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Attributes Influencing Meeting Planners' Destination Selection A Case Of Orlando, Fl

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ATTRIBUTES INFLUENCING MEETING PLANNERS' DESTINATION SELECTION:
A CASE OF ORLANDO, FL.

by

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ABSTRACT

The meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) industry generates billions of dollars in direct and indirect spending annually, and is considered one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry. Destinations that want to capitalize on this industry must understand what drives its planners. The current study used Orlando, Florida as a case study, and investigated whether there are differences between the three meeting planners' types (association, corporate, 3rd party) in regards to destination selection attributes and the recent recession impact. The study further identified attributes that affect future bookings to Orlando. Data was collected from a nationwide survey of meeting planners with a usable sample of 2,388 completed phone surveys and 118 completed online questionnaires. Only one significant difference was found between the three meeting planners' types.

This research was performed in the midst of the recent recession. Some effects of the recent economic downturn on the events industry are decreased attendance and more conservative cost management. Most association meeting planners did not cancel or postponed their events, although all planners agree that attendance to their meetings decreased. Third party planners seemed to be the most sensitive to budget allocations.

Recommendations for the Orlando Orange County Conventions and Visitor's Bureau include marketing the variety and quality of its meeting facilities better, its extreme weather insurance and its website. It is also wise to pursue more local associations, because those can be the main source of income during recessions.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother and father.

They both lost their parents in the passing year and still hold their heads high and support me

from 7,000 miles away.

I love you both.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVUATIONS

CIC   Convention Industry Council

CVB   Convention and Visitor's Bureau

ICCA   International Congress and Convention Association

MICE   Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions

MPI   Meeting Professionals International

OOCCVB   Orlando Orange County Convention and Visitor's Bureau (Visit Orlando)

PCMA   Professional Convention Management Association

SMERF   Social, Military, Education, Religious and Fraternal

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) industry represents one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry (Casanova, Kim & Morrison, 2005; DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf and Godlewska, 2008; Weber, 2001; Weber & Roehl, 2001). Whether it is a publically traded company that is obligated by law, healthcare providers that gather for training purposes or a family reunion, essentially all organizations need to plan and execute some type of event. However, during times of economic downturn, meeting and events budgets are on top of the list for budget cuts, and meeting planners are being forced to do more with less. The latest recession, which started in 2008, has greatly affected the events industry and changed public perception of it (Duffy, 2010). It also made meeting planners more cautious with their destination selection.

Understanding meeting planners' site selection process and considerations is important for destinations that want to capitalize on the events industry. With the growing competition, destinations must become experts in all facets of the events industry. They have to understand that while there are main attributes that are important to all meeting planners and all meeting types, there are still many differences that derive from the type of meeting planners that plan events, or the different segments the meeting planners plan for. Commonly known MICE segments are corporate, associations, government and social, military, education, religion and fraternal (SMERF) (Fenich, 2006; Rompf, Breiter & Severt, 2008). The different segment can

focus on environment, agriculture, finance, heritage and culture, real state, sports, technology and much more.

Previous literature has focused on association site selection, although lately investigated how event type influences destination attributes importance (Comas & Moscardo 2005; Rompf, Breiter & Severt, 2008). Research is somewhat extensive; however it is mainly theoretical and lacks empirical support (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998). Crawford and McCleary (1992) anticipated that more quantitative research will be published as the hospitality field grows, however a review of the convention and meeting management research through the years 1990 - 2003 shows no increase in this type of research (Lee & Back, 2005).

There is a need for comprehensive empirical research that includes multiple segments of the industry and multiple meeting planner types that are from different geographic locations to generate an overall understanding of attributes that influence meeting planners when they choose a destination. The first step is to portray a current picture of the U.S. MICE industry in terms of events characteristics and meeting planners' characteristics.

Research Objectives

While previous studies investigated meeting planners' decision making process and/or destinations' attributes that are important to meeting planners, many focused on association meeting planners, or did not differentiate between the meeting planner's types or the event they were planning. This research investigates the link between three meeting planners' types (association, corporate and 3rd party planners) and the attributes that influence them when

choosing destinations. Meeting planners participating in this research are from different locations around the nation (representing all 50 states and Canada), plan different events (e.g. trade shows, annual meetings, board meetings, training) and for various clients, including, but not limited to corporations, associations and family reunions. By surveying different meeting planners that plan different events for various segments, this research aims to fill the gap in literature as well as stimulate a much needed academic interest in the process of site selection by meeting planners of all types.

The main purpose of the research at hand is to understand some of the major attributes that influence the different type of meeting planners when they think of Orlando as a meeting destination for their events, as well as what can affect their future booking. The primary objectives of the proposed research are to:

1. *Provide an up-to-date overview of the characteristics of meeting planners and the MICE industry in the United States.*

2. *Determine if there is a difference in destination selection attributes for Orlando among the three meeting planner types (association, corporate, 3rd party).*

3. *Determine which destination selection attributes will affect meeting planners' future bookings to Orlando.*

4. *Determine how the recent downturn in the economy has impacted the three meeting planner types (association, corporate, 3rd party).*

Research Background

The events industry is known for its substantial direct and indirect impact on local economy (Baloglu & Love 2005), and that is partially why it is a main focus of Convention and Visitor's Bureaus (CVBs) in destinations. For example, during 2007, Orlando hosted 6.1 million visitors that participated in different events (conventions, seminars, etc.), with an estimated economic impact of $2.8 billion (Orlando CVB, 2008a). In 2008, an additional $460 million was spent at the Orange County Convention Center by exhibitors and associations (Orlando CVB, 2008b). In order for these millions to be spent in Orlando, meeting planners and other decision makers had to choose Orlando as the most suitable destination for their events.

Meeting planners are those individuals that "...plan, organize, implement, and control…events" (Convention Industry Council [CIC], 2011a). Meeting planners are mainly identified as corporate, association, government or independent (3rd party) meeting planners (Casanova, Kim & Morrison 2005). Their type, the organization they plan for and the type of event they are planning will determine their goals and objectives, and therefore, their planning process. While corporate meeting planners view event related spending as a necessary evil, association meeting planners view it as a source of revenue (Toh, Peterson & Foster, 2007). Independent planners, or 3rd party planners, are outside consultants that specialize in meeting planning (Casanova, Kim & Morrison 2005), and adapt themselves to the organization they plan for. Destinations are fighting for the right to host events. The first step in winning this fight is to understand what makes a destination viable for events in the eyes of the decision makers and stake holders.

The site selection process is an important component in the MICE industry and includes three key players – meeting suppliers, meeting buyers and attendees (Opperman & Chon, 1997). Destinations are considered to be meeting suppliers, since they are both the platform for the event and the suppliers of the overall services (e.g. meeting space, rooms, and pre and post conference activities) (Rogers, 2008). Decision makers have many options, and similar to choosing a hotel or a catering company, destinations are regarded as a supply. Buyers are the decision makers: those who choose the location and structure of the events. Attendees are the heart and soul of the operations, without which there will be no event (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998). Previous studies often investigate associations' site selection since associations are the largest part in the MICE industry (ICCA, 2005), while the remaining segments (corporate meetings, trade shows etc.) are left unexplored. A meeting supplier (i.e. a destination) needs to understand *all* segments of the MICE industry in order to gain a competitive advantage and attract buyers and attendees. Good relationships with the individuals or organizations that plan the meetings are important to a destination that wants to be considered as viable for meetings.

Because of the growing competition among meeting destinations, the latest recession, the rise of second tier destinations and events that are being held aboard cruise ships, understanding destination characteristics is even more important today (Comas & Moscardo 2005; Fenich, 2001; Lee & Back, 2005; Phillips & Gaddie, 2005; Rompf, Breiter & Severt, 2008). However, the emphasis is on qualitative research of destination selection criteria, while empirical research on meeting planners' perception of destinations is very limited (Baloglu and Love, 2005; Crouch & Louviere, 2004). Furthermore, most of these investigations were made in 'unsystematic fashion' (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998 p. 53). One of the most extensive investigations was done by

Crouch & Ritchie (1998) which formulated a conceptual model of the site selection process and urged researchers and convention cities to conduct further research in order to 'reduce wasteful expenditures' (p.65). Although interest increased, most studies on the site selection process focused on destination attributes, and until recently, very few investigated whether event type, for example, influences meeting planners' destination selection decision making process (Comas & Moscardo 2005; Rompf, Breiter & Severt, 2008).

Host destinations are expected to possess certain attributes that are valued by both meeting planners and participants. There are different types of events, in various sizes, and each with specific goals and objectives. A destination that wants to be successful should know how to promote itself to the different groups. Associations' events mostly combine educational and social components in their events, encouraging networking between their attendees (Rompf, Breiter & Severt, 2008). Corporations are focused on the agenda at hand and formulate or implement policy and procedures (Fenich, 2006). These different needs and objectives affect the site selection process, including who is actually choosing the destination. It is critical for the destination to be familiar with the decision makers at the specific organization in order to influence their decision (Clark & McCleary, 1995).

One of the top meeting destinations in the United States is Orlando, FL (Oppermann, 1996) and is perceived as a suitable destination to many organizations. It is the home of the 2nd largest convention center in the US (over two million square feet of exhibit space), and has 114,109 hotel rooms (Orlando Orange County Convention & Visitor's Bureau, 2011a). The research presented at hand is using Orlando as a case study, however since Orlando is a leading

meeting destination; this case study can be applied on other MICE destinations in the U.S. that are similar to Orlando.

Methodology

The main purpose of the current research is to determine the attributes that influence meeting planners when considering Orlando as a destination for their events, based on the three meeting planner types (associations, corporate and 3rd party). Meeting planners from all over the nation were surveyed by a research team at the UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, utilizing a semi structured phone interview (Appendix A) and an online survey (Appendix B). Data presented in this study was gathered from about 2,500 meeting planners in the course of 11 months. Qualitative data was initially collected via phone from the meeting planners, and then was transformed to quantitative data and imported to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. The surveys included demographic questions (such as gender, geographic location), characteristics of meetings (time of year, size, type), meeting planner's previous experience with Orlando, and attributes they look for when choosing a destination for their events.

Quantitative data was gathered via online surveys and was also imported into SPSS. Common statistical tests like frequency analysis, One Way ANOVA and regression analysis were applied in order to determine if there are significant differences among the meeting planners' type.

