



**Dispelling Two Myths:
*That Measuring A Few Incentive Travel Programs Within an
Organization Is an Okay Strategy ... and That Meeting and
Incentive Travel Measurement Can Happen Without
Consolidation***

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The importance of measuring the impact of meetings and incentive travel programs is not limited to just a few such events. Employing a strategy to limit this focus belies the importance of measurement overall.

Measurement serves as the enabler in establishing an environment of accountability. And without a system for measurement, there is no way to gauge whether future investment is warranted.

Meeting and incentive travel accountability has long been a fleeting quality. The greatest deficiency in these programs begins with the lack of consistent stated and memorialized goals and objectives. Without clear, stated objectives for the program, the resources planning and executing the program do so without the end goal in mind. Therefore, the planning community is left with a singular focus on program logistics. When program logistics are elevated to the sole focus, then the best one can hope for is a “smooth program” and “satisfied attendees”. Often, from the perspective of planners, the justification for a meeting or incentive travel program is found in the standing ovation received at the final night dinner.

This is not good enough. It limits the impact that meeting and incentive travel executives can have within an organization. Just as a Human Resources professional has an obligation to inform other executives on the best practices in hiring, so too does a meeting or incentive travel executive have a responsibility to make program objectives the beacon that focuses the program and enables measurement.

It is because of this that looking at measurement in just a few programs is so unacceptable. Again, using the HR example, are adhering to non-discrimination standards or performing background checks on new employees applicable only some of the time?

Employing best practices applies *all* the time, which leads to another myth: that meeting and incentive travel measurement is possible without consolidation.

Imagine for a minute that a certain Fortune 500 company spends tens of millions of dollars annually on advertising. Now imagine that this same company does not have a global strategy for how they are spending this money, nor do they have a consistent way of deploying their advertising message. This same company is unable to even tell you where

they are advertising or what their total spend is. This same company relies on over two dozen different companies to design and place ads for them.

How can they succeed at having a strategic advertising program that provides for competitive advantages for their customers? They can't and they won't. This crude, unsophisticated waste of marketing dollars is sure to fail and any C-level executive finding this situation within their company would immediately dismiss the person in charge.

If this scenario within advertising is so deplorable, why would these same C-level executives allow the same dynamics to persist within their meetings and incentive travel marketing area?

The aforementioned scenario translated to the meetings and incentive travel marketing area: A certain Fortune 500 company spends tens of millions of dollars on meetings and incentive travel. There is no clearing house for this activity so decisions are left to the field, often with administrative assistants playing a crucial role. Programs have no consistency and, in fact, it is difficult to know what programs are happening when and where.

This, however, is still not the most disturbing dynamic within meetings and incentive marketing. As previously stated, the greatest deficiency is that meetings and incentive executives fail to consistently define "Why" the expenditure is justified. Of all the programs within a corporation, less than 5% have written goals for what they hope to achieve. How are the resources dedicated to planning and executing a program going to know what the overall goal is if it is never answered and documented for all to see? A derivative to this poor performance is that less than 1% of programs effectively measure the impact that they have on their intended audience.

This situation is untenable, yet it is the norm within corporations today. If you don't believe this, ask yourself the ten questions appended to this document to determine if your organization is failing to take a professional approach to managing meeting and incentive programs.

It is widely understood that you can only manage what you can measure. What is more apparent is that you can only measure what you can find. Meetings and incentive programs are the last uncharted territory for Corporate Procurement. Akin to a modern day Manifest Destiny, no excessive corporate expenditure will last given today's ubiquity of corporate financial governance, as it should be. Excessive should not be equated with luxurious, but rather excessive should be defined as non-justifiable.

How does an organization ensure that its meetings and incentive travel program do not

allow for any non-justifiable expenditures? The answer is rather simplistic, as good answers usually are. Employ a systemic approach that mandates that all meetings and incentive travel programs have defined objectives and performance measurement against those objectives.

So, in order to “find” every meeting and incentive program within an organization, there needs to be a methodology for tracking this. There is an emerging concept within the industry that talks about the PACE of programs. PACE is an acronym for Plan, Approve, Calendar, and Evaluate. This provides a concise overview of that which is important in the effort to gain control of meetings and incentives.

Plan consists of the process to request and justify an incentive travel program, as well as perform regular functions related to a program such as the contracting of hotels. **Approve**, being self-explanatory, also denotes a workflow in that certain hurdles need to be achieved. **Calendar** again being self-explanatory highlights the importance of visibility in an effective meeting or incentive travel program. **Evaluate** infers that you have defined in advance how you will measure the performance of the program. This effort of analyzing results happens on both the strategic and tactical level.

This interdependent relationship between a comprehensive meeting and incentive travel consolidation strategy and meeting and incentive travel measurement has not been widely recognized before now. Ultimately, it begins to center around a discussion of control.

Visibility and control are the two most crucial qualities that lead to savings and, ultimately, Meeting and Incentive Optimization.

*This white paper is based on the findings of the **Measurement in the Meetings and Incentive Travel Industry Summit** held at the Clayoquot Wilderness Resort in British Columbia. The event was attended by senior-level marketing, meeting and incentive travel executives focused on developing consensus leadership positions on issues that will affect the future of our industry. It is made available to the International SITE Foundation through the graciousness of Ambassadors, LLC.*

Ten Questions for Meeting and Incentive Travel Performance Diagnostics

1. Do you have a uniform procedure for requesting and obtaining approval of meeting and incentive travel activity?
2. Do you have a strategic partner that provides you with recommendations related to approach, audience, and experience for your programs?
3. Do you treat the messaging (and representation of your brand) the same for meetings and incentive travel as you do in other medium of communication such as advertising and printed collateral?
4. When negotiating with hotels, do you communicate how much volume you deliver to their brand and what percent of your overall hotel spending that represents?
5. Do you have individuals, e.g. administrative assistants, who are in-charge of a meeting or an incentive travel program as something they do because they can fit it in given their other time commitments?
6. Is there one calendar that lists every meeting and incentive travel activity across your entire organization?
7. Can that calendar be filtered by region or division to list only a limited number of programs?
8. Does every program have a written objective of what you are trying to accomplish by expending the time and financial resources?
9. Is there a built-in measurement process for every program?
10. Do you have a finite group of preferred vendors (no more than twice the number of advertising firms you work with) that assist you in the execution of your meetings and incentive travel programs?

