in the figure 13 where 66.6% of the responses found the ability to contact planners either more difficult or somewhat more difficult than in the past. Only 33.3% of the respondents found contacting planners somewhat less difficult to contact and none of the planners found it less difficult to contact planners.

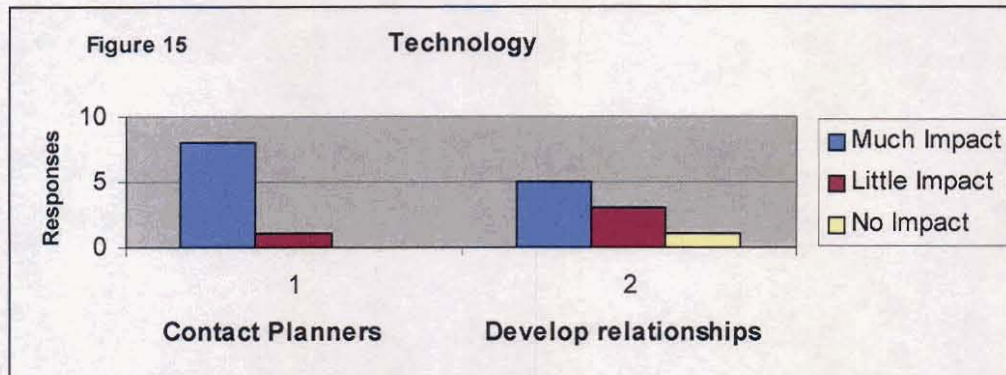


When learning about supplier's ability to develop new relationships with planners versus five years ago, 55.5% said that it was either more difficult or somewhat more difficult to develop new relationships with planners (figure 14). While 33.3% said that it was somewhat less difficult to develop new relationships with planners.



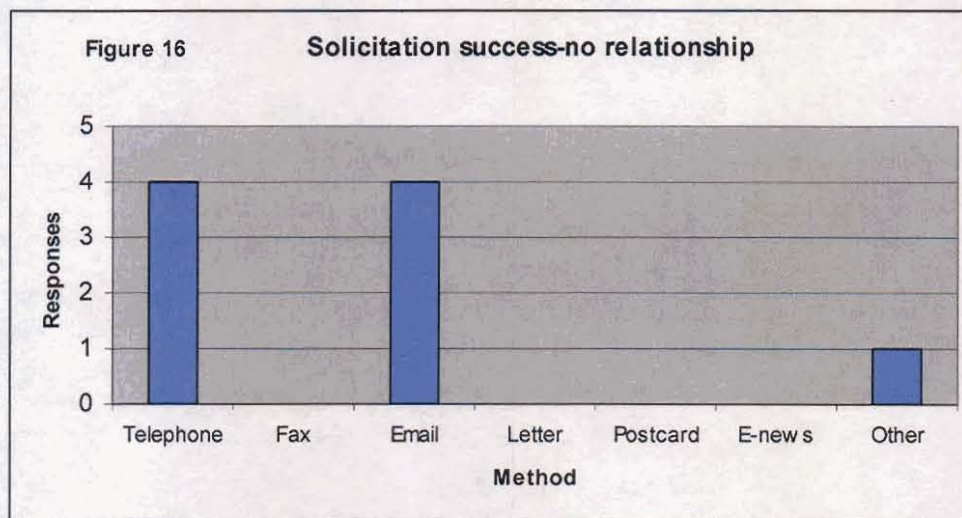
Asking the suppliers about technology, they felt that technology played a very important role when contacting planners as 88.8% felt it had much impact and only 11% felt that it had

little impact (figure 15). The suppliers felt that technology had much impact when developing relationships, (55.5%) while 33% felt technology had little impact (figure 15).