Summary

This study aimed to determine if there are differences among the three main meeting planners' types (associations, corporate, 3rd party) in regards to destination selection attributes, destination attributes that affect future booking and the affect of the recent economic downturn. Only a few significant differences were found, and that might be the result of the small sample. A larger sample that includes more than just U.S. meeting planners might provide more significant differences and deepen our understanding of meeting planners, their preferences and their destination selection attributes.

Definition of Terms

In 2011, the Orlando Orange County Convention and Visitor's Bureau (OOCCVB) changed its name to Visit Orlando. Since at the time of conducting the research, they were known as OOCCVB, this study will still relate to Visit Orlando as OOCCVB.

The following terms are frequently used in the MICE industry as well as throughout this research paper:

Event: An organized occasion such as a meeting, convention, exhibition, special event, gala dinner, etc. An event is often composed of several different yet related functions (CIC, 2011a)

Planner: Person whose job it is to oversee and arrange every aspect of an event. Person can be an employee of or hired ad hoc by companies, associations and other organizations to plan, organize, implement, and control meetings, conventions, and other events(CIC, 2011a)

Board Meeting: A meeting of the governing body of an organization (CIC, 2004)

Conference: 1) Participatory meeting designed for discussion, fact-finding, problem solving and consultation.

2) An event used by any organization to meet and exchange views, convey a message, open a debate or give publicity to some area of opinion on a specific issue. No tradition, continuity or timing is required to convene a conference. Conferences are usually of short duration with specific objectives, and are generally on a smaller scale than congresses or conventions (CIC, 2011a)

Convention: Gathering of delegates, representatives, and members of a membership or industry organization convened for a common purpose. Common features include educational sessions, committee meetings, social functions, and meetings to conduct the governance business of the organization. Conventions are typically recurring events with specific, established timing (CIC, 2011a)

Exhibition: An event at which products, services or promotional materials are

       displayed to attendees visiting exhibits on the show floor. These events

       focus primarily on business-to-business (B2B) relationships (CIC, 2011a)

Trade Show: An exhibition of products and/or services held for members of a common

       or related industry. Not open to the general public (CIC, 2011a)

Training meeting: Structured learning session in which instructor presents specific

       information and techniques (CIC, 2004)

Structure of Thesis

This thesis includes comprehensive literature review that gives justification for this research. It is followed by a "Methodology" chapter which describes the research instrument and the data collection process. The "Results" chapter presents the analysis of the data and provides some interpretations to it. The final chapter discusses the results and offers recommendations, implications and future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides background to the current research. It starts by introducing the economic importance of the events industry and the contribution of meetings and conventions to the host destination. Next, the role of the Convention and Visitor's Bureaus is discussed, including their part in promoting destinations and understanding meeting planners needs. Since many times the decisions are made by meeting planners, or according to their recommendations, the third part of the chapter discusses the three main meeting planners' types - association, corporate and third party planners. This is followed by presentation of previous studies on site selection process and destinations' important attributes as they appear in that literature. The current research framework is presented in the summary section.

Economic Impact of Events

The meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) industry represents one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry (Casanova, Kim & Morrison, 2005; DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf and Godlewska, 2008; Weber, 2001; Weber & Roehl, 2001). According to *Meetings & Conventions Magazine*, 1,321,100 events were held in 2007 (Braley, 2008), a tremendous increase from 2005 (1,243,600 events) and 2003 (1,058,800) (DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf & Godlewska, 2008). According to the Convention Industry Council (CIC), a meeting is 'an event where the primary activity of the attendees is to attend educational sessions, participate

in meetings/discussions, socialize, or attend other organized events' (CIC, 2004). For the purpose of this research, "events" will refer to any form of "gathering for business, educational or social purposes" (Fenich, 2006, p.7), which include, but are not limited to, conventions, tradeshows, board meetings, seminars, incentive programs, annual meetings, and cultural events. Events can be held year round, in various locations, and in different settings - a number of small meeting rooms under one roof, or one comprehensive large space for larger events.

"Billions of dollars are spent annually on meetings and conventions. Destinations compete aggressively for the rights to host these events…" (Crouch & Richie, 1998, p. 65). The latest research from the CIC reveals that during 2010 the MICE industry contributed $2.63 trillion in direct spending and $9.07 trillion in indirect spending. This was due to the spending of 205 million attendees participating in 1.8 million events that were held in the U.S. during that year. In their research, the CIC included conventions, conferences, congresses, trade shows and exhibitions, incentive events, corporate/business meetings (the latter institute 1.3M of the total events) and more, but excluded social and recreational activities, certain educational and political activities and gathering for sales of good/services such as consumer shows (CIC, 2011b).

The MICE industry's importance to an economy is well recognized, as researchers and practitioners both acknowledge the many contributions that conventions and other events have on local, state and national economies (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Lee, 2006). The industry is considered to be of great economic impact due to four main reasons. First, its target market is "high-quality, high-cost–and therefore–high-yield end of the market" (Casanova, Kim & Morrison, 2005, p. 22). Second, unlike most segments of the hospitality and tourism industry, events are a year-round activity. Third, if an event is successful, it is likely that it will be held

again in the same destination (future business and revenue). Last, event tourism is greener than

mass tourism (Casanova, Kim & Morrison, 2005).

The 2008 "Meeting Market Report" published by *Meetings & Conventions Magazine*

reported that throughout 2007, approximately $103 billion was spent on conventions ($34.6

billion), associations ($38.1 billion) and corporate ($30.2 billion) events (Braley, 2008).

Corporate events spending more than doubled from 2007 to 2008 ($70 billion), but the great

economic recession that started in mid 2008, led to a considerable decline in 2009, when

corporations spent approximately $54 billion on events (Braley, 2010).

The MICE industry does not only contribute to the host destination in direct spending

(hotel rooms, meeting space), but also accelerates the growth of the travel and tourism industry

in that destination (Lee & Back, 2005). Attendees may visit the destination for the first time (due

to event's location), but choose to come back for leisure purposes. However in order to attract

events to the destination, it must provide the right infrastructure, e.g. developing meeting spaces

and facilities, adequate transportation system, food and beverage outlets etc. (Hodur & Leistritz,

2006). "Each dollar of convention-related spending initiates a broad set of economic interactions

that produce additional spending in other sectors of a region's economy, and thus the economic

impact of conventions can be doubled or tripled because of the extensive indirect influence on

host cities' economies" (Lee & Back, 2005, p.410). Meetings account for $263 billion in

spending (CIC, 2011). The top 10 areas for funds allocation were meeting planning and

production ($109 billion), accommodations ($34.9 billion), food and beverage ($26.4 billion) air

transportation ($17.8 billion), venue rental ($10.6 billion), retail ($7.2 billion) Gasoline ($6.6

billion), recreation and entertainment ($6.2 billion), car rental ($5.5 billion), travel services/other

tourism commodities ($3.4 billion). However, before the money is spent in the destination, the destination should be chosen to host the event. Marketing and promoting the destination to the relevant market segments can help achieve this goal, and is one of the functions of Convention and Visitor's Bureaus (CVBs).

Convention and Visitor's Bureaus

CVB's purpose is to 'develop an image that will position their cities in the marketplace as a viable destination for meetings and conventions' (Gartrell in Weber & Roehl, 2001; Wang, 2008). CVB's role is to bring business to the destination in order to create a chain reaction that results in better wealth to the residences of its destination (DMAI, n.d.). This reaction is achieved by advertising the destination, creating familiarity and strengthening the brand within the right circles (Cai, 2002), thus attracting more businesses to the destination.

In recent years, CVBs have changed their mission statements to incorporate more than just marketing the destination. The shift from 'sales and marketing' to 'partnering in economic development' allows them to be more involved in their communities and better serve planners and visitors to their destination (Anonymous, 2008.). They are more recognizable as an economic driver in the community, and play a significant part during recessions. Attendees might visit a destination they didn't plan to simply because the event is being held there. Positive experience might lead them to come back on their own, as well as convince colleagues and friends to do the same (Meetings Market Report, 2002). CVBs familiarity with the destination

and with the group that is visiting allow them to create the best fit and offer attendees suitable activities other then events, especially if attendees are joined by family or friends.

According to Wang (2008), CVB is also referred to as Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), and its five main functions are: "(1) economic driver; (2) community marketer; (3) industry coordinator; (4) quasi-public representative; and, (5) builder of community pride" (p. 193). As an industry coordinator and public representative, a CVB works with local businesses in the destination, and with individuals and groups that show interest in visiting the destination (Wang, 2008). Groups usually rely on meeting planners to plan their events, and a local CVB can provide these meeting planners with a bundle of information in less time and in a centralized location (on-line or in person). Meeting planners are utilizing the internet and all of its associated technology as planning tools, and those are becoming the most influential factors in the meeting industry (Ha & Love, 2005). The planners use technology to gain access to more comprehensive data that in turn helps them to deliver a better product to their clients at a lower cost and achieve a higher return on investment. CVB provides meeting planners access to a range of services, packages, and other functions that the planner might not know about or thought of using (e.g. attractions in the vicinity of the convention). CVB's familiarity with its area helps create a better fit between the planner's needs and the destination's offerings (hotels, meeting spaces). When it comes to conventions in particular, CVB can also assist in the promotion of convention attendance, convention housing assistance, on-site registration and information, and on-site registration staffing.

In addition, CVBs are more concerned with service quality. Their customers are both the local members (business in the community) and meeting planners, and they need to protect both

of their interests (Weber & Roehl, 2001). If a CVB is an expert in its destination's offerings, and has a deep understanding of its clients' (meeting planners) needs, it will be successful in bringing business and revenue. This understanding can be achieved by listening to meeting planners from different segments and different locations nationwide. Destinations that are actively researching meeting planners' needs and wants will achieve this goal more easily.

The unprecedented growth of the meetings and convention industry led to increased importance of meeting planners. The success (or failure) of the event is a reflection on the meeting planner who designed it. "The willingness of a CVB to help them [meeting planners] with their events even during a weak economy is a win/win situation for both the meeting planner and the CVB" because it can lead to a better, longer relationship (Bundock, 2009). The relationships will create familiarity on both sides (meeting planners familiarity with the destination, and the destination's CVB with meeting planners' needs) and will result in high quality events. Professionals in their field, meeting planners are the main factor in planning and execution process of successful meetings and events (Toh, Dekay & Yates, 2005).

