



## Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Useless Data or Powerful Information

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### Welcome

This issue of Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events looks to deliver fabulous, transformed meetings not through the meeting itself but through the back door.

Yes, I believe that what happens in the meeting is key, but the devil still remains in the details of planning.

We accumulate lots of information about meetings – some qualitative and quantitative. I received my MBA from a school that prides itself in creating number "crunchers". Throughout my career I have met people who say "Numbers are not my thing" or "I hate math." Believe me, math is not my strong suit. But I know that a few numbers can tell a story. This issue of Tips for Innovative Meetings is devoted to mining information and the numbers behind a meeting so they can transform your meeting, your career, and future meetings.

Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

PS Happy Thanksgiving to you and your families!

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### Making Sense of the Data Dump

Data by itself is only marginally useful. You are skimming through a magazine, your eyes taking in lots of data. Which articles do you read and absorb? When your eyes

reach something that is interesting to you, you stop and read the information contained in the article. Data that is applicable to you becomes information. And when you use your information— internalize it, analyze it, extrapolate from it, make decisions from it - - then you turn information into knowledge. The information becomes more valuable and by default you – the knowledge worker -- become more valuable.

The use of information describes a business discipline known as Business Intelligence (BI). Smarter decisions will happen in organizations when data are better management, understood and analyzed. We have the opportunity to apply Business Intelligence to the meetings in which we are involved. And in doing so, bring value to our role and our company.

But first we need to make sense of the huge amounts of data and decide what will get us the information we need.

Where do you start? It depends on what you want to do? What are your objectives? What are the organizational hot buttons? What's important to the business you support? That is where you should start.

The answer is not the same for everyone in every company. Converting Data to Information to Knowledge requires the intervention of a person who can see (or at least make an educated guess) what is needed.

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### Mining for Nuggets

In my opinion there are two thing important things to consider about information:

1. What does it tell us (known as data mining in the database world)
2. How can we better manage information

Let's first address the need to make sense of the huge amounts of data and decide what will get us the information we need.

There are many technology tools available to support meetings (Online Registration, Online Site Selection, Housing Management, Meeting Consolidation, Post-meeting Feedback). And just as companies have installed major Enterprise Resource Systems to manage their manufacturing processes, there are also expensive Enterprise Meeting Systems. I am not an expert on any of these technology tools. (See Freebies for some advice there. I have also amassed a wide collection of articles on the topic of using tools. Contact me if you I can share some of those. Click here [Sharing](#) or email me at stinnish@ameritech.net. It is Thanksgiving and the time to give!)

My message is this:

Technology is an enabler (a tool) and these tools can result in important benefits: automation, time savings, cost savings, easy registration for our attendees. But these tools offer us the opportunity to improve the meeting and not just the meeting process. Whether you are using Excel or a specific meeting technology solution, be sure that you are also looking to find some nuggets that improve the meeting (or a future meeting). Consider these possibilities:

- Meeting Participants' Interests
- Meeting Participant's Past Program Registration
- Meeting Registration Patterns
- Meeting Spend
- Savings

By analyzing the data you can gain information that helps you target the content and logistics for the next meeting you plan.

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### The Best Information is Seamless

I worked in the financial services industry when Electronic Data Information (EDI) was a burgeoning initiative. Starting in the auto industry, the auto manufacturers (beginning with GM) begin insisting that their suppliers work with them to supply transactional information electronically. It is terribly inefficient to have one company's computer system spew out a piece of paper and send it (in those days by mail or fax) to another company, who must key the same information into their system in order to process the paper. This is the cycle that occurs for countless types of business transactions.

Its inefficient, error prone and expensive. I observed the change in financial transactions; there are changes occurring in the travel/hospitality industry that is a precursor to changes in the meeting industry. Jay Boehmer & Bruce Serlen wrote in BTN Online (August 25, 2003) about how charge card issuers, payment networks and hotel companies are building relationships to provide electronic folio line item detail to corporate clients.

While it is unlikely that we will see all hotel companies electronically transmitting folio, the transferring of detailed data (level-three data) allows companies to create efficiencies in expense report. For example, "At Rockwell Automation, travelers sign off on expense reports through our intranet. The system allows them to identify any items of a personal nature incurred at the hotel and that they're going to pay separately." says Tom Formberg, Director of Business Services.

Carlson Hotels Worldwide eventually expects all of its brands to offer this information and will start implementing e-folio capability at its Radisson Hotels & Resorts unit. David Sjolander, Vice President of hotel information systems, says he sees the competitive advantage for Carlson's participation as twofold. "Not only can we offer the convenience to the traveler and buyer in term of handling expense reporting, but there's a benefit in data analysis as well. Travel managers now will have considerable information at their disposal as to how total spend at the hotel actually is broken out."

That is enabling Business Intelligence.

This type of data integration occurs when BIG companies throw their weight around. IBM played a critical role when it required its preferred hotel suppliers to be able to provide data for its own travelers this way—if they wanted to keep their share of IBM's significant room night volume.

