



Meeting Architecture

Meeting Architecture by Maarten Vanneste is perhaps the most significant book ever written about the meetings and events industry and history could prove it to be the turning point for the profession of planning meetings and events.

The author is the self-made owner of Abbit Meeting Support, which looks like an AV production company, but offers its customers a deeper understanding of meeting objectives and how to reach them, with or without the AV.

Having started a career in the service of meetings as great tools for education, motivation and networking, Maarten Vanneste was puzzled, to say the least, when he attended his first meetings industry exhibition in 1998 and found only venues and hospitality related services, nothing to do with the content side of meetings.

Little has changed during the past ten years. The focus of meeting and event planners is still on the hospitality and satisfaction of attendees, meeting owners spend their budgets on impressive stage shows and famous motivational speakers without connecting all the effort and expenditure to the real objectives, the behavioural changes of participants which will create value for the meeting owners and provide the return on investment.

A study of event industry magazines in 2006 showed that 98.5 per cent of the advertisers were

destinations and venues, no industry has developed to provide meetings with content. We have the shell, but no-one has yet put the pearl inside it, is Vanneste's analogy, to call it the meetings and events industry is like the steel industry calling itself the automotive industry.

To help planners develop meeting content, Vanneste offers the Meeting Support Matrix and the Meeting Content Matrix. The objectives of meetings usually have something to do with education, networking and motivation and the most suitable meeting concept may be developed by considering conceptual, human, artistic, technical and technological tools and how they may be deployed before, during and after the meeting. He then shows how the ROI Methodology of Jack Phillips and the ROI Institute provides the conceptual framework for how the achievement of different objectives provides the return on investment for stakeholders. When building a small warehouse, any manager would recognize the need for an architect as well as a project manager and a construction site manager. When spending the same amount of money on a customer event, none of the same attention is paid to purpose and design and the manager is not held responsible for results far below what could have been achieved. But the poor manager who needs a meeting or event, the budget owner, has nowhere to turn for help and support in devel-

oping the objectives, content and format and to evaluate afterwards if the objectives were met.

Maarten Vanneste calls this missing profession the meeting architect. Rather than defining the meeting designer or meeting planner into this role, he wants a completely new professional title to emphasize that this is a new role and not just a tweaking of things as they are. This line of reasoning makes sense and even though it sounds a bit strange at first, we will get used to the meeting architect and learn to know how he is to put the pearl in the shell.

The profession of meeting architecture draws on many existing professions such as education, psychology, sociology, business management, marketing, finance, procurement, project management and others in order to provide the holistic view of meetings and events and the contribution they can make to achieving business objectives.

Having explained in this well written and easy flowing book the need for the meeting architect, a manifesto for a new profession as he calls it, Vanneste passes the challenge on to associations, corporations and universities to further define the role and body of knowledge of the meeting architect and to develop the curriculum for the university degrees required to make it a professional reality. After reading the book I have no doubt, there is only one way forward. ■

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