Meeting Planners

Meeting planners are people "whose job it is to oversee and arrange every aspect of an event…plan, organize, implement, and control meetings, conventions, and other events" (CIC, 2011a). Meeting planners are identified as corporate, association, government or independent (3rd party) meeting planners (Casanova, Kim & Morrison 2005). Regardless of their type, meeting planners perform many similar roles, and their characteristics are mainly the same (age, sex,

years of experience on the job, credentials). However, there are unique characteristics to each meeting planners group (Toh, Dekay & Yates, 2005).

Corporate meeting planners account for 34% of meeting planners in the U.S. (Toh, Peterson & Foster, 2007) and are usually employed by the corporation they plan for. Their position may be defined as "meeting planner", or they can be temporarily chosen to plan a specific event (accidental meeting planner). A meeting in the corporate world is considered a necessary expense, since the corporation is paying for the attendees. Therefore cost reduction is very important. Corporate events are often smaller and business focused. An event's success is measured by whether or not the company's goals have been accomplished. Meeting planner's success is measured by his/hers ability to plan and execute within budget, while making the most of it (through good negotiation). Corporate planners have a shorter lead time when planning events, which allows them to utilize off-peak dates that lower their housing and meetings space costs. Using technology to plan events is increasing in popularity for corporate meeting planners, as they use software like Meeting Matrix to see layouts of meeting space, or manage roommates' preference on-line. When it comes to site selection, the most important factors for the corporate planner are: adequacy of meeting rooms, costs, negotiable rates and food service (Toh, Peterson & Foster, 2007).

Association meeting planners account for 27% of meeting planners (Toh, Peterson & Foster, 2007) and are employed by the association they plan for. Association meeting planners may be responsible for regional, national, and international events, but work mostly on the association's annual meeting. Events are considered a source of revenue, and cost management is focused on creating revenue enhancement - attendees are expected to pay registration fees and

accommodations. Association events are focused on education and socializing / networking, and making sure that the attendees will enjoy their time inside and outside the meeting schedule. Since associations' events are not mandatory, success is measured by high attendance and positive feedback from participants. This in turn reflects to the meeting planner's success and "if revenues exceed costs, it would be considered a bonus" (Toh, Peterson & Foster, 2007, p. 46). Association planners require a longer lead time when planning events, especially when it pertains to the annual meeting, due to the size of events (Toh, Peterson & Foster, 2007).

Third party (independent) meeting planners account for 13% of meeting planners (Toh, Peterson & Foster, 2007) and can be hired by any type of organization (corporate, association or any other type) (Toh, Dekay & Yates, 2005). Third party planners are outside consultants that specialize in meeting planning (Casanova, Kim & Morrison 2005). They are hired to plan non-core activities like negotiating room rates, locating suitable venues and more. They explore several options based on the organization's characteristics (e.g. meeting type, budget, size, etc.) and offer (or choose) the best match for the event. More than 80% of independent meeting planners are women (Toh, Dekay & Yates, 2005).

'Other' meeting planners make up the remaining 26% and include "those who are working for the government, housing bureaus, and travel agencies" (Toh, Dekay & Yates, 2005, p. 432). Government meeting planners (also referred to as "the public sector") are quite similar to association meeting planners in many ways, and this is the main reason why they are regarded as the same group in research context (Rogers, 2008). Their budgets derive from public funds, hence the heavy scrutiny on the way those funds are allocated. Government planners are required to comply with a 'per diem' allowance - they must find venues and hotels in which total daily

costs (accommodations, food and beverage and other expenses) do not exceed the daily

allowance that is given to government employees (Rogers, 2008).

Whether it is an association or a corporation, an annual meeting or a board meeting, the

location of an event is usually crucial for its success. Understanding the role of meeting planners

in the site selection process, and the attributes they deem important has been a focus of the

hospitality industry for years (Comas & Moscardo 2005; Fenich, 2001; Lee & Back, 2005;

Rompf, Breiter & Severt, 2008). The following section provides a review of previous studies in

the field, focusing on site selection process and destinations attributes that were found as

important to meeting planners or attendees.

Destination Selection Process and Attributes

The process through which meeting planners choose destinations for their events is of

utmost importance to destinations around the world and has been researched in many different

aspects. Attempts have been made to identify specific attributes that are important to both

attendees and meeting planners, and the kind of information they are searching for in the

planning process. Because of the growing competition within meeting destinations, the rise of

second tier destinations, the latest recession, and increased popularity of events on cruise ships,

understanding destination characteristics is even more important than ever (Phillips & Gaddie,

2005).

Zelinsky (1994) investigated the geography of convention in the U.S and offered a

number of insights. He suggested that in attendees' decision making process, the following

factors are being considered: a) Personal considerations (is the timing right? Are there previous obligations? Holidays?), b) Affordability (costs in dollar amount and time consumed) and c) Accessibility. He also concluded that 'deciding where to convene is usually the prerogative of the executives of an organization, sometimes consulting with the membership' (p.74).

Clark and McCleary (1995) applied the organizational buying process on destination selection process by associations. They suggested that a destination that wants to be considered as a viable meeting destination has to be included in the association's initial pool of options (evoked set), which means it has to be offered by one of the decision makers in the organization. Identifying and approaching these key players in the associations and marketing the destination to them increases the chances of it being chosen as the final location for the event. However when a destination configures the marketing plan, it needs to take the association's size, characteristics and budget under consideration.

Oppermann (1996) surveyed meeting planners' decision criteria and evaluation of 30 North America convention cities. He suggested that previous experience or lack thereof, has an influence on meeting planners' perceptions. Indeed his analysis shows that previous experience has major influence on the destination's image as perceived by meeting planners. The the non-experienced ones tend to have less favorable approach towards the tested cities. It appears that this is due to familiarity of the meeting planners with both their counter partners at the destination (conventions teams in hotels and meeting facilities, CVB personnel) and the meeting destination itself. Oppermann (1996) findings reinforced Vogt, Roehl and Fesenmaier's (1994) conclusions that previous experience is an important and most frequently used source of information for meeting planners.

Oppermann (1996) asked 600 meeting planners to rank the importance of 15 destinations'

attributes. The results of 123 surveys show that meeting planners put great importance on

meeting rooms and facilities, and the hotel service quality while planning a conference. These

top two attributes are followed by hotel room availability, the attractiveness of the location,

safety/security and ease of transportation. Climate and night time activities were ranked as least

important.

Oppermann and Chon (1997) presented an overview of convention participation and

destination selection process for attendees. They acknowledge that there are three major players

in destination selection – associations, host destinations and attendees – and chose to focus on

attendees and their decision making process. According to Oppermann and Chon (1997), four

main factors influence attendees when thinking about whether or not to participate in an event; 1)

personal/business - the purpose of the trip, their health, finances, 2) association/conference -

level of involvement, personal goals and agendas, 3) location - ease and length of travel, cost,

destination image, 4) intervening opportunities- competing and alternative events.

Crouch and Ritchie (1998) acknowledged the fundamental difference between

associations' and corporations' site selection process, and chose to focus their investigation on

associations because "it appears that about 70-75 percent of industry spending is on association-

organized events" (p. 51). By reviewing past literature on destination selection process, Crouch

and Ritchie composed a conceptual model of the site selection process which is presented as

Figure 1. They developed taxonomy for classifying destination attributes into eight main

categories – accessibility, local support, extra-conference opportunities, accommodation

facilities, information, site environment and other criteria. ."Regardless of the type of meeting,

convention or exposition, the site is a critical factor in the success or failure of the event" (p. 52),

and it is the most important decision within the meeting planning process. Reinforcing Clark and

McCleary (1995), Crouch and Ritchie suggest that identifying decision makers in associations

will increase a destination's chances of hosting events and enjoy the prosperity that follows.

However they agree that more research is needed in the area of site selection process.

Chacko and Fenich (2000) put emphasis on meeting planners' role in destination

selection, and suggest that meeting planners' perceptions "are crucial to the success of a

destination" (p. 214). In their survey, 291 meeting and convention planners from the North

America market rated twelve cities in North America (New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Orlando and

more) according to certain attributes that were mostly derived from the model that was

developed by Crouch and Ritchie (1998). Promotional appeal of the site was found the most

important contributor to the overall convention destination attractiveness, more than room or

meeting space availability. Chacko and Fenich (2000) suggest that this is due to the assumption

that rooms and meeting space are to be found in many destinations, but not all destinations

possess that same appeal to attendees. In order to generate high attendance and maintain a high

level of interest and satisfaction, the destination that is chosen has to possess certain attributes

that are valued by both meeting planners and participants. The destination has to have a suitable

image and be perceived as appropriate for that organization (Crouch and Ritchie, 1998).

Fenich (2001) investigated community (destination) attractiveness for conventions. In his

review of previous studies he identified a number of common destination attributes that appeared

to be of importance. "Destination services" was the most frequent attribute mentioned, followed

by "promotional appeal". Other frequent attributes were "air transportation", "hotel rooms",

