

International Meetings



BY CHRISTINA PAPPAS



What's New Is What's Old

The hottest trend in international meetings right now — globalization — has actually been around for centuries. Indeed, for thousands of years, people and businesses have been buying from and selling to each other at great distance, like the Silk

Road that connected China and Europe during the Middle Ages, or the seventeenth century Dutch East India Company, the first multinational corporation.

But it's the high-speed forms of transportation and communication developed during the last century and escalating in the last few decades that are generating significant increases in global trade and investment.

Globalization, in essence, is international integration. You can look at it as the compression of distance and space. As the time necessary to connect geographic locations is reduced, distance undergoes compression or disappears. When that happens, we're allowed to operate in a much smaller world.

We will continue to prosper in this small world if we pay attention to **seven other trends** that we see emerging and changing the face of international meetings:

■ **Internationalization.** Successful meetings and events will continue to be those that have been internationalized, a combination of globalization and localization. The global economy is basically an interconnected marketplace, unhampered by time zones or national

boundaries. The McDonald's restaurants you find around the world, which adapt their menus to suit local tastes, are an example of internationalization.

Meetings and events that are brought to international markets will prosper in 2014 if they are internationalized.

■ **Attendance.** More emphasis is being placed on increasing attendance at meetings, and a major growth area continues to be *international delegates* — whether in the U.S. or at meetings abroad. With continued economic growth in developing countries, many businesses

are either opening offices overseas; increasing the number of overseas delegates at their meetings; or (depending on the industry) giving U.S.-based members exposure to global education, research and networking. These segments will continue to increase in 2014 and offer opportunities for increased revenue.

■ **It's all about business.** It doesn't matter where you are in the world, business will continue to be all about *return on investment*. As the economy recovers, evidence suggests that planners' mindsets have not. The meetings they plan are being conducted in a decidedly different, more cost-oriented manner. There continues to be limited room for leisure or extracurricular activities, and while more upscale accommodations and facilities are being

sourced, this is being done with a new, frugal mindset.

■ **Increased options.** More destinations and venues from which to choose have come with increased globalization. More extensive international air service and infrastructure developments are giving global suppliers the opportunity to entice planners to consider bringing their meetings to them. The coming year will bring more options and continue to be a buyer's market.

■ **Technology.** The concept of being *connected* is part of globalization. Technology has not only transformed the way travel is booked but also the way we network, communicate and share information on venues and services. Easy exchange of information through the Internet and social media continues to be on the rise, as information can easily cross borders. *Immediacy* will continue to be seen as a requirement through the advancement of technology.

■ **Shorter lead times.** As in the U.S., international meetings will continue to see shorter lead times, a trend that is coupled with the ability to access anyone around the world 24/7.

■ **Shifting demographics.** Generation Y is the youngest and fastest-growing segment of our workforce. They're the first generation to be a *global generation*, having grown up in a borderless, digital world. They view overseas travel as simply the physical completion of a global connection that began on a computer screen. With this perspective, it's just a matter of time before we drop the words *international* or *global* from before the word *meeting*, because there will be no need for such a differentiation among this group of up-and-coming decision-makers. ■



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