



The value of satisfaction

An independent report into how
customer satisfaction affects the value
of meetings, conferences and events.

Foreword

Is an industry preoccupation with 'cutting edge' facilities clouding what it is that really generates value in a conferencing venue? Or are there other, maybe less tangible, factors at play? Our independent Value of Satisfaction report aims to find out.

Conference venues are part of a hugely competitive league, one in which it's considered necessary to constantly reinvent and redevelop your offering in order to remain relevant. This redevelopment seemingly often translates into the 'more' concept: more technology, more innovation, more luxury, more choice.

There is a school of thought however that suggests 'more' can be superfluous, and that 'customer satisfaction' is derived from other, less material, factors. This report seeks to explore what these factors are, and the role they play in delivering successful, productive and effective meetings.

But we didn't want to simply focus on the delegate – as important, of course, as they are. Events hosted at third-party or external venues – whether business conferences, meetings or training sessions - have numerous stakeholders, not least the event bookers directly engaged in the buying process and the managers to whom an event's effectiveness is essential.

Do these disparate groups share the same view about what defines satisfaction – and do they agree on which factors are most important? Again, our independent study seeks to find out.

I hope you find the findings as fascinating as I did: I'm sure you will agree they paint a valuable picture for anyone involved in the events business, from host to delegate.

I'd also welcome your feedback and thoughts. Enter the debate via Twitter ([@WarwickConf](#) [#valueofsatisfaction](#)) or email me at rachael.bartlett@warwick.ac.uk Enjoy the read.



Rachael Bartlett
HEAD OF SALES AND MARKETING

Executive summary

People deliver satisfaction: that's the overwhelming message from all three groups. Helpful and friendly staff go a long way to delivering satisfaction - but unhelpful staff wield an even greater power.

- 'Knowledgeable or helpful staff' is the leading factor resulting in satisfaction (62%)
- 52% of delegates say it takes a single member of staff to ruin a good customer experience
- 43% of delegates say a meeting they have attended in the last 12 months has been let down by poor staff

Food is a source of conflict between bookers and delegates; disappointment is rife amongst the former group while the latter – influenced by cost pressures no doubt – don't regard quality as being an essential factor.

- 79% of delegates have been disappointed with a host venue's catering in the last 12 months
- Just 12% of event bookers rank catering quality as a top three criteria when booking a venue...
- ... yet when asked what contributes towards satisfaction, 80% cite appropriate catering as being their number one priority

Inflated invoices are troubling managers and bookers alike, while delegates are racking up expenses bills that only half of ROI calculations capture. Yet cost is the driving influence on booking decisions for bookers.

- 74% of delegates have had to pay for extra items when attending an event, including dinner, lunch, Wi-Fi and parking
- 45% of managers and event bookers have received an invoice that exceeds the amount counted by on average 25%
- While ROI is measured by 97% of managers, far fewer take into account travel expenses (56%) and staff expenses (50%)

Disruptions affect three-quarters of delegates despite managers telling us a disruption-free environment is very important. Non-business guests, technology woes and unhelpful staff are stuttering productivity.

- 75% of delegates have experienced meeting disruption in the last 12 months
- 26% have had their attention disrupted by non-business guests
- Ineffective staff have halted productivity for one in five (21%) delegates

Methodology



This independent research was completed by Dynamic Markets, an independent research consultancy. It presents quantitative research carried out with delegates, event bookers and managers who send staff to events. All respondents work for organisations with at least 250 employees.

The sample consists of 100 delegates and 100 managers, all of whom confirmed that in the previous 12 months they have attended, or authorised staff from their company to attend, a business conference, event or external training session hosted at venues other than their own company; and 50 event bookers responsible for booking external venues on behalf of their organisation.

The fieldwork took place during May 2013. Before and during the interview, respondents were not aware that Warwick Conferences had commissioned the research.

The results of the survey have been analysed and sig-tested at a 95% confidence level according to various parameters. For this summary, any differences reported are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level.