"restaurants" and "local transportation". Fenich (2001) used facts, such as number of rooms in a destination, crime rate, average temperature, size of meeting space and more, to compare cities in the U.S. Each attribute was rated and an overall score was given to a city. Fenich (2001) suggested that the city with the highest score should be the best choice for the event.
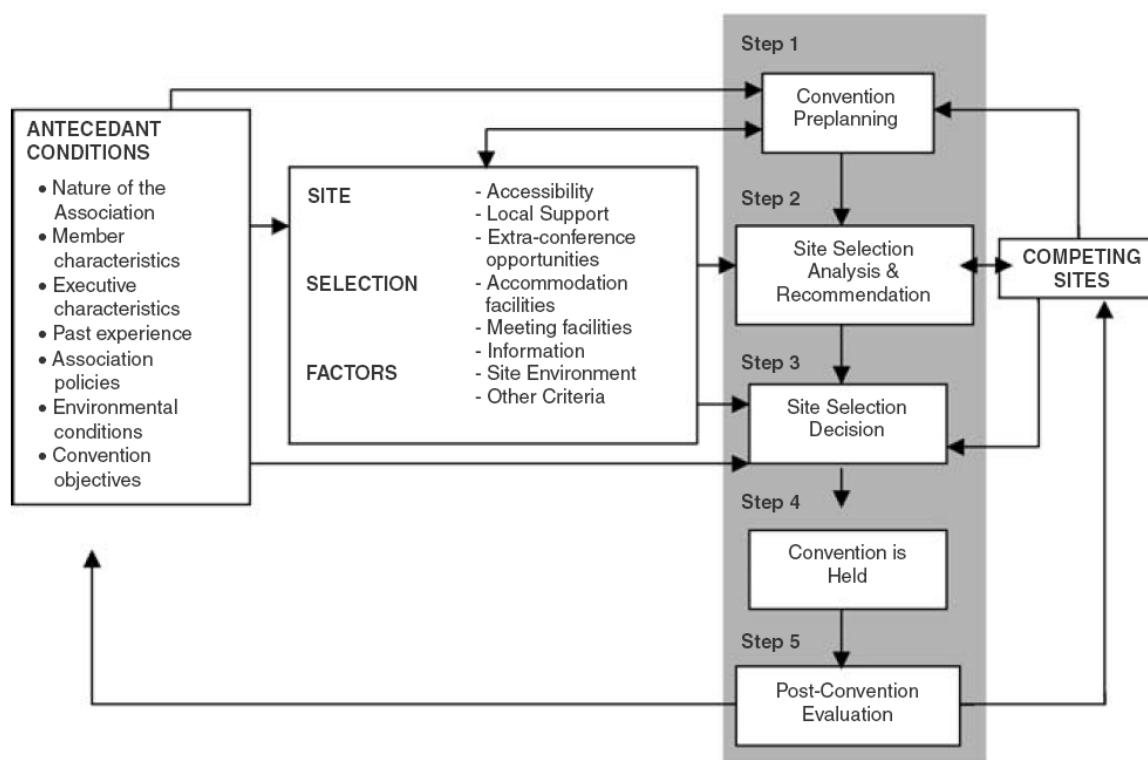
Figure 1 - General Conceptual Model of the Site Selection Process (source: Crouch & Ritchie, 1998, p.61)

Baloglu and Love (2001) investigated the importance of destination selection attributes and the perceived performance of five major convention cities - Las Vegas, Chicago, Dallas, Atlanta and Orlando. In a pre-test performed with 20 professional meeting planners, "capacity of meeting facilities" deemed the most important attribute, followed by "quality of meeting facilities" and "safety and security of destination". "Climate" was the least important attribute,

and "city reputation" was in the bottom five. The survey was further developed and administered, generating 157 usable surveys from meeting planners all over the nation (Baloglu & Love, 2005). "Capacity of meeting space" was yet again the most important factor; however it was followed by "CVB housing services". "Climate", although not least important, was still in the bottom five.

Choi and Boger (2002) investigated the relationships between convention site selections attributes and association characteristics. They surveyed associations from six states (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and South Dakota) while focusing on state associations which mainly conduct events close to attendees' hometowns. As a first step, 252 participants ranked 45 attributes by importance. The top 10 attributes are presented in Figure 2.

Using factor analysis, the 45 attributes were condensed into nine factors. The factors, in order of importance were inventory, hotel personnel, price, quality of meeting rooms, quality of meeting service, safety/security, quality of sleeping rooms, overall affordability of destinations and location. When selecting a convention site, no significant differences were found between associations types. However, marginal and significant differences were found between age, size and budget of the associations. For example - location was more important to younger associations than to older ones, and for associations larger in size and budget, inventory and quality of meeting services were very important.

Baloglu and Love (2003) performed an importance-performance analysis (IPA) of Las Vegas. Once again, "capacity of meeting space" was the most important factor to the meeting planners, and Las Vegas is perceived to be performing really well in this category. "Quality of

meeting space" and "number of meeting rooms" follow as second and third factors. In contrast to their 2005 results, "CVB housing services" was ranked as least important factor.

Attribute	Percent	Rank	Mean Score	Rank
Proximity of hotel to meeting facility	71.4	1	4.58	1
Capacity of meeting rooms	65.6	2	4.57	2
Hotel cleanliness	62.8	3	4.56	3
Number of meeting rooms	61.6	4	4.48	5
Quality of food and beverage	59.8	5	4.51	4
Banquet space	59.0	6	4.40	8
Complimentary meeting space	57.3	7	4.40	8
Meeting room rates	56.7	8	4.40	8
Friendliness of hotel personnel	56.7	8	4.47	6
Problem-solving skills of hotel personnel	56.4	10	4.47	6

Figure 2 - Top 10 Attributes of Convention Site Selection (source: Choi & Boger, 2002, p.62)

Crouch and Louviere (2004) investigated the Australian meeting market and developed a logical choice model for site selection. They conducted 25 in-depth interviews with experienced meeting planners that were actively involved in site selection process, using categories from Crouch and Ritchie (1998), to determine attributes that will be incorporated into the choice experiment survey. The choice survey was conducted over the phone and generated 86 complete responses. Survey participants were presented with a number of convention sites that possessed certain attributes (e.g. number of rooms, climate, travel distance) and 16 scenarios. They were asked to indicate a) will they recommend this site to whoever they are planning for, and b) how is this site in comparison to the last site they have planned in (better, same, worst). Results showed that proximity of the convention site was very important (the closer the better). Venue cost is a major factor in the overall attractiveness of the site, as an expensive venue is less appealing. In addition, availability of accommodation connected to the meeting site increased

site desirability. However as room rates got higher the possibility of a site being selected as a host destination declined.

Comas and Moscardo (2005) researched associations conference decision making process in the intent to provide host destinations tools to evaluate and market themselves better to these associations. Also focusing on the Australian market, they conducted ten in-depth interviews with associations' conference organizers and used a semi-structured interview based on the Crouch and Ritchie (1998) model. Analysis of the decision making process revealed that most associations plan their conference in-house, rarely using outside sources other than promotional materials. Many associations create committees to plan a certain event, and those vary in size and scope of responsibilities. In addition, destinations are presented in a bidding process, and then reviewed by decision makers (often, the committee) which choose the actual site. If a destination is not included in the bidding process, it is not considered as a viable option regardless of its attributed or compatibility to an association. Major considerations for associations' conference organizers when choosing a site are the venue itself (size, cost etc.), budget, and time constrains (Comas and Moscardo, 2005).

Regarding destination attributes, associations' conference organizers look for the following: 1) Meeting venue that is accessible. It also has to have both large space to host big events as well as smaller space for breakouts and business meetings. 2) Accommodation venue that is of sufficient quality and is easy to get to and from the convention area. 3) Convenience - having everything under the same roof (meeting space, accommodations etc.) saves time, money and complications. 4) Technology. 5) Price. 6) Atmosphere - the quality and appearance of the facilities, staff and residents' friendliness (Comas and Moscardo, 2005).

Philips and Geddie (2005) chose to focus on events and incentive trips aboard cruise ships and investigated the attributes that influence meeting planners to conduct their event on a cruise ship rather than the traditional way. They surveyed 236 professional meeting planners (members in the Professional Convention Management Association) asking about previous experience, perception, and intentions in regards to events onboard cruise ships. The majority of participants had no experience with these types of events, and was not interested in having an event on a ship. Meeting planners were asked to rank the importance of five factors to their attendees when having an event onboard a cruise ship. "Price/cost" was ranked number one, followed by "location" and "ambience". The option to "bring family along" and "food" were ranked as least important. Then the meeting planners were asked to rank the importance of eight factors when considering an event onboard a cruise ship. Again, "price/cost" was the most important factor, followed by "facilities" and "safety/security". On fourth place were "location" and "ports-of-call", followed by "other factors". The least important factors were "food" and "audio/visual".

Chen (2006) developed an analytical approach to convention site selection, and used Taiwan as its application case. Chen built a three level model, in which site selection is the main goal (level one). There are five site factors that are being analyzed (level two) and each of the factors has 3-4 attributes (level three) (See Figure 3). Each factor and attribute was weighted in comparison to the others, identifying the most important factors and attributes when selecting a convention site. "Site environment" and "meeting and accommodation facilities" were found to be the two most important factors when selecting a convention site. Cost was the least important

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factor. However Chen emphasized that while his study offers basis for research in regards to other locations, results are only applicable to one region (Taiwan).
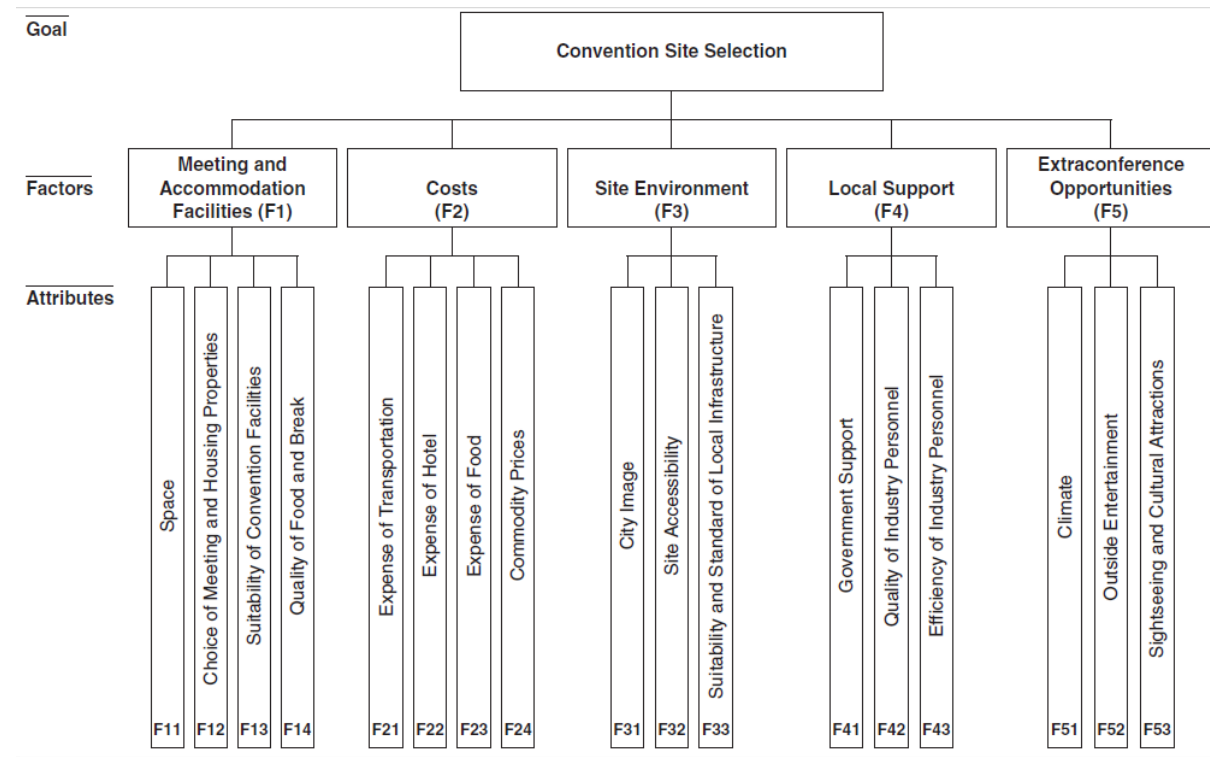
Goal: Convention Site Selection

