

SOCIAL NETWORKING 3.0: HOW TO MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU, YOUR ATTENDEES, & EXHIBITORS

At HSMAI's Affordable Meetings® National in Washington, DC, in September, a panel of experts and expert users working with social networking in meeting planning critiqued the use of social networking in planning that very meeting. Panelist James Spargo, Senior Vice President for Exposition Sales, Marketing and Management at J. Spargo & Associates, HSMAI's management company for Affordable Meetings, was able to show how the company had used social networking throughout the year to make the meeting a success. Panelists Wayne Crawford with a2z, Inc., an event management software company, and Pat Pathade and Michael Hatch, with Fantail Consulting and Technologies, provided excellent guidance on how the audience of meeting planners could be most effective in this medium.

While meeting planners must use LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, etc., today, Spargo cautioned that they are not as "free" as they seem. The staffing required to manage them can be substantial. Spargo noted that he had a staff person working in this space for several hours a day for about six months before Affordable

Meetings National. He offered some lessons learned after their first year in this milieu.

"The trial and error approach is not advisable," he said. "Set firm and achievable objectives and realistic expectations. Remember that traditional marketing methods are still important – don't expect social media to generate significant direct exhibitor sales or attendee registrations. Plan the campaign, work the campaign, and be sure you allocate resources to run the campaign."

Tools in use at Affordable Meetings National included "Network Now" and "ChirpE." "Network Now" is a matchmaking program. Profiles are entered and attendees can search exhibitors, exhibitors can search attendees, and both can search educational offerings. "ChirpE," a mobile solution that enables events industry stakeholders to find valuable show information when and where they want it, is a bridge between event site content and social media.

The methodology involved in using social networking for Affordable Meetings included using one person from the marketing team who was already active at a personal level in social media to set up the Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter pages, monitor them, and generate interest by posting frequently.

Twitter had the highest number of followers, at least partly because it was the venue that got the most attention by the staff person responsible. She spent at least an hour a day (several more hours a day as time for the meeting got closer) finding others who had commented, re-tweeting, answering messages, finding articles to post, and finding what other people had said in other spaces about Affordable Meetings.

Some tactics included running a trivia quiz every Tuesday on the Twitter page. Winners received small gifts like Starbucks gift cards. Facts were posted two or three times a week – things like "The D.C. Metro Area has a higher concentration of meeting planners than any other city in the country."

During the meeting, someone from J. Spargo monitored Twitter to stay on top of comments from attendees and exhibitors. They learned from social media



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that some attendees thought more signage would be useful; show managers immediately added signage. Advice from the panel: “Solve every complaint onsite, or at least address the issues, or it will hurt you in the long run.”

Spargo shared a blueprint and strategies for others beginning to use social media seriously in their meeting planning:

- Define your purpose for using social media;
- Define specific campaign milestones;
- Monitor and track statistics;
- Be prepared to change tactics along the way;
- Engage your entire team and rotate responsibilities;
- Review and adjust once a month;
- Use social media to engage your target audience and build community;
- Use Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and blogs;
- Post content from other sources – make it informational, not just selling;
- Use customized tools like “Network Now” and “ChirpE.”

J. Spargo’s tactical plan for social networking for Affordable Meetings included:

- Post news articles of interest to the community;
- Post industry research articles;
- Post at least three articles on how to save time, effort, and money;
- Re-post – interview authors and re-post including the original article with the interview;
- Include a follow-up question at the end of your post;
- Post at least once a week – preferably two or three times. Tuesdays, and, second, Thursdays, are the best days.

Social media efforts this year increased awareness of the HSMIA Affordable Meetings® shows, increased brand recognition, and provided increased opportunities for customer service. It is an indispensable weapon in today’s meeting planner arsenal.



James Spargo, Senior Vice President, Exposition Sales & Management, J. Spargo & Associates, Inc., directs an experienced, aggressive and customer-service oriented exhibit sales, marketing and operations team. A twenty year sales, marketing and management leader, James started in the trade show business by working summers “pushing crates” on the show floor for general contractors. He soon worked his way up in the business from Exhibits Coordinator, Sales Representative, Marketing Manager, Vice President of Exhibit Sales, and finally Senior Vice President. James and his team manage 30+ events yearly, from small table-top conferences to tradeshow events. Contact: james.spargo@jspargo.com.



Wayne Crawford is Vice President of sales for a2z, Inc., a Columbia, Maryland-based company that is the leading provider of innovative software solutions to sell, market and manage expositions. Crawford oversees the efforts and team driving the company’s growing sales efforts. Contact: wayne@fantailtech.com.



Michael J. Hatch, President, Fantail Consulting & Technologies, is a successful entrepreneur. Before joining Fantail Mike was Partner at a2z, Inc. and served as their Senior Vice President of Sales & Marketing, helping that company to progress from a start-up to become one of the meeting industry’s leading event technology providers in several product categories. Mike has owned and operated two successful exhibit design and graphics production companies that successfully launched several innovative new products and marketing concepts nationwide, and served over 10,000 companies, associations and government agencies during a seventeen year span. He has also produced over 50 successful trade shows and education conferences. Contact: mike@fantailtech.com.



Pat Pathade, CEO Fantail Consulting & Technologies, is an accomplished Technology Professional with 25 years experience. His areas of focus are technology and business consulting. He excels in putting together teams, designing and building systems, and then seeing the projects through the initial operating periods. He has an MBA from the Sellinger School of Business, Baltimore and a Bachelor of Technology in Civil Engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai. He also holds PMP and ITIL certifications. Contact: pat@fantailtech.com.