

MEETINGS MEAN BUSINESS

What if there was not a meeting of the founding fathers to write the constitution of the United States? What if IBM and Microsoft never had the meeting where IBM gave control of the operating systems to Bill Gates and Microsoft? What if Ray Kroc never met face to face with Dick and Mac McDonald? What if no one came to President Obama's inauguration or no one heard Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech live?

It's hard to imagine a world without face to face meetings and interactions. Meetings are about connections. Face to face human interaction is the spark that motivates all of us to build, renew and nurture business relationships. Meetings bring people together and bring out the best in creative thinking, innovation and imagination. Ideas are what move businesses, shape nations and create compelling new products and services. Ideas are the cornerstone of what meetings are all about. Without ideas, we are not inspired. At the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc. we like to say meetings, conventions and tradeshows generate not only a return on investment but a Return on Ideas.

In this current economic crisis, we tend to focus more on cost cutting opportunities rather than revenue enhancements. We cannot cost cut our way to future success and prosperity. We must build top line revenue. Meetings, conventions and tradeshows are critical for businesses and individuals to grow their sales and marketing opportunities, enhance their individual performances and identify new ways of conducting business. Meetings are economic drivers. They foster strong and long term personal business relationships which cannot be duplicated by teleconference calls, webinars, or email. Technology can enhance meetings but cannot substitute the power of face to face interaction.

The increased media sensationalism on meetings is one-sided. We agree that taxpayer dollars should be spent wisely. However, the political rhetoric has created an environment where corporate CEO's are cancelling meetings due to the possibility they may be vilified by the media. In fact, Las Vegas has been hit especially hard. The Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority states in the last 90 days, the market has lost 340 meeting groups representing \$131M in lost revenue.

A recent study by Meetings & Conventions Magazine (91% of all respondents worked for companies that were not receiving federal bailout funds) found that 20% of meeting planners had cancelled their meeting solely due to the negative media pressure and political rhetoric. In addition, 52% said the "mass-media backlash against meetings" had been "extremely" or "moderately" influential.

Business travel creates 2.4M jobs in the United States. Meetings and events are directly responsible for 1.0M jobs in this country. Business travel accounts for \$240B in spending and \$39B in tax revenue at the federal, state, and local levels. Here in Orlando, total travel (leisure and business) is a \$31B per year industry, directly or indirectly employing 1 in 4 Central Floridians.

Orlando is not immune to outside negative influences affecting the overall meetings industry. We are the second largest meetings destination in the county, serving 10M business travelers and generating over 5,000 meetings, conventions and tradeshow per year. We are booking conventions and tradeshow into 2029 to secure economic stimulus just as we have for the past 25 years of the Orlando/Orange County CVB's existence. We have more than \$16B on the books in future business at the Orange County Convention Center alone.

We have seen cancellations within our own destination, especially, in the financial sector. However, our investment in meetings infrastructure will continue because we believe in the future of meetings. Hilton Hotels Corporation and its owners alone are making close to a \$1.0B investment with 3,000 new hotel rooms at the convention center and Bonnet Creek. The Peabody Hotel is investing more than \$400M. These investments create new jobs, generate incremental revenue and expand our offerings. Not to mention our current inventory of 112,000 guest rooms of which many are focused on ten meetings market.

The US Travel Association has created a campaign Meetings Mean Business designed to:

- Urge the Department of the Treasury to swiftly enact clear and sensible meetings and events guidelines for companies receiving taxpayer assistance
- Defeat punitive legislation designed to unreasonably restrict corporate meetings and events
- Encourage members of Congress to tone down their criticism of meetings and events and embrace travel as a solution to America's economic woes
- Inform the media about the benefits of meetings and events and the unintended victims of sensational and uninformed criticism.

The Orlando/Orange County CVB is in full support of these initiatives. For more information, please visit www.meetingsmeanbusiness.com.

Orlando Meetings Mean Business. Orlando Meetings Mean Jobs. And Orlando Meetings Mean Economic Development. Meetings, conventions and tradeshow are essential to our economic growth and overall economic health. As importantly, they provide a compelling platform for connecting people to opportunities. And don't we all need more opportunities and new ideas in business.

If you should require additional information about the meetings industry and how you can support our overall efforts please email me at gary.sain@orlandocvb.com.