Factors:
- Meeting and Accommodation Facilities (F1)
- Costs (F2)
- Site Environment (F3)
- Local Support (F4)
- Extraconference Opportunities (F5)

Attributes:
- Space (F11)
- Choice of Meeting and Housing Properties (F12)
- Suitability of Convention Facilities (F13)
- Quality of Food and Break (F14)
- Expense of Transportation (F21)
- Expense of Hotel (F22)
- Expense of Food (F23)
- Commodity Prices (F24)
- City Image (F31)
- Site Accessibility (F32)
- Suitability and Standard of Local Infrastructure (F33)
- Government Support (F41)
- Quality of Industry Personnel (F42)
- Efficiency of Industry Personnel (F43)
- Climate (F51)
- Outside Entertainment (F52)
- Sightseeing and Cultural Attractions (F53)

Figure 3 -Hierarchy of Convention Site Selection (source: Chen, 2006, p.170)

Fawzy and Abo-Samra (2008) investigated associations' organizational buyer behavior and proposed a conceptual model of site selection process for associations. Relying on the Crouch and Ritchie (1998) model (Figure 1) and other researchers, they added a few more steps to the decision making process. *Step one* is the anticipation or recognition of a problem (is the meeting necessary?). The following three steps are all related to convention preplanning activities; *step two* - formation of a buying center (who is in charge and what the policies are), *step three* - general need description (number of rooms, meeting space needed etc.), and *step four* - product specification. In *step five*, we identify the type of buyclass (is this the first time to plan

this meeting? Is the association considering a new destination, or is it the same site every time?).

In *step six* proposed sites are analyzed and recommendations are provided, which leads to site

selection and order routine specification (contracts) in *step seven*. In *step eight,* the convention is

held. *Step nine* is a performance review of the convention.

Rompf, Breiter and Severt (2008) based their destination selection research on event type,

arguing that each event has specific goals thus considerations of destination criteria may vary

according to event type. They found that indeed, "event planners assign different levels of

importance to destination selection criteria based on the type of event being planned" (p. 36).

However there are a few key success factors that are the minimum attributes a destination has to

possess in order to be considered as a viable destination for any kind of meeting. These factors

are: perceived value, overall cost, reputation hosting events, image desirable to visit, support

services for events, and safety and security.

DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf and Godlewska (2008) investigated the difference between

meeting and exhibition planners in their destination selection criteria. They focus on three major

planners' associations - International association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE), Meeting

Planners Professional (MPI) and Professional Association Management Association (PCMA).

They first asked the participants about the largest event they have planned (number of attendees,

required meeting space, number of peak room nights, location), and then asked them to rate 13

destination attributes according to the importance they were given at the time of the destination

selection process.

Results from 209 surveys show that, to some extent, there were differences in attributes

importance in relation to different events. IAEE members' most important attributes were

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"exhibit space," "perceived value for money," "overall cost," "desirable destination image," and "reputation for hosting successful events." PCMA members focus on "support services for events," "overall cost," "perceived value for money," "safety and security," and "reputation for hosting successful events." MPI members' top five attributes were "perceived value for the money," "overall cost," "reputation for hosting successful events," "desirable destination image," and "support services for events." There were no significant differences between IAEE and PCMA members, most likely due to the fact that both indicated "annual conference/convention" as their largest event. The differences were mainly found between the two and PCMA (DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf & Godlewska, 2008).

Yoo and Chon (2008) developed a measurement scale to examine factors that influence attendees when prompted to make a decision as to convention participation. Their scale included five main factors with 17 indicators: a) destination stimuli, b) professional and social networking opportunities, c) educational opportunities, d) safety and health situation, and e) travelability. Meeting planners and host destinations that are aware of these factors can better promote themselves to their target market.

Summary and Concluding Statements

This chapter provided literature review of the meeting industry in the U.S. to help understand the research at hand. The contribution of the industry to the local, state, and national economies justifies a deeper understanding of the main key players, meeting planners in particular. A review of site selection process suggests that identifying decision makers in the

organization increases the destination chances to be selected as the host destination (Clark & McCleary, 1995, Crouch & Ritchie, 1998). In addition, meeting planners' previous experience has an important role when they select a site or recommend one to others (Oppermann, 1996; Vogt, Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1994).

When reviewing destinations' attributes or factors that have bearing on meeting planners during the site selection process, a few are mentioned more often than others: meeting rooms and facilities (Baloglu & Love, 2005; Chen, 2006; Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf & Godlewska, 2008; Oppermann, 1996), accommodation availability (Baloglu & Love, 2001; Chen, 2006; Choi & Boger, 2002; Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Fenich, 2001; Oppermann, 1996), destination image and attractiveness (Chacko & Fenich, 2000; DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf & Godlewska, 2008; Fenich, 2001; Oppermann, 1996; Rompf, Breiter & Severt, 2008) and affordability (Choi & Boger, 2002; Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Philips & Geddie, 2005; Rompf, Breiter & Severt, 2008). All these factors are mentioned as important to meeting planners, and can be regarded as motivators to choose the destination – if a destination possess the right qualities; it will prompt the meeting planner to choose that specific destination.

The main purpose of this research is to understand some of the major attributes that influence meeting planners when they think of a location for their events, and to explore if there is a difference in selection attributes among the three meeting planner types. Although destination selection criteria have been studied, "the empirical research on meeting planners' perception of convention cities has been very limited" (Baloglu and Love, 2005 p. 744). Despite the abundance of research and articles pertaining to site selection process and destination

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attributes that are deemed important to meeting planners, research that focuses on more than

association meeting planners, encompasses all meeting planners' types and compare their

destination attribute preferences is limited. Moreover, due to the size of the associations segment

in the meeting industry, there is limited research on other segments (e.g. corporate). Many

researchers focused on a specific geographic location, or specific type of meeting planners. The

current research aims to overcome this gap by surveying meeting planners from all over the

nation, multiple event types and multiple segments. In addition, during their selection process

meeting planners evaluate each destination and its attributes, and choose the ones that best match

their needs; eliminating all others (Clark & McCleary, 1995; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998).

As shown in Figure 4, the current research will explore whether meeting planners' types

affect the attributes they consider when selecting a destination for those events. In addition, it

aims to reveal which attributes act as motivators when considering Orlando as a meeting

destination, and which act as inhibitors.

The research at hand also aims to provide an up-to-date overview of the U.S. meeting

industry in two aspects: 1) a review of the meeting planners community in terms of planner type,

gender, geographic location, and the segments that they are planning for, and 2) an identification

of the characteristics of events in the U.S. in terms of type, length, number of attendees and time

of year. In addition, with meeting planners having different approaches to event related spending,

it is reasonable to assume that the recent economic downturn (2008-2010) has affected them in

different ways. Since affordability is one of the most important attributes of a destination,

identifying these differences, if there are any, may help the meeting industry to battle and

overcome any future economic downturns. Meeting suppliers that understand meeting planners'

priorities during times of constrained budget will be able to adapt to the situation better and create a win-win scenario.

The next chapter discusses the research formulation and methodology. It describes the partnership between the researcher and the Orlando Orange County Convention and Visitor's Bureau and formation of the research center in March 2009. It presents the research instruments and their development, and the data collection process.
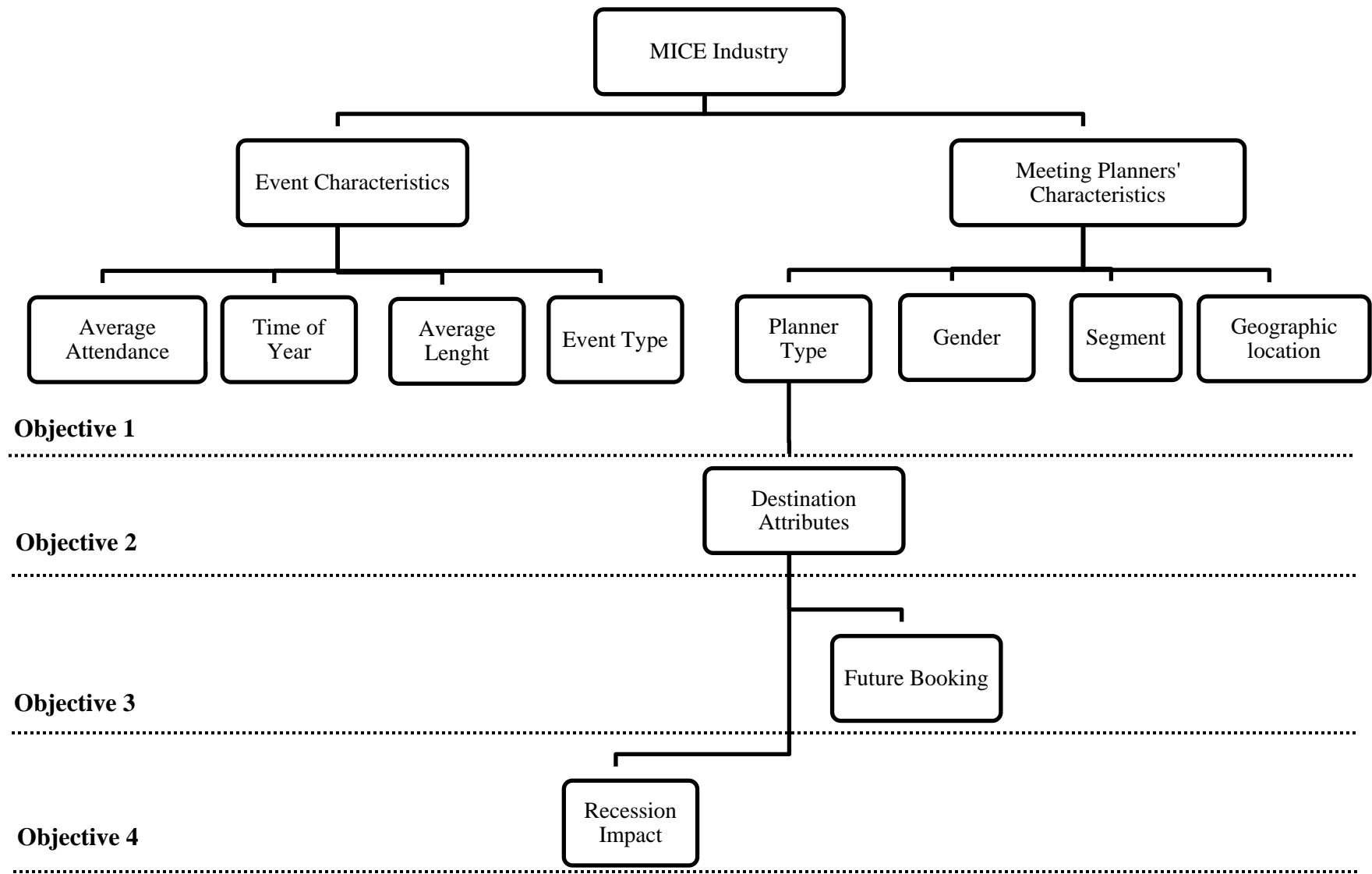
Figure 4 - Research Framework.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will start with a presentation of the research methodology. The research at hand was conducted in Orlando and was sponsored by the Orlando Orange County Convention and Visitor's Bureau (OOCCVB), and therefore the next section will provide a review of Orlando as a meeting destination, as well as the background to the partnership between the OOCCVB and the University of Central Florida, Rosen College of Hospitality Management. Next, the research instrument and its development will be discussed, and will be followed by a review of the sample and population in this study. Data collection process will conclude this chapter and will lead to Chapter Four - data analysis.

