

attendance number means the event can make maximum use of a smaller venue instead of switching to a larger and more expensive one.

Blank said technology is making the planning process more efficient and, therefore, more cost-effective. Guests can register and book travel online, eliminating many hours of labor and helping them to easily find the best prices. Blank's company includes a Travelocity link right on its website, he said.

Yes Events organizes many international events, and saves attendees money by negotiating room rates at area hotels. Blank also said technology helps with details like seating logistics. But it has its limits. Yes Events has organized a few online conferences, a cost-saving alternative for corporate meetings, but "people don't like them." His clients, who include several professional and spiritual organizations, benefit more from meeting in person, he said.

Eliminating or paring the volume of printed

materials that are so ubiquitous at meetings is a great way to save money and enhance guests' experience. Mobile devices, iPads, websites and flash drives are replacing many of the directories and promotional materials, and guests no longer have to lug them home. The switch is better for the environment, easier on attendees and saves money.

Pelletier agrees that is a good strategy for shaving 10 to 15 percent off an event's bottom line, but it also requires some caution.

"It's not enough to say, 'OK, well, I put it there and I hope people will find it,'" she said.

A "coordinated outreach strategy" is necessary to ensure attendees know how, and where, to find the information they need.

"The days of spending money and adding to the carbon footprint are gone," said Prentice Pollard, director of sales for the Washington, D.C., offices of PSAV Presentation Services, a multinational event technology company that also has offices in

Lanham. One popular solution is allowing attendees to use iPads or BlackBerry technology to collect materials, and even to quickly scan business cards and sales presentation documents, he said.

In the past few years, there has been a marked movement toward hosting virtual events, Pollard agreed, but the pendulum appears to be swinging back toward live conferences. Smaller meetings sometimes translate well to a virtual setting, but "when you're talking about hundreds of people, they need that face-to-face time to get that message out in person."

Another money-saver — with a distinct gee-whiz factor — is 3-D imaging, Pollard said. Instead of bringing an actual tank to a military convention, or a piece of hospital equipment to a medical convention, a freestanding three-dimensional depiction can be created in a room, he said. People can walk around it and examine it from every angle.

"It's got cachet," he said.

# What can tech do for you?

By KAREN NITKIN

Special to The Daily Record

Technological advances are changing every aspect of meeting and event planning, from the initial concept planning to follow-up.

Nifty advances are making conferences easier to navigate, and some have made them more exciting.

Others are replacing the event altogether.

Conferences & Logistics Consultants in Annapolis is developing its own mobile application, "meetsmart mobile," which enables attendees to access information at an event, then organize it in logical ways. The app should be available by spring, said Janeé Pelletier, the company's vice president.

She said the company launched the application because others now on the market were not meeting all of the requirements of a person attending a conference.

"We really felt like we couldn't recommend these solutions to clients," she said.

Meetsmart mobile, she said, gives attendees access to all conference information, but also includes a schedule feature and social media integration. It can generate revenue by putting sponsorship information directly in front of attendees, literally in their hands.

"When you're at a conference, especially at a big conference, you spend a lot of time walking around, feeling lost," she said.

The scheduling tool can search events and vendors to enable attendees to focus on what's germane, she said, for example helping a person at a car-related conference who is interested only in convertibles. It can then create "a personalized schedule for you."

The company also built in several networking components that allow users to receive Twitter feeds from the event and other user-generated content. Someone who is interested in hearing a certain speaker, for example, can gain insight



RICH DENNISON

**Janeé Pelletier, vice president of Annapolis-based Conferences and Logistics Consultants Inc., is overseeing development of a mobile phone application that will enable event attendees to access information in real time, and organize in ways that best suit their needs.**

from others who already have heard that person talk.

PSAV Presentation Services, which has a branch in Lanham, specializes in event technologies. Prentice Pollard, director of sales for

the firm's Washington, D.C. offices, said the company designed "Cortex 8000," which makes the most of high-definition audio and visual to draw an audience "right in to your message, no longer conscious that they're watching a projected image on a screen." The company also offers high-definition event video teleconferencing, which provides a "same room" meeting experience and allows participants from around the world to share presentations in real time.

Blake Goldsmith, owner of Extraordinary Events, said technology continues to transform the audio and visual components of events, with innovations such as digital 3-D live projection and audience response systems that allow large numbers of people to weigh in instantly as an event unfolds. A speaker might say: "How many people here want to know more about this?" And audience members can respond immediately.

Goldsmith said he is a fan of Motorola's new Zoom Android tablet, which handles online registration and makes the audio-visual components of an event remarkably easy to manage, he said. Meeting hosts now "can hook the tablet into the projector," he said, instead of wrangling several DVDs and accessories.

"You really had to be dependent on an audio-visual technology person," he said.

Extraordinary Events recently developed a Web application to manage events online.

"There are 200 to 300 pieces to an event," Goldsmith said, "from designing the flier to registering attendees to choosing linens. We have tied all that into an online model."

The system's tracking of the host's return on investment, breaking down new clients, sales and media mentions, he said, all are critically important because "people in a bad economy don't want to do events unless they know there's an outcome."

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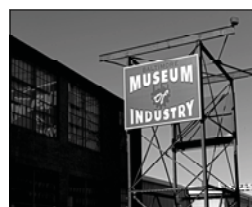


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