Dynamic Markets is a research consultancy in its 16th year of trading. It serves a wide variety of blue chip B2B and B2C clients across various industry sectors. It strictly adheres to the UK MRS Code of Conduct.

A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a dark blazer and a name tag, stands in a conference room. She is smiling and has her hands clasped in front of her. The room features long tables covered with white cloths, set with white linens, glassware, and dark napkins. The walls are light-colored with several framed pictures. A large yellow circle is overlaid on the left side of the image.

People deliver satisfaction

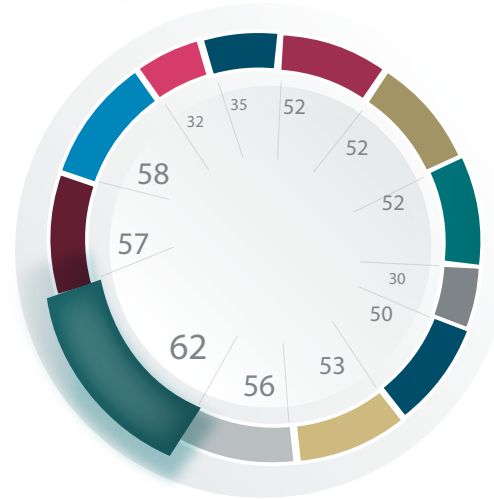
Value is derived from human
interaction, not facilities –
and it only takes one bad apple...

People deliver satisfaction

Delegates, managers and bookers agree: people deliver satisfaction. Good service is inextricably linked with higher levels of satisfaction according to our survey. But it also warns, satisfaction is an easily lost emotion.

The influence of people manifests itself across the board. The leading factor that results in satisfaction about an event is knowledgeable or helpful on-site staff (62%) – ranking higher than the effectiveness of the event itself, catering, or venue practicalities such as location, parking and technology.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS YOUR FEELING OF SATISFACTION ABOUT AN EVENT? (% OF SAMPLE)



- PROXIMITY OF THE VENUE
- APPROPRIATE CATERING
- EASY-TO-FIND VENUE
- THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MEETING
- FREE PARKING
- HAVING A DEDICATED BUSINESS VENUE (I.E. NOT FOR WEDDINGS, HOLIDAYS ETC)
- PROXIMAL PARKING
- AN INEXPENSIVE VENUE
- EASY-TO-FIND MEETING / EVENT ROOM AT THE VENUE
- NONE OF THESE / DON'T KNOW
- RELIABLE AND EASY-TO-USE TECHNOLOGY
- KNOWLEDGEABLE / HELPFUL ON-SITE STAFF
- WI-FI ACCESS



Three-quarters (76%) of our sample define good service as deriving from ‘a generally positive attitude’, and 79% said ‘efficiency’ was important.

Over two-thirds of delegates (69%) agree that ‘venue staff going the extra mile really makes a venue stand out’. Worryingly, over one in five (21%) delegates have experienced meeting disruption due to ineffective venue staff.

The price of poor interactions is equally evident. Over half (52%) of the delegates interviewed said it takes just a single member of staff to ruin a good customer service experience during an event.

Disappointment is troublingly commonplace too. Collectively, 43% of delegates say a meeting they have attended in the last 12 months has been let down by the poor quality of the venue’s staff and customer service. On average, they have experienced this three times in the last 12 months, and the more meetings they attend, the more commonplace the feeling of being let down.

It therefore should come as no surprise then to learn that 49% of delegates and managers think a poor venue selection is a bad reflection on their host.

Reputation is therefore clearly important, but is it top of the pile when it comes to the top factors event bookers consider when selecting a venue? Not quite... cost reigns, ranked as being the most important factor by almost nine in ten (86%) of our sample. In fact reputation is a top three criteria for just 56% of bookers.

Conclusion

People are a venue’s backbone – regardless of how good a venue’s facilities are, they cannot compensate for poor staff behaviour and bad customer service. Selecting a venue on cost over and above reputation risks a substandard experience for delegates and managers.