Case Study

The case study methodology is one way to conduct social science research and is preferred when "why" and "how" questions are involved (Xiao & Smith, 2006). Case studies are a common tool in the social science discipline and are used frequently by thesis and dissertation students (Yin, 2003). This implies that the case study method can produce beneficial results and implications when used correctly. "As a research strategy, the case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individuals, groups, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (Yin, 2003, p. 1). A case study is also a way for researchers to "refine

general theory and apply effective interventions in complex situations" (Stoecker in Xiao & Smith, 2006, p.739).

Case studies in the hospitality and tourism field are relatively common. Xiao & Smith (2006) reviewed 76 case studies from tourism research and concluded that the method is being used throughout the discipline and not for specific topics. It is used to explore general or holistic issues as well as particular phenomena. In many occasions, researchers use a specific geographic location to explore a general issue. Jun & McCleary (1999) used South Korea to segment association meeting planners from the United States based on their destination selection factors. Upchurch, Jeong, Clements & Jung (2000) used Seoul, Korea to examine meeting planner assessments when they choose a site for international meetings/conventions. Singal & Uysal (2009) used Abingdon, Virginia to explore effective destination management based on Butler's destination life cycle, and to demonstrate that through certain destination management strategies, the destination's decline phase can be delayed. Jia, Ayres & Huyton (2010) used the Australian market to research whether tourism taught in higher education institutes is compatible with the needs of the tourism industry.

The aim of the current research is to determine the attributes that influence meeting planners when choosing a destination for the meetings based on the three meeting planner's type. The author used Orlando as example of a destination to which meeting planners bring their events to. The characteristics of Orlando as a meeting destination are described in the next section, and show that Orlando is a suitable destination in light of the objectives of this study. Orlando was chosen due to the partnership of the OOCCVB and the Rosen College of Hospitality Management.

Orlando, FL as a Meeting Destination

Orlando is one of the top meeting destinations in the U.S. According to MeetingsNet (2003), "Las Vegas leads the list of corporate destinations… followed by Orlando, which also has hung in the top three for the past three years." The Healthcare Convention & Exhibitors Association announced Orlando as their number one meeting destination (HCEA, 2008). More recently, Metropoll study conducted by Gerard Murphy & Associates ranked Orlando as the top overall convention site; first among corporate planners and second among associations' planners. As for the future, more meeting planners intend to hold their meetings in Orlando in the next three years (Orlando Orange County Convention & Visitor's Bureau, 2010)

In 2008, the OOCCVB mediated 170 meetings that hosted 158,278 attendees and resulted in $167,912,284 million in direct revenue (R. Mohn, personal communication, October 5, 2009). This data represents all events brokered by the OOCCVB but excludes groups that deal directly with hotels and the Orange County Convention Center. Orlando is the home of the 2nd largest convention center in the US (over two million square feet of exhibit space), and has 114,109 hotel rooms (Orlando Orange County Convention & Visitor's Bureau, 2011a), making the city capable of accommodating any industry and any group size.

According to the OOCCVB (2011b), there are ten main reasons to conduct events in Orlando. (1) Orlando is a wise investment to business meetings, since there is a positive return on that investment. (2) Orlando is an imaginative destination that encourages creativity. This is where dreams come true. (3) Orlando provides quality support services – Visit Orlando. (4) Large accommodation inventory. (5) The Orange County Convention Center - 2nd largest convention center in the U.S with over 2 million square feet of meeting and exhibition space. (6)

Orlando International Airport has more than 41 scheduled airlines that provide service to over 70 domestic and 19 international destinations. (7) Boost attendance. People like Orlando for the climate, accessibility, service and reputation. (8) Weather. (9) Culinary advancement – many dining opportunities. (10). Green destination.

Research Background

In light of the 2008-2009 economic recession, the Orlando Orange County Convention and Visitor's Bureau (OOCCVB) decided to take a more proactive approach in attracting meetings and event to Orlando, and improving the destination viability in the eyes of meeting planners. A partnership was established in mid 2009 between the OOCCVB and the Rosen College of Hospitality Management in Orlando, FL in the form of a research project. The purpose of this collaboration was to reach out to meeting planners around the US and attract more business to the city of Orlando in the hopes of generating more income and help the city to recover more quickly. An added value of this cooperation was learning about meeting planners' needs and perceptions in regards to Orlando and other meeting sites in the US. That led to the formulation of the current research. In the spirit of community collaboration, a research center was formed at the Rosen College. 20 students and two supervisors, all in the process of acquiring a Bachelor or a Masters degree in hospitality related fields, were hired to survey meeting planners from around the US.

The Center's purpose was to generate sales prospects and reveal planners' reasons for choosing or declining to conduct their events in Orlando. Additional purposes were to raise

meeting planners' awareness to the Orlando Orange County CVB and assure them that the

OOCCVB is committed to helping meeting planners with their events. Unfortunately, there are

still many event planners that do not use CVBs' services (Weber, 2001), and the OOCCVB felt

that this step will increase the number of meeting planners that might reach out to them.

The OOCCVB provided the research team with old and purchased lists that contained

contact information for 24,000 meeting planners from all over the US, Canada, and some other

destinations around the world (including Germany, Russia and United Kingdom) that represent

some 50 different meeting market segments (as defined by the OOCCVB) including

associations, government, corporate and family reunion groups (complete list shown in

Appendix C).

Research Instrument

Meeting planners in this study were surveyed utilizing a semi structured phone interview

designed to understand meeting planners' needs and perceptions in regards to Orlando as a

meeting destination. The phone survey was developed based on extensive literature review

related to meeting planners' site selection (Baloglu & Love, 2001; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998;

Oppermann, 1996; Vogt, Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1994) and was submitted to the OOCCVB for

approval in order to ensure its compatibility to the OOCCVB goals and objectives. It is important

to mention that the project was evolving during time. The phone survey was further developed

during the first two months of the project, and sub questions were added. Meeting planners that

were interviewed in the early stages of the project were asked somewhat different questions than

meeting planners that were contacted later. In addition, the more experience that interviewers (the research team) gained, the better guidance they provide the meeting planners when interviewing. As they learned to handle objections and probe a little more, they were able to gather more information.

During the year in which the research was conducted, the research team interviewed meeting planners via phone and asked about their needs and perceptions in regards to Orlando as a meeting destination. The final version of the phone survey, which was established about three months into the project, contained an opening statement created to assist the research team to present themselves correctly and pleasantly, 18 questions, and 10 sub questions (Appendix A). It was divided into three parts ensuring the most important information was asked at the beginning. First part included profile information (e.g. size and number of meetings, type of meetings, experience with event planning, and previous experience with Orlando) as well as the most needed data. It focused on Orlando as a destination, and asked the meeting planners to provide feedback as to previous events. Second part related to experience with other destinations and the effect of the economy on the organization in terms of conducting events. The third part was concerned with pre and post event activities and working with the OOCCVB.

In the final stages of the project, the research team developed an online survey to reach out to meeting planners that were not reachable via phone, or requested to be emailed the survey. Online survey can help the researcher reach better quality in terms of completion and details, and is considered to be the fastest growing development in social research (Gibson & Bentley, 2007). On March 2010, during the last month of the project, an online survey was sent to 1,322 meeting planners. The online survey asked the same questions and was very similar to the phone

interview; however there were still a few changes due to the delivery method. For example - the online version of the question "What is the typical time of year when you hold your meetings?" was a multiple choice question and not an open-ended one and the respondents were asked to choose from a number of options. The question "How has the change in the economy affected the planning of your organizations meetings / events?" was transformed to "please consider any economic impact on your meeting or events" and included 8 items that the responded were asked to rate on a 5 points Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree and 5 = strongly disagree) or choose 0 = I don't know. Items in this question were selected according to the frequency of their mentioning during the phone interviews (see Appendix B for full online survey).

Sample and Population

Lists of meeting planners were provided by the OOCCVB. These lists contained contact information for meeting planners from all over the US, Canada and a handful of contacts from other destinations around the world. After excluding contacts due to inability to make international calls, meeting planners that have passed away, retired, resigned or relocated, companies that went out of business, elimination of meeting position or department due to budget cuts and more (Aaker, Kumar, Day & Leone, 2010), data was gathered from a little over 8,000 meeting planners. 2,547 meeting planners were randomly selected and analyzed due to time limitations. After cleaning the database from incomplete surveys, 2,388 (30%) of the phone responses deemed useable for the purpose of this study.

