

Communication Tools Target Client Needs

This year's National Meetings Industry Day, held at Montreal's Delta Centre-Ville on April 15 and hosted by **Daniel Fortin**, centred on the theme "A New Perspective—Modern Tools for Meetings."

An array of communication tools is available for meeting professionals today, but no matter which tools they use, all communications activities should focus on the client, said speakers during this meeting of the Montreal chapter of Meeting Professionals International (MPI).

Two representatives from Quebec's tourism industry described some of the web marketing tools they have developed, and showed how they use social networking tools.

Images play an important role in selling destinations effectively and efficiently, said **Daniel Gagnon**, Director of Communications and Advertising with Quebec City Tourism. It takes many people to turn an idea into reality, he said, as he introduced Quebec City Tourism's new website, RegiondeQuebec.com.

Gagnon described some of the processes involved in developing the site. First, they reviewed a number of websites for cities of comparable size to Quebec, pinpointing areas where they felt they could do better. They acknowledged the strengths and weaknesses of their previous site, and set about addressing the weaknesses.

The Internet is the tool of choice for planning trips, Gagnon said: 62% of travellers use it, while approximately one quarter use brochures; only a small minority relies on word of mouth. The success of any destination website will depend on good planning and efficiency. Multiple factors must be considered, and the type of traveller who'll be using the site will help determine the site's layout and available search options.

While business tourism represents a small fraction of visitors to Quebec City—about 10%—these clients tend to stay longer, and spend more money to make their stay more useful and enjoyable. They should be offered travel solutions that will enhance their visit and encourage them to stay as long as possible.

The site's features and functionalities include menus announcing business events; a fixed menu that is always visible at the top of the page, even when the user scrolls down; a menu that pops up above the "What to Do" tab; and a variety of search options driven by a more effective search engine for optimal efficiency.

Quebec City Tourism has a number of web projects slated over the next several months, Gagnon said. These include a site update, resolving programming issues, incorporating microsites within the main site, introducing online reservation capability, using Web 2.0 tools to share information, revising the business tourism offer by providing content geared to specific fields, and incorporating mobile applications. It is important to take

advantage of the excitement these tools can generate and establish yourself as an expert, with the end goal of increasing sales to your destination, he said.

It's crucial to maintain multiple points of contact when targeting clients, said **Emmanuelle Legault**, Director of Communications for Tourism Montreal. She emphasized the importance of knowing your clients and making them the central focus of all communications.

Noting that Tourism Montreal's website was previously built to appeal to a wide range of potential visitors, Legault described the site's shift in focus from mass communication to a more targeted communication style. The website now uses a more personalized approach, focusing on clients' needs, striving to understand what they want, and taking appropriate action. While multiple points of contact are essential, they can make this approach more challenging, Legault said. But the website's goal is to become part of the sales process by reaching out to clients.

To achieve this, Tourism Montreal is using an innovative, custom-designed monitoring tool. Using the MPI Montreal and MPI Toronto sites, Legault demonstrated how the tool works: it allows the user to target site users, capture their activities, and explore potential partnerships. The site's "meeting planner" section allows planners to download communication tools that can be personalized, and to obtain a \$10 cash-back offer per room per night.

Richard Tremblay, an engineer and professional speaker, focused his presentation on the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers (CAPS), describing how it can help meeting planners choose the right speaker for an event.

CAPS speakers set themselves apart through their expertise, eloquence, enterprise, and ethics, said Tremblay; the organization offers workshops, activities, and training courses to help speakers enhance their skills. Three membership levels are available: professional, candidate, and supplier. To become a professional member of CAPS, members must have given at least 20 presentations.

The CAPS website is searchable by several factors including topic, industry, type of membership, and location, making it useful for planners who want speakers with specific qualifications.

Before an event, CAPS speakers evaluate their clients' goals, challenges, and needs, determining their audience's interests to ensure clients get exactly what they want. Post-event evaluations collect client and participant feedback, which the speaker incorporates into future interactions.