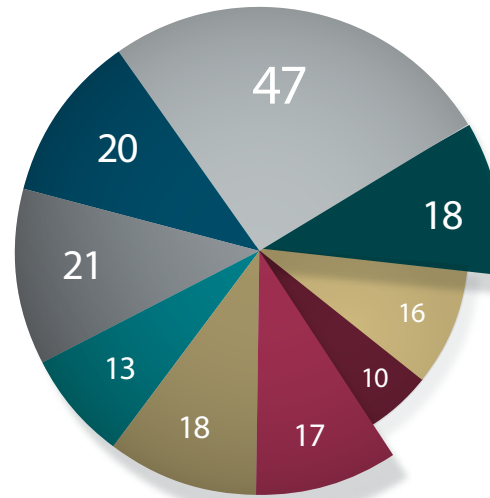
Food glorious food

Delegates value their food –
but event bookers see it as
a luxury. Who's right?



Food glorious food

IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS, FOR WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING REASONS HAVE YOU BEEN DISAPPOINTED IN THE CATERING AT MEETING VENUES? (% OF SAMPLE)



- LIMITED CHOICE
- NOT FLEXIBLE ENOUGH
- NOT SUITABLE TO YOUR OWN PERSONAL DIETARY REQUIREMENTS
- NOT APPROPRIATE TO THE TYPE OF DELEGATE AT THE EVENT
- NOT APPROPRIATE FOR THE TIME AVAILABLE FOR BREAKS
- NOT SUITABLE TO THE TYPE OF MEETING TAKING PLACE
- TOO HEAVY, LEAVING YOU FEELING LETHARGIC
- NONE
- OTHER / DON'T KNOW



Food is fuel for our brains, but for many delegates the food they are served is fuelling discontent, not stimulating satisfaction. Yet it seems catering is not on the priority menu for event bookers. What's cooking?

When it comes to catering, our research highlights a worrying gulf between those who attend events and those who organise them, and a conflict between what's deemed being *appropriate* versus *quality*.

Just 12% of event bookers rank catering *quality* as being a top three criteria when booking a venue.

In fact, of the options presented, catering quality ranked second to last. But when asked what contributes towards satisfaction, 80% cite *appropriate* catering as being their number one priority.

We have to question if this judgement is right. In overwhelming numbers, delegates are reporting disappointment with the catering they're experiencing: over the past 12 months, 79% have been disappointed in the catering at meeting venues. And the evidence is, the more meetings they attend, the more critical they become.

The most frequent reason given for their disappointment is limited choice (47%). One in five have found catering inappropriate for their dietary requirements, while the same number complain it's not been flexible enough. 18% complain the catering

has not been appropriate for the time available. Two in five delegates report dissatisfaction for multiple reasons.

It's therefore no surprise to see that when asked what elements they'd be prepared to sacrifice, less than a quarter of delegates (22%) say quality catering, versus 38% of event bookers.

Conclusion

It's clear, good food feeds satisfaction. How a venue caters for its delegates has a great influence on how well they respond to the event or meeting they're attending. Event bookers need to get closer to the catering issues that matter to their delegates; each other's definition of 'appropriate' is clearly not the same. Yet delegates' demands are not unreasonable: venues just need to ensure flexible choice is on the menu.

Hidden costs & surprising invoices

Money talks – but invoices can prove troublesome. Does the day rate squeeze have a hidden consequence?

Hidden costs & surprising invoices

Is there a hidden consequence to the relentless pursuit of cost reduction? Venue cost is readily negotiated and measured, but what about staff expenses? And to what degree are those all too common hidden extras inflating invoices?

Event bookers are three times more likely to derive satisfaction from using an inexpensive venue than delegates (64% vs 20%) or managers (35%). And it's certainly no surprise that cost is

the number one booking criteria for event bookers, with 86% ranking it their primary concern.