The online survey was sent to 1,322 meeting planners and produced 124 responses, or a 9.4% response rate. Six surveys were excluded from analysis - three were incomplete due to insufficient information, two of the respondents originated outside of the U.S. and one was excluded after cleaning the data from outliers - which led to 118 usable surveys. Response rates from online surveys can range from 6% to75% (Pan, 2010), with most of them yielding a response rate that is under 30% (Hung & Law, 2011). Online response rates are very difficult to calculate since the researcher is unable to verify how many recipients actually received the email and opened it (Fleming & Bowden, 2009). An individual may choose to ignore the email due to computer security issues (viruses), too many emails, the email was forwarded to junk mail or was not received at all (Pan, 2010). In the current study, the online survey was sent only once with no prior notice. Second and third waves might have enhanced the response rate (Hung & Law, 2011, Pan, 2010).

Data Collection Process

Data presented in this study was gathered along a period of 11 months: June 2009 through April 2010. The data was collected by hospitality students that were hired for this purpose and composed the research team. The team was presented with the goals and objectives of the OOCCVB project and was trained in making cold calls, handling objections, creating rapport and gaining trust via phone. In addition, the research team was given information about Orlando's offerings as meeting destination (CVB services, number of hotel rooms, meeting space etc.). On the job training included internet research and data analysis. Upon stating a shift, the

team members received a spread sheet with contacts' information. They researched these contacts (via internet or phone) in order to establish the best point of contact. When reaching the correct contact, the team members followed a script (Appendix A) that helped them to interview the meeting planner properly. However, they also followed the flow of the conversation, and when possible, asked for more information related to meetings outside the written interview. They recorded the conversation by typing the meeting planners' responses into the spreadsheet and updated contact information where needed. Team members reviewed each others' work from time to time and provided feedback which led to consistency in "off script" questions and data gathering and recording. At the end of each day, the supervisor reviewed the spreadsheet with the team member, asking for clarifications if needed. If the supervisors witnessed a recurring issue throughout the team, they would take the time to train the team on the topic. This usually related to the technicalities of writing the data rather than the actual content. Once a week the supervisors provided feedback to the team and received feedback in the interest to make sure everyone operated in the same manner and kept consistency and reliability of the data gathered.

From Qualitative to Quantitative

In order to be able to analyze the qualitative data that was gathered, the author conducted a few sessions of content analysis with the research team. The team searched for commonly heard statements and reoccurring subjects in the phone interviews. The author created an excel file to assist the research team in translating the qualitative data into quantitative information. Before commencing the coding of data into the new excel file, the team members went through an extensive training as to the meaning of each statement and the ways to code different remarks.

The team members transformed the verbal comments from the interviews into codes – if the meeting planner disagreed with a statement (e.g. Orlando has a variety of meeting space), it was coded as "1". If they agree, it was coded as "2". If there was no mention of that specific item, it was coded "0" for "no data". In case of a conflict, the supervisors discussed it with the team and then determined the standard coding.

The original excel file included 10 identification items (e.g. ID, gender, segment, state, etc.), 67 destination statements (e.g. "Orlando has a good variety of meeting space", "The hotels are overpriced"), 12 items related to the effect of the current economic recession (e.g. "meeting planner position was eliminated", "attendance dropped") and 49 alternative destinations that meeting planners choose other than Orlando. After coding a little over 700 phone interviews, a frequency analysis was conducted on each statement. Statements that had less than 5% response rate were assumed to be of less importance to the meeting planner and were taken off the overall analysis. For example, having the ability to conduct meeting and events inside attractions was mentioned by less than one percent of the meeting planners, so it was dropped from the final analysis. However, certain items that are of interest to the researcher and the OOCCVB were left despite the low response rate (e.g. "CVB is familiar with per diem allowance"). This resulted in a refined list that included 11 identification items, 38 destination statements, 11 economic statements and 22 alternative destinations (Appendix D). In addition, a reliability check was performed – three team members were presented with the qualitative data of 54 meeting planners and were asked to translate them to quantitative data. Coding was identical in over 77% of the cases in all items but two: "Type of meeting" and "Is this a 3rd party meeting planner" which were re-coded by the researcher.

The online survey was developed based on the semi-structured interview questions, but was modified according to the quantitative analysis. The answers were automatically inputted into an excel file due to the use of the university's form manager, a software that translates survey answers into SPSS or other data analysis programs.

Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, the qualitative data from the phone interviews were transformed to quantitative data and was imported into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0. Data from the on-line survey was also imported, separately, to an SPSS file. Before commencing any analysis, the data was explored for incomplete surveys, errors and outliers. Second, a frequency analysis was employed to establish sample characteristics and proportion (objective number one), and to identify the communication tools that meeting planners prefer when planning an event (objective number two). Next, one way ANOVA test was performed to establish if there is any difference between the three types of meeting planners (association, corporate and 3rd party) in regards to destination selection attributes (objective number 3) and the impact of the recent economic turndown (objective number 5). Finally, a multiple regression analysis was performed to determine any attributes that affect future booking in Orlando (objective number 4).

Summary

Data was collected via two methods – a semi structured interview and an on-line survey. In the semi structured interview, interviewers asked open-ended questions, while guiding the interviewee and probing when needed. The online survey questions where multiple choice or used a 5 point Likert scale to voice their level of agreement with statements that were presented. The data was transformed into quantitative data and analyzed with SPSS. Frequencies, descriptive, One Way ANOVA and regression analysis were applied on the data to produce meaningful information. 2,388 semi structured interviews and 118 online surveys were used to answer the research questions. The next chapter will discuss the statistic tests that were performed to answer each of the research questions and the results of the analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis and their meaning to the events industry. The researcher used frequency analysis, multiple regressions, and one way ANOVA to explore U.S. meeting planners, their characteristics, and the differences, or lack thereof, among the three meeting planners' types that are discussed in this study – associations, corporations and 3rd party planners. Results for objective one are based on two survey methods – semi structured phone interview and online survey. The reminding objectives are base solely on data from the online survey.

Meeting Planners and Industry Characteristics

A sample of 2,388 U.S. based meeting planners (about 30% from total meeting planners that were contacted via phone) and a sample of 118 meeting planners that responded to the online survey were analyzed to determine the U.S. meeting planners' and their events' characteristics. Results are detailed in Table 1. As in previous literature, most meeting planners in the sample are female (Braley, 2008; Beaulie & Love, 2004, "Portrait of a Planner," 2003). In addition, the majority of meeting planners participating in the surveys have planned in Orlando at least once in the past.

Association planners dominate the sample. However, while there are many associations in the lists provided by the OOCCVB, they contain some 50 market segments (as defined by the

OOCCVB), including government, corporate, incentive events, and even family reunion groups. According to Toh, Peterson & Foster (2007), associations should account for 27% of the sample, corporate meeting planners should account for 34%, and 3rd party account for 12%. In addition, many studies in the meetings and events industry suggest that the majority of meetings and events are held by associations (Clark and McCleary, 1995; Choi and Boger, 2002; Comas and Moscardo, 2005; Crouch and Ritchie, 1998). Since the OOCCVB codes any meeting planner that is not corporate or a 3rd party as an association meeting planner (e.g government planner is coded as an association planner), our sample corresponds with the literature.

In order to determine the type of meeting that was planned, the study followed the CIC definitions (that were presented in Chapter One). Meeting planners were asked what kind of events they plan for the organization they work for, and the research team coded it accordingly. However if the research team could not establish the type of event (e.g. meeting planner did not specify), it was determined by the organization type (corporations = corporate meetings).

According to frequency analysis of both samples, meetings are taking place throughout the year, with no specific season or month more popular than others. It is important to know that the majority of meeting planners in the survey are based in Florida and since Florida has a pleasant weather most of the year, this might have affected the findings. However the author could not find previous research that can support or refute this conclusion. Meetings usually last 3-4 days, and have 101-500 attendees. According to PCMA meeting planners' intention study (2010), most meetings and events that were held in 2009 were planned for 100 attendees or less.

The current research did not focus on 2009's events which were affected by the economic downturn, and this might explain the conflict in results.

Table 1 - Characteristics of U.S. Meeting Planners and Their Events

	Phone Interviews	**Online Surveys**
	N = 2388	N=118
Meeting Planners' Characteristics:		
Gender	Female – 72%	Female – 82%
	Male – 28%	Male – 12%
Meeting Planner Type	Association – 55%	Association – 46%
	Corporate – 30%	Corporate – 27%
	3rd Party – 12%	3rd Party – 27%
Segments	Trade – 16%	Trade – 13%
	Health – 10%	Health – 10%
	Government – 9%	Government – 12%
Meeting Planner's Location	Florida – 24%	Florida – 21%
	Virginia – 6%	Virginia – 7%
	Maryland – 7%	Washington DC – 6%
Events Characteristics:		
Meeting Type	Conferences – 33%	Association – 31%
	Association – 22%	Corporate – 27%
	Corporate – 15%	Conferences – 19%
Average Attendance	101-250 – 19%	101-250 – 30%
	251-500 – 22%	251-500 – 27%
Length of Event	2-3 nights – 73%	2-3 nights – 50%

Due to the nature of a semi structured interview, questions about destination attributes, future booking and the effects of the recent economic downturn were not always asked, creating inconsistency in data. The researcher could not use the phone interview to answer objectives 2-5, and findings for these objectives was based on data collected only from the on-line survey.

Destination Selection Attributes

In order to determine if there are differences in destination selection attributes for Orlando among the three meeting planners types, a One Way ANOVA was conducted. This was done from two different aspects – meeting planners experience with Orlando (deriving from Appendix B, section seven) and meeting planners' perception of Orlando (Appendix B, section nine). In both sections, meeting planners were asked to choose their level of agreement with statements about Orlando's attributes on a five points Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree and 5 = strongly disagree). They also had the option to choose 0 = I don't know.

Meeting planners were asked to consider their past experience when answering the question, and therefore not all meeting planners were able to answer. Analysis was performed on the 65 meeting planners who answered the question (marked other than 0 = I don't know). In Table 2, the results revealed significant mean difference ($p<0.05$) for one of the eight attributes that were presented in section seven – "My attendees can bring family and friends". The test demonstrated that associations' attendees are more likely to bring family and friends to an event than corporate attendees.