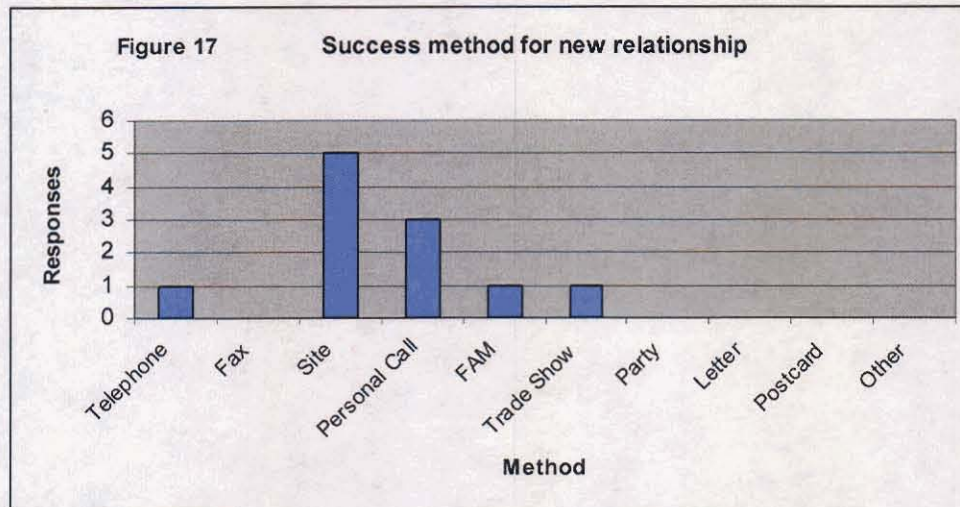
When suppliers note the most successful method of contacting planners for solicitation calls, 44% say both the phone and email are the most successful methods (figure 16).

Meanwhile, only 11% felt that “other” means were the most effective method of solicitation.

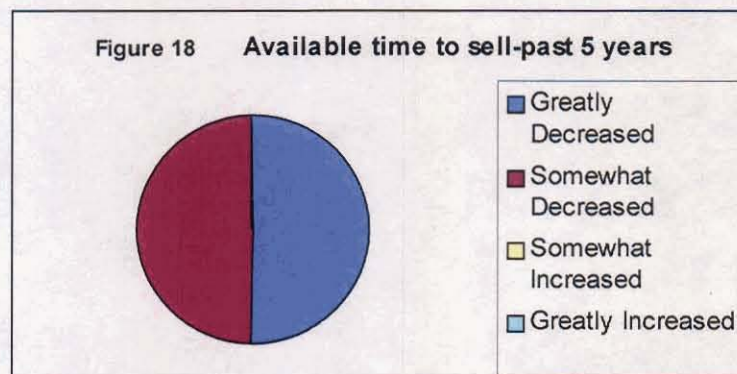


When asked what method of communication was most successful for developing new relationships, suppliers stated that a site inspection was the most effective means and was stated by 45% of the respondents (figure 17). The personal call was stated as the second most effective

method by 27%. The telephone, familiarization tour and trade show were all mentioned by 9% of the respondents each as being the best method to develop a relationship (figure17).

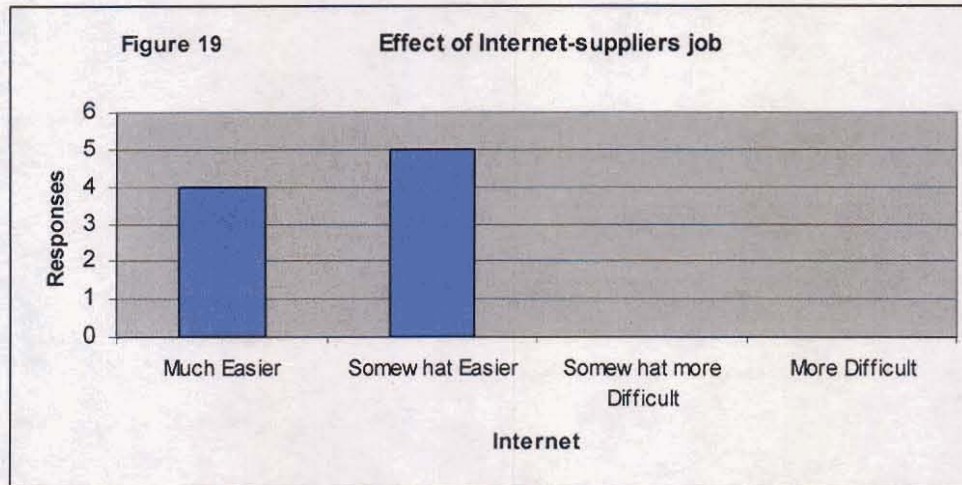


Over the past five years, all of the suppliers stated that their time to sell has somewhat decreased or greatly decreased. This was mentioned equally by 50% of the respondents for these two categories (figure 18). There were no respondents that felt their time to sell had increased at all.

