

**IMEX Meetings for Success: Webinar report**  
**Thursday 5 November 2009**

## **IMEX webinar reveals impact of working in a 'reset' world for corporate meeting planners**

Two senior figures in the international corporate meetings and events sector have revealed how changes in the global economy over the past 12 months have had a significant impact on their roles and responsibilities as well as their approach to stakeholder communications.

Speaking during the first IMEX-JMIC Corporate Meetings: Head to Head online webinar (November 5<sup>th</sup>), Larry Head, Global Director of Events for world-famous drinks brands company, Diageo, compared his recent experiences and insights with those of Debbie Donaldson, Global Development Director for the meetings, events and communications division of agency, Grass Roots.

Both speakers agreed with the webinar's opening statement: "What was relevant and targeted yesterday does not apply today."

Their discussion, which was facilitated by former chair of MPI and President of The Kliman Group, David Kliman, revealed that, despite the increasingly complex and sophisticated measurement tools now available, sometimes simple measures such as 'pints of Guinness consumed' or 'bums on seats' can be the most powerful and relevant indicators of success.

As Larry Head explained about the 2009 Guinness 250 Anniversary Celebrations, "It's more important than ever to keep strategies really simple and align them to a clear purpose. Our aim with this year's landmark celebrations was to entice every single Guinness drinker – typically a 26 year-old male - to drink one extra glass, responsibly of course! Instead of 10 million glasses consumed, we wanted 20 million. This value spoke directly to the company bottom line. Everyone in the business understood what we were gunning for and there could be no doubting it once the numbers came in. The legacy objective was to create our very own St Patrick's Day."

When quizzed about his approach to earning the respect and trust of internal stakeholders, Head explained: "You must understand your own organisation's critical issues. For instance, in some of our business units I need to know a lot about the brand's community relations programme, in others it will be about the brand's immediate growth strategy."

### **Demand for consolidation**

Kliman also asked him what the meetings industry could do to help other corporate buyers like him. Head replied: "You may not like it but the industry is becoming too complex, with too many multi-layered suppliers. A more consolidated approach helps me do my job better, and I *am* seeing more and more consolidated offerings coming into the marketplace. That said I also appreciate it can be difficult for some suppliers to bid effectively as a package."

Head also suggested that all corporate buyers need to put time and effort into understanding their procurement departments. "Take the time to form a relationship with them. They are as important a stakeholder as anybody else in the business. I am a great believer in the value of procurement to support my role."

Donaldson echoed his sentiments. "Procurement departments can become our allies. When they ask questions such as 'why are you doing it this way' it can open up a dialogue that can lead to much greater mutual understanding. We also find that procurement departments give us impartial insights about the business that the stakeholder cannot or does not have the time to provide."



From the point of view of a global meetings and events agency, Donaldson reinforced Head's view that clients are now demanding more consolidation. "They want us to remove what are perceived as layers of cost and this consolidation has been most marked in the financial services and healthcare sectors. However, it still surprises me how many clients don't know exactly what they spend on meetings and events annually. It's not easy to remove costs if you don't have an accurate baseline to work to."

### **Speed of the essence**

Donaldson also described a new tendency for events with excellent transport links which allow for a 'quick in and out'. "Accountability is also on the rise and clients are also demanding greater efficiency. However, the greatest single pressure for us at the moment is to avoid a bidding war on price alone. Lately we have seen clients ask up to 10 agencies to bid on a project. This is not a sustainable way forward."

She described how Grass Roots aims to help its corporate clients by adopting a campaign rather than a project mindset. She went on to illustrate two of the company's most successful campaigns this year; for Phones4u and Jaguar cars.

"In both cases we had a very clear, simple strategy which linked back to extremely specific sales or pipeline targets. Because we exploited the fullest possible online, viral and social media entertainment value from the Phones4U 'Survivor' event in the Bahamas, we were also able to secure sponsorship which offset a lot of the costs," she explained.

She continued, "Where Phones4U wanted to give staff a reward that 'money can't buy', Jaguar were clear about wanting to offer potential customers the experience of 'new fashioned luxury' through their cars. We planned an experiential drivers' day with the aim that every single participant would spend at least 40% of their time in a Jaguar. Combined with other high value elements, such as one-to-ones with the engineers and in-car videos to capture the driver's personal experience, we achieved a 10% purchase conversion rate."

"The point about this campaign was its emphasis on experiential marketing. Procurement people love experiential marketing because it is so easy to measure. Again we planned in a host of social media elements to make the event as content-rich as possible, and to share its feel good factor with the widest possible target market during and afterwards," she said.

The full one-hour webinar with speaker presentations is free to view and available at <http://www.imex-frankfurt.com/webinar.html>

IMEX Corporate Meetings: Head to Head webinars support the trade show's Meetings for Success initiative, launched earlier in 2009. By asking senior corporate planners or directors to explain how they are communicating success to internal stakeholders and how meetings and events are contributing to current corporate objectives, the webinars aim to share expertise and insight. They are also an opportunity for the meetings industry to identify what it can do to help such planners at a time when they are under more pressure than ever to demonstrate the commercial value of live meetings and events and their measurable impact on the corporate bottom line.

The next Corporate Meetings: Head to Head webinar will be on 9 February 2010. Speakers to be announced.