

Just a Spark

Every flame starts out as a spark, and these trends have just started to ignite. Maybe the contagious ember has caught fire at your office or it's coming your way—in any case, these trends are lighting up.

Social Footprint

Social CRM (customer relationship management) is one trend that Jeff Hurt, the Dallas-based director of education and engagement for Velvet Chain-saw Consulting, has noticed. Hurt says that today's planners are searching for their hotel or supplier salesperson in their social networks before they do business with them. Buyers are looking at the salesperson's social footprint: how active and how well connected they are in the industry. Are they linked to key players in the meetings realm? If they are not engaged in the industry, the buyer is likely going to move on, he says. "It is all about relationship sales; they are going to go with people they know. You need to be there before they need you," he says.

Contact management software such as Salesforce has followed this trend. The program now has a feature called Chatter, for "real-time collaboration in the cloud" that offers customizable groups, file sharing, feeds, app updates and analytics. According to their website, Chatter will also "leverage relevant business information from popular social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook to form stronger connections with customers, prospects

and colleagues." Don't worry: The tools are internal, so insights gained will not be blasted out to your Twitter followers.

In the same vein, social media is being integrated into event-registration software via widgets, so that prospective attendees can see who from their social networks is attending a particular conference. "Registration lists are a lure for attendees. I pay for meetings, and I want to pay for meetings that my network is going to," Hurt says. Seeing who in their network is attending will play into their decision to attend a particular meeting or event.

While this trend is still in its infancy, he sees this form of integrated social networking as one trend that will stay and eventually evolve into a larger kind of social profile. "[This profile] is like a living, breathing document that is constantly changing, and they have a lot of influence on what we do," he says.

Focus on Health & Wellness

The meetings industry has not been known for its healthy practices. After all, how can eating cook-

ies the size of your head during coffee breaks between long "exercises" of sitting during meetings be healthy? Well, the tide is changing. Attendees and planners alike are tuning in to personal health and how it relates to an overall better working and learning environment.

Cheryl Anker, president of Off 'N Running Tours, a Los Angeles-based company that produces 5K races and running tours for groups, has seen a boost in business. "Companies are really ready to put something healthy out there. It is good for everybody. People enjoy running and walking, and they can feel good about the charitable contribution," she says. The races also create an awareness for overall health at corporate events and association meetings, and participation in the annual races increases each year, she says. Anker constantly meets runners and walkers who say they have incorporated running, walking and racing into their lives after the event.

Jerry Cito, vice president of convention development for NYC & Company, the official marketing, tourism and partnership organization for New York City, has seen groups trending toward healthier steps such as energy breaks and outdoor activities including biking and walking tours, as well as scavenger hunts.

Hurt has also noticed a trend toward half-conscious events. At the recent Experience e4 conference, attendees actually had a sleep break in the afternoon, a one-and-a-half-hour period that people could relax. "The attendees loved it," he says.

Participants are also asking for lighter fare at breakfast, such as granola and yogurt, Andrews says. Overall, meals are on a smaller scale, both in portions and presentation. But the scaling down of F&B is also about budget and perception; planners want to avoid looking extravagant. "It is not just this elaborate waste of food. It is a change in perception as well, as it's budget friendly," she says.

In addition to diet and exercise, wellness has been a recent focus. Planners are adding stress-relieving components into meetings, such as yoga breaks and mini-massages. Forward-thinking spas have added detox treatments as well as services designed to ease the stress of travel on the body.

Hot Décor and Event Trends

Pop culture and fashion can dictate the theme of the meeting. "Color and texture have a direct correspondence with what is happening in fashion home trends and pop culture," Moss says. TV series like *Mad Men* have become event themes, and next year who knows what hit show or movie will inspire events, he says. In terms of colors, this year his team is seeing vibrant tones and unexpected pairings, such as bright turquoises and oranges.



Race hosted by Off 'N Running Tours in New Orleans.