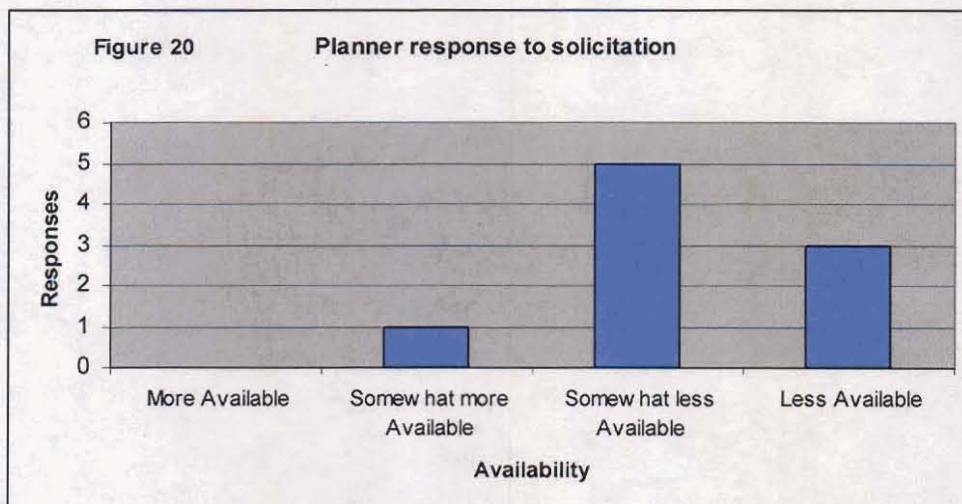


The Internet has had a positive impact on suppliers as all respondents either felt the Internet made their job much easier or somewhat easier. There were 44% that felt the Internet

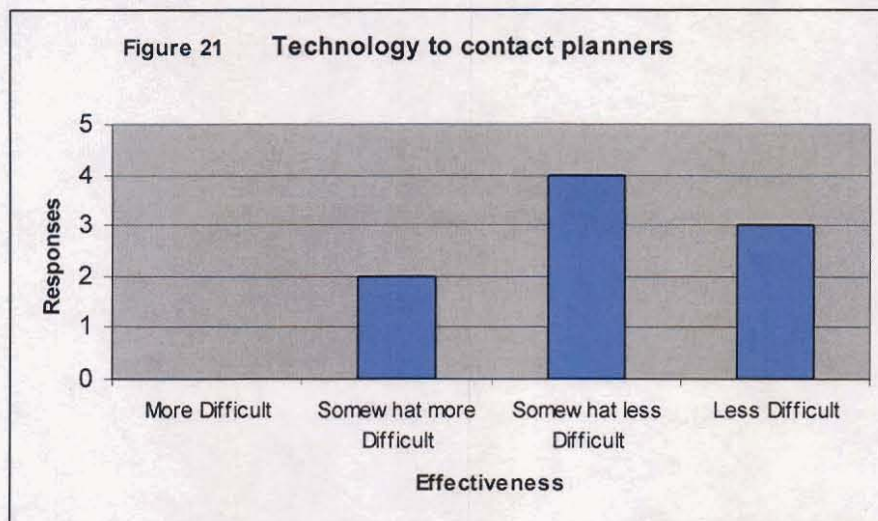
made their job much easier and 55.5% felt the Internet made their job somewhat easier (figure 19). There were no respondents that felt the Internet has made their job any more difficult.



When asking suppliers how available planners are to receive solicitation communication, almost 90% stated that planners are either somewhat less available or less available compared to five years ago (figure 20).



Asking suppliers if technology has affected their ability to contact new planners, the majority of respondents, 77.7% said that technology has made it somewhat less difficult or less difficult (figure 21). There were 22% that felt technology had made contacting planners somewhat more difficult.