However, this headline figure is only part of the story. Almost three-quarters (74%) of delegates admit they have had to pay for extra items when on-site at a meeting venue, from evening meals (30%), lunch (29%) and refreshments (29%), to Wi-Fi (26%) and parking (22%).

When it comes to invoices, 45% of managers and event bookers say they have received a final venue bill in the last 12 months that exceeded the price quoted. On average, this has amounted to 25% of the original quote.

Interestingly, more managers have experienced this problem (55%), compared to event bookers (24%), suggesting experience and expertise have a part to play in determining the end cost of an event.

Return on investment (ROI) is measured by 97% of managers, with venue cost being the item most commonly measured (63% of managers). But far fewer measure the cost of travel expenses (56%) and staff expenses (50%). Less than a third (30%) consider the cost of lost man-hours for staff being out of the office.

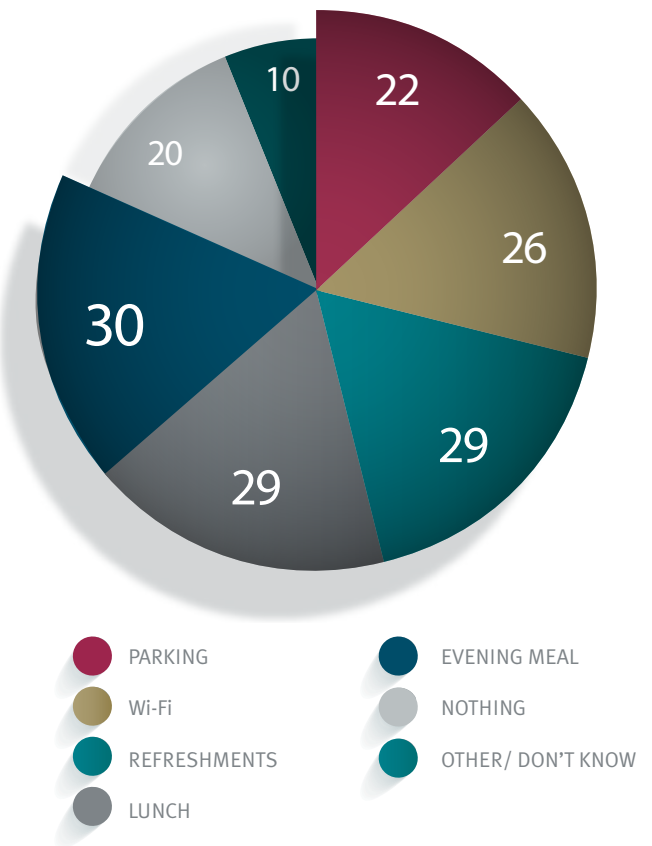
Conclusion

The devil is in the detail when it comes to understanding the true cost of meetings, conferences and events. While the spotlight is firmly fixed on the headline venue cost, what you see is not necessarily what you get. Hidden in the shadows may be a plethora of additional expenses, waiting to spring a nasty surprise on the final bill. The case for transparent or inclusive costs is clear, particularly for managers less experienced in navigating their way.



“The devil is in the detail when it comes to understanding the true cost of meetings, conferences and events.”

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING HAVE YOU HAD TO PAY FOR AS EXTRAS WHEN ON-SITE AT A MEETING VENUE? (% OF SAMPLE)



A man in a dark suit and tie stands in the center of a brightly lit office hallway, holding a briefcase. In the foreground, a hand in a light-colored sleeve holds a pen, positioned as if about to write. The background is a long, perspective-filled hallway with doors on either side.

The disruption dilemma

Nobody enjoys them, yet most experience them: disruptions put the brakes on productivity. So what's bothering us?

