

Ruud Janssen and Sam Smith spread the (tech) word

Ruud is a marketing entrepreneur and founder of The New Objective Collective. Sam is a technology consultant and editor. They were both panellists of the EIBTM WorldWide Technology Watch and will be discussing "top technologies for your 2010 shopping list, without breaking the budget" during the Technology Hour*. They know about trends, marketing and technology. It made sense to have a word with them.

*Today at 13:00, Conference Room 4.2



Our industry is generally not very tech-savvy. Why should meeting planners need to put some "bytes" into their work?

Sam: The way people are consuming information is changing. People are getting used to having two-way interactive experiences with their digital media. For example, CNN.com allows you to watch the news, read the news, report the news, [and] upload your photos or videos of the news. The news is no longer something you consume - it is something that you create. And social media has accelerated people's comfort with two-way experiences. Soon attendees will demand interactive events and reject organisers that stuff them in chairs for 5-6 hours per day to listen to speakers.

Networking is an obsession but the coffee break is still the only way to network at many meetings. How does technology help in networking?

Sam: Better networking starts with understanding the attendee's networking objectives, creating activities that correspond to those objectives and providing tools that help them answer important questions about others: Who else is here? What do they look like? What do I have in common with them? How can I connect with them during and after the event? Services like Pathable, Spotme, and Badge2Match help attendees answer those questions.

Ruud: The fad of collecting and caching personal contacts and URL's, documents and presentations is hitting an all time high. The need to have a meaningful dialogue instead of broadcasting to like-minded sets of people is a need that emerges out of the abundance of (micro) blogs, sites and newsfeeds.

Serving the virtual attendee has become a fact of life

Ruud: Preparing who to network with and being informed in order to have meaningful encounters and conversations is the next step in networking. Getting prepared, selecting and following up on which dialogues you have engaged in is exactly what technology will help us do. The devices change, the connection volume and reach grows, and technology enables us to separate the quality conversations from the gibberish.

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Budgets are tight and technology companies often have to convince clients to spend their money on "fancy gadgets". Is this realistic in today's economic situation?

Sam: If I were an event organiser considering the latest event technology, I would concentrate on the value that these tools provide for me. What new things can I do with this tool and what can I stop doing? How will it change my attendee experience? What are my event's biggest challenges and how does this tool help solve them? Then I would formulate my strategy and only then would I consider the various technology options. If you start with the technology, you increase your odds of ending up with the wrong tool.

How should our industry react to the rise of virtual events? Resist them? Embrace them?

First analyse your needs and define your strategy: If you start with the technology, you increase your odds of ending up with the wrong tool

Could recommend one technological innovation which can offer a very high ROI?

Sam: I would pick virtual meetings and hybrid events, which cut costs, build communities and include more people in events than ever before. As an example, Cisco cut their event expenses by 90% by hosting a virtual meeting. And 35% of their attendees reported that they would like to attend a face-to-face event in the future. Another benefit is using the hybrid format as a complement to a face-to-face event to include more people. ITU's Telecom World had 40,000 participants onsite and broadcast the conference to over 100,000 people. But virtual events are not right for all meetings. Forbes recently published a report for which they interviewed 750 executives that agreed that virtual events are best for "presenting data" and "information dissemination." In all other cases, face-to-face meetings were the best solution.

Preparing who to network with and being informed in order to have meaningful encounters is the next step in networking

Ruud: If it is possible to spread the message, retain it more effectively and to reach and influence a larger audience, any organisation will have to first seriously review the needs of their audience and then change the way they communicate. Budgets are a reflection of communication needs. The question is: in a world of abundant communication, do you have the skills and tools to provide a platform for effective dialogue?

Ruud: Serving the virtual attendee has become a fact of life. You can do it reactively or proactively but you can certainly not ignore that this new audience is on the rise. Through technology you can contribute, audit, view, record or be virtually present at any respectable event that takes their subject matter seriously. Can an association afford not to engage their virtual audience?



Tomorrow: EIBTM 2009 WorldWide Technology Watch Winner Presentation & Drinks Reception

When?
Wednesday
2nd December
14.05 → 14.30

Where?
Conference Centre Room, 4.2

Pathable, this year's winner will present a short overview of their winning technology product for the meetings industry followed by a drinks reception. The presentation will be held just after the Technology Hour. Pathable has won a free stand to exhibit at the MPI Technology Village @ EIBTM

Stand P145

SoftCongres launches tool to count event attendees

How many people came? How many are in room A? How many passed by the sponsor area? These questions can be answered by myCounter, a new tool by SoftCongres to count the number of people in events. The service consists of a physical counting tool which works with two cameras and spots the movement of people. The information is then processed by a central computer with an error tolerance of between 2% and 4%. This solution allows users to quantify the flow of people (their direction of movement), the time they stay in each place and the occupancy of each hall.

Stand: P285