The overall outcome of the supplier survey concludes that suppliers find it more difficult or somewhat more difficult to contact planners (66.6%) and more difficult or somewhat more difficult (55%) develop relationships with planners than five years ago (figure 13).

Suppliers felt that technology played an important role in contacting planners, (88.8%) and developing relationships (55.5%)(figure 15).

Solicitation with planners in which suppliers had no previous relationship; both telephone and email responses were 44% and were the most successful methods from a supplier standpoint (figure 16).

When asking suppliers the most effective method to develop relationships, the site inspection was the most cited at 45%, followed by the personal call at 27% (figure 17).

When asking about the amount of time suppliers have to sell versus five years ago, 50% suggested their time had “somewhat decreased,” while 50% said their time had “greatly decreased” (figure 18).

All of the suppliers felt that the Internet made their job either “much easier,” (44%) or “somewhat easier” (55.5%)(figure 19).

It was concluded that 90% of the planners were either “somewhat less available” or “less available” to receive solicitation communication than they were five years ago (figure 20).

When asking how technology affected their ability to contact new planners, 77% of suppliers said that it was “somewhat less difficult” or “less difficult” (figure 21).

Chapter V: Discussion

Conclusions

Based on the data collected, it is clear that both planners and suppliers have less time available to devote to their primary job of meeting planning and selling, respectively. This is noted by the almost 70% of planners whose time has decreased (figure 1) and by 100% of suppliers that state their time to sell has either “somewhat decreased,” or “greatly decreased”(figure 18). Time for both parties is valuable, so suppliers should utilize the limited time they have to use communication methods that will be well received by planners.

The planner’s time has been impacted by added responsibilities beyond the planning of meetings, (48%) and by having to book more meetings without additional staff (36%)(figure 2). Therefore, suppliers should consider providing service that helps the planner in the planning of meetings where a planner is being stretched from more responsibilities and no increased staff. This service might be specifically learned from the planner through personal communication beyond the scope of meetings the planner schedules.

Planners said that with less time they use technology to accomplish their tasks. This is evidenced by 29% of the planners that say they use web search to secure new information (figure 5). The majority (97%) also says that the Internet has made their job easier (figure 4). Suppliers should maintain up to date and accurate information on their web site. Suppliers should also ensure that the site is easy to maneuver within and secure information. High-level sophistication in their email server and connectivity to minimize any delays in electronic communication is another aspect of technology that suppliers should have. The supplier’s web site should also be distributed across a wide range of meeting web sites.

The three top solicitation methods preferred by planners center on personal communication. In the order of preference, an appointment to meet, telephone call and meet on a FAM tour were the top selections (figure 6). These methods outweighed a letter, fax or email communication. This should tell suppliers that although technology has become a big part of our lives, planners still prefer more personal communication. Comparing this information with the suppliers report that contacting planners is either “more difficult” (33%) or “somewhat more difficult” (33%) than in the past, (figure 13) leads one to wonder if perhaps suppliers are using the wrong communication method.

When comparing the successful methods used by suppliers in the past, both telephone (44%) and email (44%) were the most successful (figure 16). Therefore the telephone becomes the common high-ranking communication method for this project as planners ranked the telephone as the second most desirable method (figure 6). Although email did not rank in the top three most desired methods for planners, it was ranked as the fourth most preferred method. Suppliers ranked email among the top successful solicitation methods so email is a strong second method for solicitation.

Planners are not comfortable with planning meetings completely on-line whether the planner has met at the location in question or if it is a new location. This should be comforting for suppliers for the time being. Suppliers should therefore embrace their personal attributes to make sales communication as preferred by planners.

Relationships for planners are important in general, for planning ski meetings (figure 11) and to save time for planners (figure 8). This tells suppliers that they should work on developing relationships with planners and use the communication methods preferred by planners to accomplish such. The most preferred method for the planner is the site inspection (23%)

followed by the personal sales call or tradeshow attendance, (16%) and the third most preferred method is from an introduction by a peer (15.7%) as seen in figure 12. This should tell suppliers that they need to get planners to their respective destination, make sure they attend necessary trade shows and request referrals from current planners in which they have a relationship. The peer introduction may be among the least pursued thus leaving the most room for success.