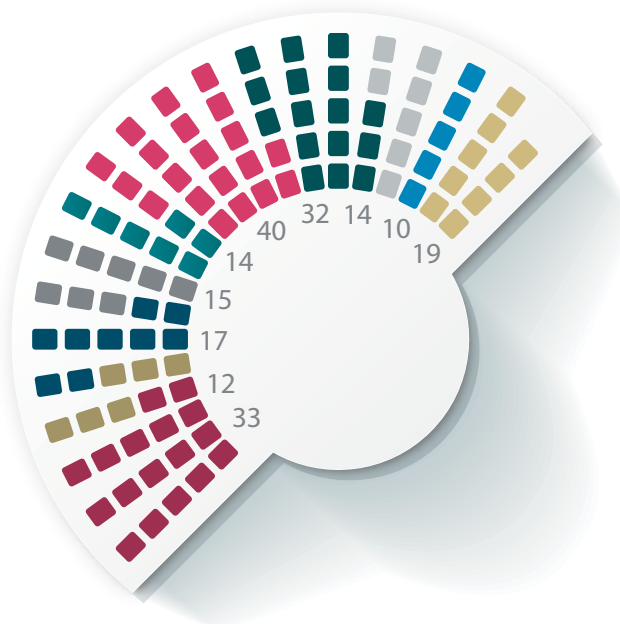
The disruption dilemma

Disruptions are the bane of the delegates' life. Whether it's testing technology, annoying noises, other guests or logistical headaches, disruptions get in the way of meeting effectiveness.

Three-quarters of delegates have experienced meeting disruption for one reason or another in the last 12 months. Of these, a third have experienced technology issues, while 32% have had issues with intrusive background noise.

Ineffective staff and unhelpful / unknowledgeable staff have halted productivity for 21% and 19% of delegates respectively. Over a quarter (26%) of delegates who've attending a meeting or event at a mixed-purpose venue have had their attention disrupted by non-business guests.

FOR WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING REASONS HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED MEETING DISRUPTION IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?
(% OF SAMPLE)



- TECHNOLOGY PROBLEMS
- CATERING INTERVALS OVERRUNNING
- DIFFICULT-TO-FIND VENUES
- PARKING DIFFICULTIES
- OTHER NON-BUSINESS GUESTS/ACTIVITIES
- UNHELPFUL/ UNKNOWLEDGEABLE/ INEFFECTIVE VENUE STAFF
- BACKGROUND NOISE (E.G. CLEANERS/ BUILDERS/ SIRENS ETC)
- QUEUES FOR THE TOILET
- OTHER/ DON'T KNOW
- NONE



Venue logistics are a form of disruption too, impacting delegates' productivity before they even enter the building. Nearly one in five (17%) have struggled to find a venue, while 15% have experienced parking difficulties. It's therefore easy to understand why an easy-to-find venue, free parking and proximal parking are ranked highly as factors that contribute towards satisfaction by over half of all delegates.

And again, the more meetings and events attended, the greater the sensitivity to disruption. Also, those who've experienced poor service or have encountered non-business guests are far more likely to have also experienced disruption. Frequency breeds intolerance, so dedicated venues, free from distraction are therefore seen as being important by 90% of our sample.

Indeed, delegates who are CEOs, MDs or owners think it very important a meeting venue lacks distractions (78%).

When push comes to shove and budgets force a sacrifice to be made, 52% of event bookers and 55% of managers choose to prioritise keeping a dedicated venue in their top three choices – above plush décor and overnight stays.

Conclusion

Delegates – especially those who attend off-site meetings and events frequently - don't enjoy rubbing shoulders with brides, grooms or leisure guests; they value distraction-free environments where they are able to concentrate on the job in hand. Just as parking, technology and people issues lead to dissatisfaction, they are also disruptive influences on performance and productivity.

Conclusions

The value of satisfaction cannot be attributed to a single thing. When it comes to the things a venue must do or provide to keep its clients happy, delegates, their managers, and event bookers agree on some aspects but differ on others.

