

Looking To Energize Employees, Engage Customers, Or Inspire Sales Teams? Meet!

Face-to-face meetings contribute to business success

By Christine Duffy, President, CEO, Maritz Travel Company and
Mary Beth McEuen, Division Vice President, Executive Director, The Maritz Institute

As the meetings, events and incentive travel industry rebounds from one of the worst periods in recent memory, the future still may seem uncertain. With the advent of virtual meeting technologies, the expanding pervasiveness of social media and the continued budget pressures facing corporate America, are the days of the large face-to-face meeting over? After all, they do require the largest investment in time, money and resources.

Simply stated, no, the days of face-to-face meetings are not over. In fact, in a recently published Cornell whitepaper, "The Future of Meetings: The Case for Face-to-Face," Maritz makes the case that large-group meetings play an important role in creating cultural and business success. These gatherings are an increasingly important contributor to driving engagement among employees and customers. The challenge for the industry is to provide effective decision criteria on when to use various communications mediums, including virtual and face-to-face. Both play a very important role in effective engagement with all of the key stakeholders of the business. As this whitepaper suggests, the real question for these organizations becomes, when are large group face-to-face meetings and events the best option for achieving business results?

Research indicates that an investment in face-to-face is best when businesses need to:

- **Capture the attention of their audience** - such as for new product introductions, significant change initiatives, or organizational reward and recognition activities.
- **Inspire a positive emotional climate** - This inspiration can be used by your organization to improve collaboration, increase innovation and spark performance.
- **Build the human network and personal relationships within their organization** - creating a shared sense of mission and purpose, fostering empathy across organizational lines, and creating camaraderie position the organization for success.

Why? The science that underlies these findings highlights how most of the elements of a well designed face-to-face meeting tap into many of our uniquely human qualities.

There are five "intangible" human qualities that face-to-face meetings enhance:

- **Attention** - Forget the myth that people are great at "multitasking." The reality is attention is a limited resource and when forced to deal with multiple tasks, the brain is forced to toggle among tasks, doing none of them as well as when attention is focused. This is more accurately called "switch-tasking."¹
- **Mirroring** - Research has revealed the existence of "mirror neurons" in the brain that react in response to visual cues—for example, in a conversation, the speaker's body language causes a "mirror" reaction in the listener's neurons that would create the same action.²
- **Emotional contagion** - The report cites recent research confirming that emotions, attitudes, and moods "ripple out from individuals and influence not only other individuals' emotions, thoughts, attitudes and behaviors, but also the dynamics of the entire group." The reality is this emotional contagion can work in either a positive or negative manner. Smart organizations intuitively know to use this to spark positive contribution.³
- **Empathy and trust** - The ability to connect with people, understand their perspective and share an experience helps strengthen our relationships and networks. People in positive relationships are more likely to see and share what they have in common – not dwell on the ways in which they differ.⁴
- **Building the social network** - All organizations possess a unique social network. Enhancing and energizing this network affects all aspects of the organization, from the quality of decision making to innovation and creativity, readiness and adaptability to change and the facilitation of learning.⁵

As this whitepaper summarizes, large-group face-to-face meetings and events are an important part of a communications strategy. The paper proposes that large-group face-to-face meetings are the best option when a business or organization needs to capture attention necessary for a new or different strategy, relationship, or product. They are the best option for inspiring people and building a positive emotional climate that influences decision-making and performance at every level. They play a critical role in building strong relationships and the sense of community that contributes to the formation of powerful, informal networks for success. Finally, face-to-face is the best option for celebration and recognition rituals that enliven the human spirit and shape the cultural norms of the organization.⁶

For a full copy of the whitepaper visit:

<http://www.hotelschool.cornell.edu/research/chr/pubs/perspective/perspective-15297.html>.

About Maritz Travel

St. Louis-based Maritz Travel is the global leader in helping companies achieve business results through the effective use of meeting, event and incentive travel programs. Maritz Travel works with companies to reward and recognize top performers, ensure effective communications to customers or staff, spur innovation through enhanced collaboration, and improve customer, employee and channel partner engagement.

About The Maritz Institute

The Maritz Institute serves as a bridge between the human sciences and Maritz business solutions, which are designed to help companies achieve strategic goals by engaging employees, business partners and customers. The Institute brings insight – anchored in science – that provides a foundation for understanding, enabling and motivating people in ways that are most meaningful to them. It helps create better business and better lives.

References

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- 3 Sigal G. Barsade, "The Ripple Effect: Emotional Contagion and Its Influence on Group Behavior," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 4, (December 2002), pp. 644-675.
- 4 Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The Revolutionary New Science of Human Relationships* (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 109.
- 5 James S. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 94, *Supplement: Organizations and Institutions: Sociological and Economic Approaches to the Analysis of Social Structure* (1988), pp. S95-S120.
- 6 Christine Duffy and Mary Beth McEuen, "The Future of Meetings: The Case for Face-to-Face," *Cornell Hospitality Industry Perspectives*, No. 6 (September 2010, Cornell Center for Hospitality Research).

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1 877 4 MARITZ.