The top two methods planners prefer to develop relationships is exactly the top two methods outlined by suppliers that have been successful. The site inspection as stated by 45% of the suppliers followed by the personal sales call at 27% was cited, (figure 17) as the methods suppliers had success in relationship development. In figure 12, 23% of the planners felt the site inspection was the best method to develop a relationship followed by 16.8% that stated the personal call was most successful. Suppliers need to continue down this path for success in continuing to grow and develop new relationships with planners using the site inspection and the personal call as the main method of communication.

Recommendations

As suppliers contact planners in the future, they need to not get discouraged when planners may not respond as promptly as the supplier may like. Suppliers must keep in mind that planners are time deprived and may not be able to provide a timely response to a planners communication.

Suppliers must also keep in mind that when they make contact with planners that they are not wasting the time of the planner. Suppliers should use technology to secure as much information as possible before communication with planners so that the time element is utilized wisely.

Planners have had their time impacted because they have been assigned responsibilities beyond their meeting planning responsibilities and because they are booking more meetings. Knowing planners are not comfortable planning meetings completely on-line, which would save a lot of time, suppliers should learn of processes that can save the planner time when booking a meeting. Anticipate the needs of the planner. Stay one or two steps ahead of the planning process in terms of need and these actions will be well received by the planner as it relates to time.

Although planners do not use technology to book their meetings, they do use technology to secure information on new destinations. This should tell the suppliers that they should maintain their web site with the most up to date information, ensure the site is “user friendly,” and use third party web sites to list your product so that it can be found during web searches.

As suppliers consider developing new business, the communication methods most likely to receive a response by planners in order are; personal sales call, telephone call and attending a FAM tour. Suppliers need to take note that these methods are what should guide them in their solicitation methods. Work to meet the planner personally, use the telephone and plan FAM tours that will be attended by new planners. It could also be viewed that a telephone call to set up the personal call or to invite the planner on a FAM tour would be the most likely to succeed. Suppliers responded that telephone and email were their most successful solicitation methods for new contact. The telephone is the method that both supplier and planner have cited as among the top solicitation methods they have experienced or would be likely to respond. Suppliers should be diligent making phone calls as a new solicitation method and should also consider using a cell phone to ensure the ability to be contacted.

Relationships are important to planners in general and were cited as being a time saver as well. Half of the planners even suggest they might move a meeting to work with a supplier in

which they have a relationship. This would result in additional business and address the need to save time for planners. Thus suppliers should work to get planners to their property and when this is accomplished; spend time to develop the relationship through dining and activities together. Trade shows were the second most important aspect of relationship building and suppliers should ensure they attend and effectively work the trade show floor. Peer introduction was the third most cited method that would lead to relationship building. Suppliers need to ask for introductions from planners in which they already have an existing relationship to develop new relationships.

Although the amount of time planners have to plan meetings has diminished in the past five years, the methods for suppliers to utilize to communicate with planners has not changed much over that period. Personal meetings, the telephone and asking for referrals are among the longest standing processes in the planner/supplier relationship. This study reinforces the need to utilize technology in the process, however the industry still relies heavily on personal contact and relationship development.

References

- Alpine skiing and snowboarding*. (2005). Retrieved October 25, 2005, from http://www.yampavalley.info/visitor_ser0021.asp
- Baraban, R. (2005a, September 1). Candid conversation in Charleston. *Insurance Conference Planner*. Retrieved October 14, 2005, from http://meetingsnet.com/financialinsurancemeetings/financial/insurance_candid_conversation_charleston/
- Baraban, R. (2005b, September 1). Easy booking for day meetings. *Insurance Conference Planner*. Retrieved October 14, 2005, from http://meetingsnet.com/sites/insurance_easy_booking_day
- Baraban, R. (2005c, January 1). Exclusive reader survey insights 2005. *Insurance Conference Planner*. Retrieved October 14, 2005 from http://meetingsnet.com/financialinsurancemeetings/financial/insurance_exclusive_reader_survey_2/
- Classic Meetings. (n. d.). *Your meeting, conference, special event, and incentive planning partner*. Retrieved November 12, 2005, from <http://www.classicmeetings.com>
- Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia (6th ed.). (2005). *Encyclopedia-skiing: History*. Retrieved October 25, 2005, from <http://print.factmonster.com/ce6/sports/A0861118.html>
- Conferon. (2005a). *History of Conferon - a meeting planning company*. Retrieved November 8, 2005, from <http://www.conferon.com/about/index.html>
- Conferon. (2005b). *Meeting planning services*. Retrieved February 2, 2006, from <http://www.conferon.com/services/planning.html>

