

MPI Greater Edmonton Chapter: Transforming the Meetings Industry Through New Media

“New media will change the way the way you do business,” said **Amber MacArthur**, addressing 250 meetings industry professionals at Edmonton’s Shaw Conference Centre on April 15. As part of the 13th annual National Meetings Industry Day (NMID) celebrations, participants learned how to use a variety of new media to promote events, build connections, and measure success.

MacArthur, a new-media consultant and journalist, discussed several tools—blogs, social media, mobile media, and podcasts—and explained how each could be used to enhance the meetings industry.

Blogs are a versatile tool that can enhance a meeting or conference before, during, and after the actual event. For example, prior to her speaking engagement in Edmonton, MacArthur promoted the event by posting the NMID website in a blog on her own home page. When blogs are used during the event, “conversations move from the room to the world outside,” MacArthur said. You can use these conversations to “build up a community by listening to what audiences want.”

Blogs can also be used to assess an event’s success, either by monitoring the event blog for feedback, or by using tools that determine how many people visit a blog or website and how long they stay on the site.

The popularity of social networking tools makes them effective promotional tools. By creating a Facebook event page, organizers can use social networks to promote a meeting, a conference, or a social event. Organizations that want to “get outside Facebook” can use similar social marketing options, such as Ning.

Regardless of the type of social media used, event promotion must send a consistent message and get that message out to as many people as possible. “Share everywhere,” MacArthur said. “Be an advertising marathoner, not a sprinter.” For example, attention can be drawn to social networks through email footers. “We all send 50, 100, maybe even 150 email messages every day. Why not think of the email footer as a place to advertise social media participation?” By including links to Facebook or other social networking spaces, such as Twitter, in an email footer, daily correspondence becomes a pervasive marketing strategy.

Twitter, the popular social networking tool that allows users to correspond using short, 140-character messages called tweets, provides an immediate and mobile way to gather or send information. MacArthur encouraged participants to use Twitter to “build your own little army of people who will spread the message about the meeting or event you’re hosting.” Regular updates are key to using Twitter successfully. MacArthur recommended daily updates in the weeks leading up to an event, to build momentum and “get people excited online about the event.”

Because Twitter is a mobile media, any smartphone, cell phone, or BlackBerry user can access it at any time. This makes it ideal for gauging the level of interest in or the success of an event while it is happening. MacArthur emphasized the importance of listening to online feedback: “If

you don't use these tools, you won't be a part of the conversations online.”

The meetings industry can also benefit from podcasts—audio or video files that can be downloaded from the Internet. Generally, podcasts are used to educate or entertain viewers or listeners. The Edmonton NMID website includes a podcast of MacArthur promoting the 2010 event. Podcasts are free and simple to create and provide an excellent way to build connections with communities, clients, and potential clients.

To reap the benefits of podcasts or other video-based media, the content must be authentic. Authenticity is just as important in the world of new media as it is in face-to-face interactions. It involves a “willingness to be honest, accessible, and admit your mistakes,” MacArthur said. In podcasts, these qualities enhance relationships and build connections with viewers or listeners.

Creativity, like authenticity, is crucial to the success of all new media, including videos. With so much noise online, “you really want to stand out. You have to be brave.” MacArthur demonstrated the importance of creativity by engaging the audience in a unique photo op. “To stand out on the Internet, we need to be original. So we're going to take a photo that is original.” She asked everyone to stand and explained that, on the count of three, they should all jump in the air and strike a silly or interesting pose. A photographer snapped a photo—which MacArthur plans to use to promote the success of the NMID event.

When starting out with new media, “grow from the inside out,” MacArthur suggested. For these tools to be successful, they need to be accepted and used by the event team itself. The more individuals in an organization become familiar with new media, the easier it will be for others to join in. “Think of it as a high school dance,” she said. “No one wants to be first on the floor. But as soon as one or two people are dancing, it's not long before the dance floor is full. It's the same with new media.”