

Incentive travel sector still robust, say top buyers

Managers reporting that the economic downturn is benefiting the incentive travel sector outnumber those who disagree.

Nearly half (48%) of a poll of over 1,000 hosted buyers who attended IMEX recently agree that motivational programmes now matter more if corporate performance targets are to be met. Around 1 in 3 (35%) survey respondents disagree, whilst 17% believe the answer can vary according to complex circumstances.

more powerful

Representing the views of those wholly convinced of the current need for incentive campaigns are the following views:

- *'companies continue to book incentives if prices are sufficiently low, or less exotic and nearer destinations are selected – they know staff and dealers still need motivating'*
- *'yes, because this is a time when you must achieve more to beat the competition and maintain good working habits for the future'*
- *'the key to overcoming the recession is not just to reward your top performers, but also to incentivise the middle-of-the-road performers using a layering of rewards'*
- *'incentives will be the last corporate events to be reduced'*
- *'clients are actually promoting more events simply to guarantee meeting their targets'*
- *'yes, there is no better time than now, because the motivational effect of winning a trip is even more powerful for employees'*

'non-pc'

In contrast are those who think it is difficult currently to persuade companies to initiate incentive programmes. Their arguments centre on a corporate emphasis to save money, trying not to alienate other employees, union personnel or shareholders, and the 'non-pc' image that holiday rewards can attract in some media. Others suggest that the threat of losing a job is now incentive enough, and that the chance simply to earn more cash can itself be performance enhancing.

robust strength

It is, however, the category of reply that responds both 'yes and no' that hints at the robust and enduring strengths of motivational campaigns. Comments that reflect the wide spectrum of opinions of CEOs and CFOs include:

- *'what has to matter is that the perception of enhanced performance is linked to productivity and production'*
- *'today's corporate psychology is such that the easier solution is to stage meetcentives'*
- *'it all depends on the company's ability to measure motivational ROI with skill and accuracy. Otherwise they feel at risk of being seen as wasteful and indulging in unnecessary spending'*
- *'much depends on how switched-on are the finance people ...for example, are they sufficiently in touch with demoralised staff or disdainful customers?'*
- *'the uninformed rhetoric of newspapers has made it vital that incentives, if offered, deliver demonstrable results'*
- *'the image of the intended destination can save the programme ... it should not appear too amazing'*

To sum up: those engaged in the performance improvement sector should feel encouraged that their work has never mattered more. In the short term, however, the key is to offer and position rewards that best suit the client's wider sensitivities and responsibilities; as well as demonstrating the ROI from each programme.