- Conferon. (2005c). *Hotel contracts and negotiations*. Retrieved February 2, 2006, from <http://www.conferon.com/services/negot.html>
- Convention Industry Council. (2003). *Results*. Retrieved February 2, 2006, from <http://glossary.conventionindustry.org/showlink.asp>
- Convention PlanIt. (n. d.). *Search results*. Retrieved October 18, 2005, from http://www.conventionplanit.com/cvb_search.php?category=cvb&view_all=1
- Dahl, H. (n. d.). *Travel news from Norway*. Retrieved October 17, 2005, from <http://www.net-gain.co.uk/norway/6/index.html>
- E-mmediate response meetings*. (2005). Retrieved November 17, 2005, from <http://e-mmediatemeetings.hyatt.com>
- Foster, L. (n. d.). *Colorado skiing: The grand mountains*. Retrieved October 25, 2005, from <http://www.fostertravel.com/COLSKI.html>
- Imboden, C. & Imboden, D. (n. d.). *Switzerland /Austria for visitors*. Retrieved October 25, 2005, from <http://europeforvisitors.com/switzaustria/articles/arosa.htm>
- Lutz, C. (n. d.). Snowmass ski lodges have colorful history. *Snowmass Village Sun*. Retrieved October 19, 2005, from <http://www.snowmasspress.com/articles/smasslodges.pdf>
- Lutz, C. (2001). Remembering opening day. *Snowmass Village Sun*. Retrieved October 18, 2005, from <http://www.snowmasspress.com/articles/openingday.pdf>
- Meeting Professionals International. (2005). *FutureWatch*. Retrieved October 16, 2005, from http://www.mpiweb.org/CMS/uploadedFiles/Research_and_Whitepapers/futurewatch2005.pdf

Meeting Professionals International. (2006). *Meeting Professionals International 2005-2006*

Quick Facts. Retrieved October 16, 2005, from

<http://www.mpiweb.org/CMS/mpweb/mpicontent.aspx?id=2364>

Meetings market report. (2004). *Meetings & Conventions Magazine*. Retrieved November 9,

2005, from <http://www.mcmag.com/mmr2004/exec.html>

Obermeyer. (n. d.). *Klaus Obermeyer...skier, engineer, innovator*. Retrieved November 9, 2005,

from <http://www.obermeyer.com/company/2005/history.cfm>

OnVantage. (2006a). *Delivering the largest marketplace for meetings*. Retrieved February 2,

2006, from <http://www.onvantage.com/>

OnVantage. (2006b). *Marketview marketing packages*. Retrieved November 17, 2005, from

http://www.onvantage.com/products/marketview/marketing_packages.php

Pelletier, S. (2002). Replaceable planners? *Association Meetings*. Retrieved October 14, 2005,

from http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0CXQ/is_6_14/ai_95192315/print

Pfeif, P. (n. d.). *Colorado ski museum: Ski hall of fame*. Retrieved October 24, 2005, from

<http://skimuseum.net/historyUS.html>

Resort opening years. (2005). Retrieved October 25, 2005, from

<http://www.coloradoskihistory.com/history/openingdates.html>

Skiing history-history of skiing. (n. d.). Retrieved October 25, 2005, from [http://www.abc-of-](http://www.abc-of-skiing.com/printarticle.asp?AR_ID=83)

[skiing.com/printarticle.asp?AR_ID=83](http://www.abc-of-skiing.com/printarticle.asp?AR_ID=83)

Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions. (2004). The Snowmass conference:

A conversation with founder Jack Vogel. *Catheterization and Cardiovascular*

Interventions, (63). Retrieved October 17, 2005, from

<http://www.scai.org/PDF/Snowmass%20interview%20Nov%202004%20CCI.pdf>

StarCite. (2005). *Destination meetings*. Retrieved November 17, 2005, from

<http://www.starcite.com/html/english/dmarketing.html>

Sturken, C. A., & Lynch, B. (2004). It takes two. *Meetings and Conventions*. Retrieved October