Many organizations already track spend using a corporate procurement card.

Experience in the closely related industries (travel) and non-related industries tell us that when information is integrated and seamless it leads to more efficiency.

One must only look at the APEX initiative to see how the hospitality industry is starting on that road.

The more standardized information is, the fewer hands that touch it, and more automated the flow, the better it can be managed.

You can re-engineer (the fancy word for "improve") your information flow within your organization. First, find out what data exists. Secondly, find out in which system it resides (paper, Excel, proprietary company, ASP, other). Third, think if and how it can help you. Finally, find a way to capture useful information as simply as possible and be dumped into a place where you can use it (preferably not a paper based place!).

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### Everything You Wanted to Know about APEX

APEX (Accepted Practices Exchange), an initiative of the Convention Industry Council, to develop and implement industry-wide accepted practices to create and enhance efficiencies throughout the meetings, conventions and exhibitions industry. It is addressing seven key areas: terminology; history/post event reports; resumes and work orders; requests for proposals (RFPs); housing & registration; meeting and site profiles; and, contracts.

Terminology is important so that all parties can be guaranteed that we are talking about the same thing.

In the area of History/Post Event Reports, the Convention Industry Council approved a series of accepted practices that address the "how" and the "what" of post-event reporting.

The full report on Post-Event Reporting accepted practices can be found on-line at <http://www.conventionindustry.org/apex/acceptedpractices/posteventreporting.htm> or click here [APEX](#)

The benefit of APEX is that we can streamline and decrease the cost of doing business between parties in our industry (just like the automotive industry accomplished in the '80's). Says APEX Commission Chair Mickey Schaefer, CAE, "Accepted practices will assist the industry by improving communications, creating cost efficiencies and streamlining systems. With a common language and shared tools, we will save valuable time that we can channel toward creativity, improving service quality and addressing the broader issues that challenge our industry."

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### Why Crunch the Numbers

In referring to consumer marketing, Business Week stated, "In the electronic age of marketing, personal information is the new currency." In the meeting world, we can use meeting information to be our currency, too!

- Create Senior Management Support By linking information to business objectives you will be able to sustain senior management interest and support

for your efforts.

- Speak the Language of Business Like it or not, the language of business includes statistics and dollars. Use this language and you will be "understood" by the people controlling the purse strings.
- Practice Business Intelligence Use information to perform your own business intelligence. With the right information you can analyze the numbers and conduct research. Numbers lend credibility as you quantify information and are not seen as relying on hunches or anecdotal evidence. Here is the best resource for organizing your information visually: [The Visual Display of Quantitative Information](#)

You can use information to organize your staff and your processes. For example, you may choose to segment responsibilities -- one person does all site selection. You may realize the benefits of consolidating the information and function.

You can use information in negotiations. In the report on APEX, they note that for example, good historical data on room pick-up is vital when leveraging business with a hotel. Without it an event organizer is losing amenities, losing complimentary rooms, and losing discounted exhibit space.

You can use information to identify patterns that will better manage an event. These numbers can be at the macro level (about the event) as well as micro (about your participants).

- Decision Making Tool With sufficient historical information, you can use the information to help you make decisions.
- Leverage Your Career Use information to document your performance. The value of your knowledge and skills will become indisputable.

Many of us do these functions; my message is that this number crunching is as important as the day-to-day responsibilities.

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Freebies: [That's PRIVATE](#)

**FREEBIES:**

Corbin Ball's website is rightfully noted as the most comprehensive in the industry. His site includes templates to automate your meeting processes and tons of information on the technology tools that makes it easier to manage data into information into knowledge. Check it out at [www.corbinball.com](http://www.corbinball.com) or click here [Corbin Ball](#).

**More FREEBIES** Click here [That's Private](#) or send an email to [stinnish@ameritech.net](mailto:stinnish@ameritech.net) for additional information on European data and privacy standards.

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Future T.I.M.E.

If you like the newsletter, you will love the movie! Well, not exactly, however, I am embarking on writing a book that captures some of the thoughts and philosophies embodied in my newsletter. I welcome moral support, ideas, and people who are willing to read the proof of the book before it is published. Please let me hear from you!

Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events will be accepting limited advertising. If you are interested in using this e-newsletter as a way to reach a targeted audience, please e-mail Ron Hopkins at [rchopkins@ameritech.net](mailto:rchopkins@ameritech.net) for more details. [Or Click Here](#)

I would really appreciate it if you would forward T.I.M.E. onto your colleagues, associates, and clients. Just press the forward button at the end of the newsletter.

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May 2000: [Teambuilding](#) and (Freebie) New York Times Reprint On Teambuilding

June 2000: [Green Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Resource List Of Exercises

July 2000: [Values](#) and (Freebie) Meeting Analysis

August 2000: [Minimum/Minimal Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Web Winners

October 2000: [Evaluations](#) and (Freebie) Sample Evaluation Questions

November 2000: [Politics](#)

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