This balancing act is familiar to any of us operating at the sharp end of the conference business. But it's concerning to see so many respondents expressing dissatisfaction with a recent experience. Whether it's lacklustre catering, poor quality or unhelpful staff, disruptions, or invoices that bear little resemblance to the one anticipated, it would seem our service industry is not consistent at giving the service desired.

What does come across loud and clear is the link between quality human interaction and higher levels of satisfaction. Delegates, managers and events bookers are unanimous in their verdict: people deliver satisfaction.

In other words, encountering staff who care when attending an event at a third-party venue makes a tangible difference to how that event is perceived.

People caring about the experience they facilitate goes beyond creating front of house positivity however. A true culture of client care wouldn't

permit inappropriate catering, an environment not consistent with concentration and engagement, and a pricing structure that deliberately conceals the truth - all factors cited as leading to dissatisfaction. The issue of 'cost' remains a constant – directly and indirectly, it's surely the biggest influence of all the factors explored in this study. But while it's no surprise to see that event bookers are most motivated by the rate they can secure, it's uncomfortable to see the things delegates are dipping into their own pockets (or expenses accounts) to pay for, and the number of invoices that bear little resemblance to the quote provided.

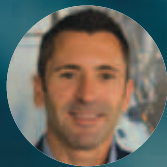
A final point: event bookers would do well to listen to their delegates a little closer on a handful of points: after all, a satisfied delegate should be our mutual objective.

Don't forget to let us know what you think - enter the debate via Twitter ([@WarwickConf](https://twitter.com/WarwickConf) [#valueofsatisfaction](https://twitter.com/WarwickConf)) or email rachael.bartlett@warwick.ac.uk.

Independent view: HBAA



There are few things in today's world that don't change, but refreshingly, our desire and expectation for great service continues as a key buying motivator.



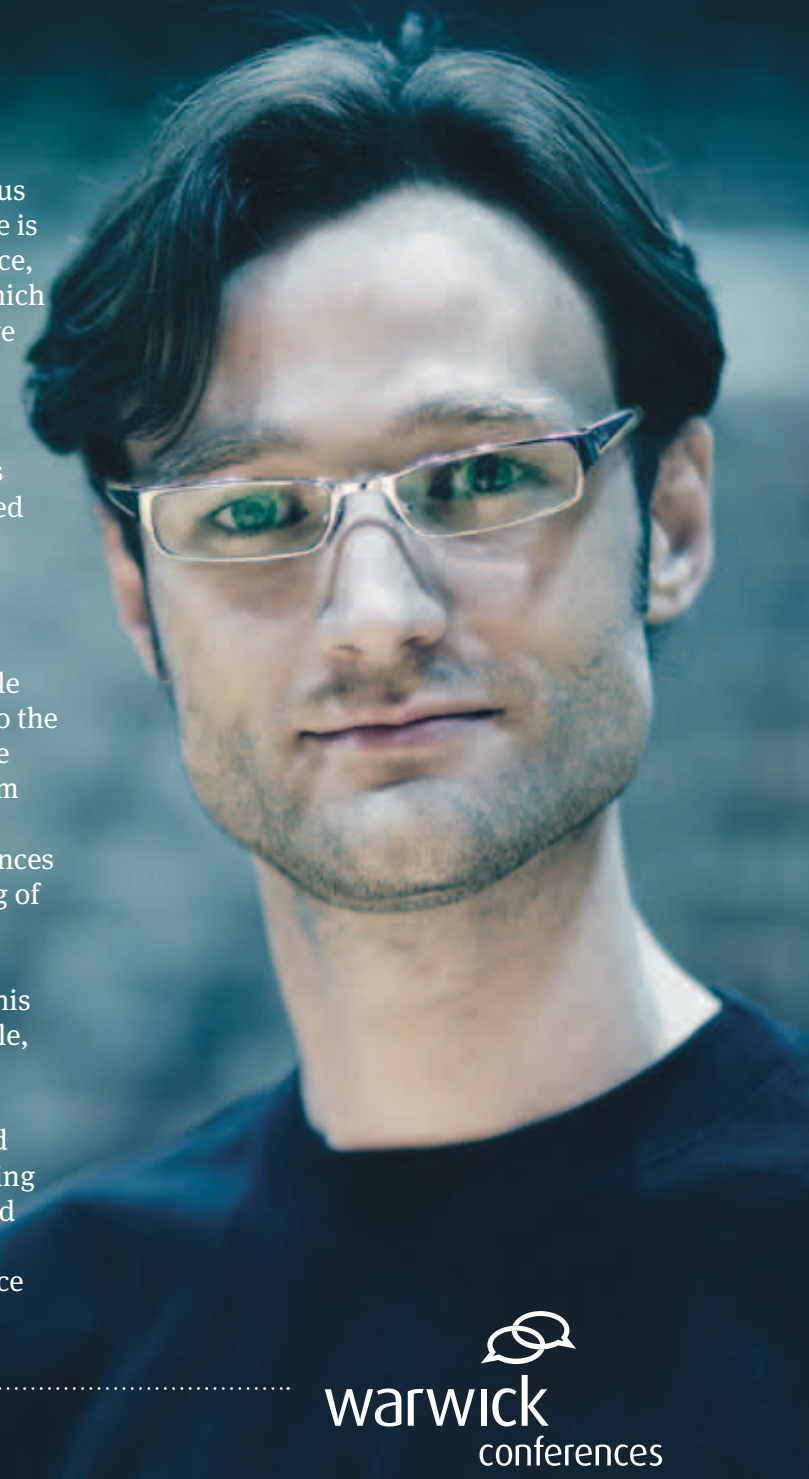
Chris Parnham
CHAIRMAN OF THE HBAA, THE TRADE
ASSOCIATION FOR THE HOTEL BOOKING
AGENCY, APARTMENT AND VENUE
COMMUNITY