14, 2005, from <http://www.meetings-conventions.com/on-the-cover.aspx?articleid=3371>

Sun Valley Ketchum Chamber & Visitors Bureau. (2005). *History of the area*. Retrieved October

12, 2005, from

<http://www.visitsunvalley.com/articles/index.cfm?action=View&ArticleID=32>

Town of Snowmass Village. (2000). *The history of the planning and development of Snowmass*

Village. Retrieved October 11, 2005, from

<http://www.tosv.com/forms/building/TOSV1.pdf>

Appendix A: Survey Cover Letters

November 25, 2005

Dear Planner,

I am completing my master's degree in Hospitality & Tourism and my thesis topic is; "Communication Methods Utilized by Convention & Meeting Planners as they relate to Ski Destinations." I am employed at a ski resort in Snowmass Village, Colorado. The research I am conducting will provide information on the best communication techniques, the value of relationships with suppliers, and how technology has impacted your job over the past several years. This information will be valuable for suppliers to know as they communicate with you in the future.

Please know that your name has been selected from the MPI database and your responses are strictly voluntary, and will remain completely confidential.

The survey consists of 20 questions which should not take you more than 10-15 minutes to complete. A return stamped envelope is included for the return of your response. If you elect to participate, please return your response by December 20, 2005.

I would appreciate your participation and if you should have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

December 5, 2005

Dear Destination Colorado Member,

I am completing my master's degree in Hospitality & Tourism and my thesis topic is; "Communication Methods Utilized by Convention & Meeting Planners as they relate to Ski Destinations." The research I am conducting will provide information on your ability to contact meeting planners and the techniques that have been successful. The outcome of the study will provide information on how suppliers might be more successful in communicating with meeting planners.

Please know that your name has been selected from the Destination Colorado membership book and your responses are strictly voluntary, and will remain completely confidential.

The survey consists of 10 questions which should not take you more than 10 minutes to complete. The survey is attached as a word document, please either fill out the survey and email your response, or print the survey and fax it back. (fax number noted below) If you elect to participate, I would appreciate your response by December 19, 2005.

I am surveying 250 planners that are members of MPI with an in depth survey that will be compared to your responses as a cross-reference. The planners were selected anonymously however they were qualified as planners that plan meetings in the mountain region.

I would appreciate your participation and if you should have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Appendix B: Sample Surveys

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Survey Meeting Planner

Considering your time as a meeting planner

1. Over the past five years, has the amount of time you have available to plan meetings increased or decreased?

☐ Increased (Go go question #4) ☐ Decreased

2. Why has the amount of your time decreased?

☐ Meeting Staff reductions ☐ More meetings w/out staff additions

☐ Added responsibilities beyond scope of meeting planning

☐ No longer able to outsource any or all aspects of planning meeting

3. With less available time for meeting planning, what is different about the way you function?

☐ Nothing, work harder, work longer ☐ Rely on technology (web sites/email)

☐ Rely on Corporate or Regional sales offices ☐ Rely on CVB's

☐ Rely on 3rd party planners ☐ other

Considering Communication Tools for meeting planning

4. How has the Internet affected your job?

☐ Made it easier ☐ made it more difficult ☐ No effect

5. What is the most effective way for you to secure information on a new destination?

☐ Web site search ☐ regional CVB ☐ Hotel Regional sales office

☐ Ask a peer ☐ Contact a hotel/facility direct ☐ Use a third party planner

6. Considering your current job, how likely are you to respond to a letter or postcard solicitation from a supplier you do not currently know?

☐ very likely ☐ somewhat likely ☐ not very likely ☐ very unlikely

7. Considering your current job, how likely are you to respond to an email solicitation from a supplier you do not currently know?

☐ very likely ☐ somewhat likely ☐ not very likely ☐ very unlikely

8. Considering your current job, how likely are you to respond to a phone/voicemail solicitation from a supplier you do not currently know?

☐ very likely ☐ somewhat likely ☐ not very likely ☐ very unlikely

9. Considering your current job, how likely are you to respond to a fax solicitation from a supplier you do not currently know?

