

# Determine the ROI of your meetings

*The first step is to establish the criteria to be measured*

BY MARGE ANDERSON, for SBT

In today's economy, all businesses are evaluating their return on investment (ROI). This includes product ROI, employee ROI, customer ROI, etc. However, one area increasingly coming to the forefront of ROI discussions is meetings. Executive management teams require specific measurable results for their meetings and incentive programs.

For example, your CEO or vice president of sales might ask, "What is our company's ROI for the national sales meeting?" In recent years, a familiar answer, "We've motivated the team to sell," is no longer considered a measurable result.

Further, meetings and events are two distinctly different disciplines, but events are also moving more into quantitative and qualitative ROI measurement.

Instead of stating goals and objectives as "guests having a good time," positioning events to incorporate measurement tools with attendance goals, number of contacts with interactive entertainers and utilizing entertainers as a measurement tool for canvassing guests is extremely helpful in obtaining Monday morning "fast facts" on achieving measurable ROI.

Strategically selective informal post-event evaluation attendee calls are also very effective. This is particularly important as client appreciation gatherings don't incorporate a post-event evalu-

ation guests complete prior to departure.

Meeting Professionals International (MPI) has adopted an approach to measuring an organization's ROI for meetings — the ROI Institute's methodology of measuring benefits and costs associated with meetings.

The ROI Institute, founded by Jack and Patti Phillips, has used their methodology successfully for over two decades in the training and development field: Now, MPI and the ROI Institute are teaming to show executives the exact return on investment from their meetings.

In a nutshell, the ROI Institute methodology includes four steps:

**Evaluation planning** - Meeting planners and sponsors agree upon the goals and objectives for the meeting, what impacts are appropriate to measure, and what methods they want to use. For example, a director of sales may expect a product launch meeting to increase sales by 10 percent. She and the meeting planner use the evaluation planning

phase to figure out what data they need to gather to discover how the meeting impacts sales. They could decide to use a trend line analysis to compare sales cycles against the timing of the meeting, or to interview sales managers.

**Data collection** - During and after the meeting, many tools exist that meeting planners can use to collect data. Questionnaires, focus groups, interviews and performance contracting are just some of the many approaches. Which approach to use depends on what kind of resources the company has to commit to measurement.

**Data Analysis** - During the data analysis phase, the ROI process recommends isolating the effects of the meeting from other factors that could influence the business goals of the meeting sponsor. Using our example, the meeting planner can draw on a variety of techniques to separate the product launch meetings' impact on sales from other factors, such as an upturn in the economy or what competitors are doing. The next step in the analysis is to convert all of the benefits of the meeting, like improved customer loyalty, the value of the increased sales, or higher staff retention to monetary values. Monetary values are then calculated against meeting costs and converted into an ROI value that reflects the company's return on the investment in the meeting.

**Reporting** - Finally, it is important

to make sure meeting sponsors, customers and attendees understand the impact of the meeting. Results of their participation can be reported through memos, websites, and follow up communications.

Understanding that meetings do impact your ROI is the first step to measurable results. The second step would be identifying the need for meeting professionals to partner with you as employees or consultants to help you truly measure your meetings ROI.

Ask yourself a few questions. How is your company measuring its meetings ROI? Do you have a certified meeting professional, certified meeting manager or certified special events professional on staff? Does your company partner with any meeting, event and incentive management companies?

Wisconsin is home to more than 320 meeting professionals. If you are ready to take bold steps, embrace and further develop your meetings department, you have a plethora of resources available to you.

**Marge Anderson** represents the Energy Center of Wisconsin. Gloria Nelson of Gloria Nelson Event Design LLC and Kim Marie Ball, CMP, of Premier Meetings and Incentives, also contributed to this article. All three are members of the Wisconsin Chapter of Meeting Professionals International. For more information, visit [www.mpiwi.org](http://www.mpiwi.org).