I am delighted to see that this survey reminds us that the surest way for a venue to be distinctive is to make sure they have the basics right – service, food, accuracy and smooth running – all of which can only be delivered by great people who have had relevant industry-specific training.

Often venues try to secure business or differentiation using the fixed asset, the things that cannot be changed, influenced or improved upon; venue location, standard of facilities, number and quality of rooms.

But, as clients keep telling us, and as those questioned for this survey tell us, it's the people that make a venue stand out. Clients go back to the same venue over and over again because of the human experience – the way a person or a team goes out of their way to make sure the event is delivered beautifully. The human touch influences the food, the accuracy and the smooth running of an event or meeting.

Event venues which want to be successful in this sector need to ensure they have the right people, that they invest in quality training and development, and that these people have the freedom and desire to impress their clients and make their event a smooth and all-encompassing experience. Commitments are made to be relied upon, food is a chance to excite the delegate, and knowledge with accuracy builds confidence and trust.



Independent view: MIA



The report presents some fascinating findings which will be of great value to venues, delegates and bookers alike.



Jane Longhurst
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
MEETINGS INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

As revealed by the research findings, people are hugely important in the generation of a feeling of satisfaction at a venue. We too have found this to be the case which is why the higher levels of AIM (Silver & Gold) use customer service levels as a key grading criteria.

I believe there is a 'hierarchy of satisfaction needs' that venues must achieve and, perhaps contrary to the report's findings, facilities are important. For a venue to offer good, safe, honest (especially with open invoicing as the report finds) and legally compliant facilities is a basic requirement, and should be the starting point for any meetings and events space, but true satisfaction is achieved when these are complemented by excellent service, quality catering and well-trained enthusiastic staff.

In general, I feel the report confirms this point of view and if the industry is to achieve sustainable business levels into the future, it needs to embrace a people-focused customer service orientated approach to delivering satisfaction to its clients.

This is why the MIA is committed to working with meetings businesses to help them get the basics in place, before raising their standards of service. In addition, the association advises buyers on the best way to ensure they receive it.



Share
your views



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