☐ very likely ☐ somewhat likely ☐ not very likely ☐ very unlikely

10. Considering your current job, how likely are you to respond to an offer to win a gift solicitation from a supplier you do not currently know?

☐ very likely ☐ somewhat likely ☐ not very likely ☐ very unlikely

11. Considering your current job, how likely are you to respond to an offer to attend a FAM solicitation from a supplier you do not currently know?

☐ very likely ☐ somewhat likely ☐ not very likely ☐ very unlikely

12. Considering your current job, how likely are you to respond to an attempt to set up a personal meeting from a supplier you do not currently know?

☐ very likely ☐ somewhat likely ☐ not very likely ☐ very unlikely

Thinking about your relationships with suppliers

13. How comfortable are you *rebooking* a meeting entirely on-line without human intervention?

☐ Very comfortable ☐ Somewhat comfortable ☐ Somewhat uncomfortable
☐ Very uncomfortable

14. How comfortable are you booking a *first time* meeting completely on-line without human intervention?

☐ Very comfortable ☐ Somewhat comfortable ☐ Somewhat uncomfortable
☐ Very uncomfortable

15. Do you feel relationships with suppliers are important?

☐ Very Important ☐ Somewhat Important ☐ Somewhat unimportant
☐ Very unimportant

16. Do you feel a solid relationship with a supplier is important to save you time when planning a meeting with that supplier?

☐ Very Important ☐ Somewhat Important ☐ Somewhat unimportant
☐ Very unimportant

17. Would you consider moving a meeting to work with a supplier you have a good relationship with, even if the site the supplier was at was not the best site for the meeting?

☐ Absolutely ☐ Maybe ☐ No

18. How has technology impacted your ability to develop new relationships with suppliers vs. five years ago?

☐ Made it easier ☐ Made it more difficult ☐ no impact

19. When considering a ski destination, how important is a good supplier relationship?

☐ Very Important ☐ Somewhat Important ☐ Not very important

☐ Not at all important

20. Considering today's work environment, what is the best method to develop a relationship with a supplier?

☐ Meet at a trade show ☐ meet on a FAM ☐ Meet on a site inspection

☐ Introduced by a peer ☐ Meet on a personal call

☐ Meet at a trade organization meeting (Ie: MPI, HSMAI etc.)

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Supplier Survey

1. Have you found it more difficult to contact new planners than it was 5 years ago?
☐ More difficult ☐ somewhat more difficult ☐ somewhat less difficult
☐ Less Difficult
2. How have you found developing new relationships with meeting planners compared to 5 years ago?
☐ More difficult ☐ somewhat more difficult ☐ somewhat less difficult
☐ Less Difficult
3. Do you feel technology has had a positive impact on your ability to contact new planners?
☐ Much Impact ☐ Little Impact ☐ No Impact
4. Do you feel technology has had a positive impact on your ability to develop new relationships?
☐ Much Impact ☐ Little Impact ☐ No Impact
5. Thinking about making general solicitation calls to potential planners that you do not have a relationship with. The method that is most successful for me is:
☐ Telephone ☐ Fax ☐ Email ☐ Letter ☐ Postcard ☐ E-news ☐ other
6. Thinking about developing a relationship with a new planner, how have you been most successful in the past?

☐ Telephone ☐ Fax ☐ Site Inspection ☐ Personal Calls ☐ FAM Tour

☐ Meet at Trade Show ☐ Parties ☐ Letter ☐ postcard ☐ other

7. Looking at the past 5 years, the amount of time you have available to sell has...

☐ Greatly increased ☐ Somewhat increased ☐ Somewhat decreased

☐ Greatly decreased

8. How has the Internet affected your job?

☐ Made it much easier ☐ Made it somewhat easier

☐ Made it somewhat more difficult ☐ Made it more difficult

9. Compared to 5 years ago, how available are planners to respond to your solicitation communication?

☐ More available ☐ Somewhat more available ☐ Somewhat less available

☐ Less available

10. How has technology in your job affected your ability to contact new planners?

☐ Made it more difficult ☐ Made it somewhat more difficult ☐ Made it somewhat less difficult ☐ Made it less difficult