It is important to note that in regards to receiving support from the OOCCVB, the mean difference for 3rd party planners is only 2.20, which is much higher than association (1.77) and corporate (1.79) planners. This might be because 3rd party planners are independent and have their own resources. Meeting planners are in general agreement that Orlando is an overall good value for the organization. This does not necessarily mean that Orlando is cheap, but speaks to the perceived value for money spent.

Table 2 - ANOVA for Comparison of Destination Attributes for Different Meeting Planners (Past Experience Considered).

	Types of meeting planners			F Value	P Value
	Association N=31	Corporate N=14	3rd Party N=20		
My attendees can bring Family and friends	1.35 *	2.07 *	1.60	3.766	.029
There is a variety of accommodations / venues	1.58	1.43	1.55	.160	.852
Orlando is easily accessible	1.29	1.43	1.70	2.113	.130
Orlando offers quality city-wide transportation	2.13	2.57	2.40	.851	.432
Orlando has pleasant weather	1.45	1.64	1.75	1.438	.245
My organization received high quality service	1.68	1.64	1.55	.230	.795
Orlando is an overall good value to my organization	1.90	2.00	1.75	.472	.626
I receive ample support from the OOCCVB	1.77	1.79	2.20	1.781	.177

Measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale: strongly agree (1), neutral (3), strongly disagree (5).

* indicate the source of significant differences ($p < 0.05$).

Meeting planners were asked to consider Orlando as a meeting destination. Analysis was performed on the 116 meeting planners who answered this question. No significant differences were found within the seven attributes that were presented (see Table 3), meaning that the meeting planner type was irrelevant for the question. Meeting planners considered the attribute "Orlando is easily accessible" twice, once based on previous experience (mean = 1.29), and once based on perception (1.40). The results were somewhat similar, and the difference could be explained by the fact that in the second analysis (based on Appendix B, section nine) the meeting planners that had no experience with Orlando were added. A review of the descriptive statistics of the ANOVA analysis show that in section seven analysis corporation meeting planners agreed

(to some extant) with the statement that Orlando is accessible (mean=1.43, highest score = 3).

However in section nine analysis there are a handful of corporate meeting planners that disagree

with the statement (mean=1.6, highest score = 4). A further analysis should be conducted, with a

larger sample, in order to determine if there are differences between corporate meeting planners

that have been to Orlando and ones who have.

Table 3 - ANOVA for Comparison of Destination Attributes for Different Meeting Planners (Perception Considered).

	Types of meeting planners				
	Association	Corporate	3rd Party	F Value	P Value
	N=40	N=25	N=24		
Orlando is a fun destination	1.62	1.80	1.71	.441	.645
Orlando matches my org needs	2.18	2.32	2.29	.269	.765
Orlando is easily accessible	1.40	1.60	1.71	1.648	.199
Orlando offers a variety of activities/venues	1.52	1.48	1.46	.083	.920
Attendees enjoy being able to mix business and pleasure	1.62	1.56	1.54	.113	.893
In order to save time and money someone from the organization needs to be located in the area	2.95	3.64	3.42	2.442	.093
Orlando is on my rotation schedule	2.75	2.56	2.92	.751	.475

Measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale: strongly agree (1), neutral (3), strongly disagree (5).

What Effects Future Booking

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict meeting planners' future booking

in Orlando. The question "Would you consider conducting any future meetings/events in

Orlando?" was assigned as the dependent variable, and the items in Appendix B, section nine of

the online survey were assigned as the predictors. Results are presented in Table 4 and show that

the model explains 21.7% of the cases analyzed. There is a positive linear relationship between "Orlando is on my rotation schedule," and the consideration of future bookings (β=0.064, p=0.001). It stands to reason that if Orlando is on the organization's rotation schedule, then the organization will positively consider booking it in the future. In addition, there is a negative linear relationship between the predictor "In order to save time and money, someone from the organization needs to be located in the area" and future booking (β= -0.037, p=0.039). It appears it is irrelevant to most meeting planners whether or not they have a local representative, which means Orlando can be a viable destination to many organizations.

Table 4 - Regression Analysis: Attributes That Affect Future Booking.

Attributes	Consideration to come back to Orlando		
	Beta	t-value	Sig. t
Orlando is a fun destination	-.051	-.455	.650
Orlando matches my org needs	.179	1.684	.095
Orlando is easily accessible	-.115	-1.136	.259
Orlando offers a variety of activities/venues	.180	1.423	.158
Attendees enjoy being able to mix business and pleasure	.026	.189	.850
In order to same time and money someone from the organization needs to be located in the area	-.183	-2.093	.039*
Orlando is on my rotation schedule	.297	3.350	.001*
Constant		9.419	.000
Multiple R	4.66		
R squared	.217		
F test statistics / significance	F = 4.232 P=.000		

Measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale: strongly agree (1), neutral (3), strongly disagree (5).

* indicate the source of significant differences (p < 0.05).

N=118

The Affects of the Recent Recession

As mentioned earlier, affordability is one of the most important attributes of a destination (Choi & Boger, 2002; Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Philips & Geddie, 2005; Rompf, Breiter & Severt, 2008). This attribute takes an even higher priority during recessions and times of constrained budgets. Meeting planners were asked "Please consider any economic impact on your meetings or events" and were presented with eight statements to which they needed to respond. The response was on a 5 points Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree and 5 = strongly disagree), with the option to chose 0 = I don't know.

Meeting planners agreed that due to the latest economic crisis, attendance to events declined, and they were forced to practice a much more conservative cost management, particularly with regards to accommodations and food/beverage costs. Third party planners, who are measured by their negotiation skills and their budget management, (Toh, Dekay & Yates, 2005) seemed to be the most attuned to saving costs.

The results are presented in Table 5 and reveal significant mean differences (p<0.05) between "associations" and "corporate" meeting planners in the question of cancelling or postponing events. Associations meeting planners say that they did not cancel or postpone meetings due to the economy. This is supported by a recent survey conducted by *Corporate Meetings & Incentives* magazine (Downturn by numbers, 2009), in which only 9% of associations meeting planners reported to cancel meetings due to the economic crisis. Since corporations view meetings and events as an expense (Toh, Peterson & Foster, 2007), it stands to

reason that when managing the overall corporate budget in tough times, corporations will cut

back on meetings, events, and business travel.

Table 5 - ANOVA for Comparison of Recession Impact on Events for Different Meeting Planners.

	Types of meeting planners			F Value	P Value
	Association	Corporate	3rd Party		
	N=55	N=30	N=32		
Meetings are cancelled or postponed	3.45 *	2.63 *	2.88	3.484	.034
MP position / department was scaled down or eliminated	3.16	2.97	2.53	1.974	.144
Meetings must be near HQ or region	3.70	3.50	3.66	.315	.730
Attendance is down	2.64	2.76	2.88	.317	.691
My attendees can bring family and friends	3.67	3.60	3.58	.051	.950
Using virtual meeting tools	3.20	2.97	3.06	.356	.701
Room rates have taken higher priority	2.29	2.17	1.78	2.257	.109
Food and beverage rates have taken higher priority	2.13	2.13	1.81	.990	.375

Measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale: strongly agree (1), neutral (3), strongly disagree (5).

* indicate the source of significant differences ($p < 0.05$).

Results also show that many meeting planners report that attendance in their events has declined (mean for all group was 3.09). This is supported by meeting planners that were interviewed via phone and answered this question. The 19th Annual Meetings Market Survey (2010) revealed that 48% of meeting planners reported attendance has declined from 2008 to 2009. In addition, "Planners already are cutting back F&B and requesting more customized menus with lower-priced items" (Odom in Meetings & Conventions, 2008).

Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth discussion of the analysis that was applied in order to answer the research objectives. Data analyzed with SPSS, frequencies, descriptive, One Way

ANOVA and regression analysis were applied in order to produce meaningful information. The next chapter will offer theoretical and practical implications and discuss the limitation of this research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This research aimed to develop a deeper understanding of meeting planners, one of the most important functions of the MICE industry. Focusing on the three main meeting planners' types – associations, corporate and 3rd party planners – this study attempted to find differences in destination selection attributes and recession impact. This chapter discusses research findings as well as provides recommendations for the OOCCVB. It will conclude with study limitations and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

Meeting planners' characteristics in previous studies focused on demographic information such as sex, age, years of experience, and were somewhat different than those that are being presented in this study. Determining whether or not the industry has changed in the last few decades is therefore a difficult task. Our sample is mostly compiled of association meeting planners, which are a great source of revenue for a destination. Many of their attendees enjoy the option of bringing their families, and mix business and pleasure while attending meetings, which generates indirect spending patterns. Results demonstrate that the industry is still being led by females (over 70% of the sample are females), although according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), they are only 50.2% of the general populations. One of the reasons for this discrepancy is that "perhaps women posses more of the personality traits or skill sets that are required to be a

good meeting planner" (Beaulieu & Love, 2005, p. 118). Destinations that want to reach out to new clients and meeting planners should remember that in most cases they are communicating with females and adjust their message accordingly.

As it pertains to the research at hand, it appears that meeting planners are planning events throughout the year, with no specific season or month. Orlando has year-round comfortable weather which makes it a perfect destination. In addition, most events are planned for less than 500 attendees and last no more than three nights.

The importance of destination selection attributes for meeting planners is well recognized, and this study is aimed to determine if there is a difference in destination selection attributes for Orlando among the three meeting planners types (association, corporate, 3rd party). The study revealed that only one significant difference was found between association and corporate planners in the question of family and friends joining attendees for an event. This can be explained by the social nature of association events. A destination that wants to be considered for association events should have a variety of activities that are outside of the main event. Meeting planners are in general agreement that Orlando is a fun destination that offers a good variety of activities. They also agree that attendees enjoy the ability to mix business and pleasure. It is important to remember that these findings relate to Orlando as a meeting destination. There were no other significant differences between the three meeting planners' types in their destination attributes. However, that may be a result of the small online sample that was used exploring this objective.

There were two attributes that can predict future booking to Orlando. First, if Orlando is on an organization's rotation schedule, the consideration to book Orlando for future events

increases. This coincided with Clark and McCleary's (1995) suggestion that a destination has to

be in the evoke set of destinations in order to be considered as a viable meeting destination.

Furthermore, many meeting planners are relying on previous experience when booking the next

event (Barley, 2008), and would go back to a successful location. Second, 47% of meeting

planners disagree (or strongly disagree) with the statement "In order to save time and money

someone from the organization needs to be located in the area". That means that local

representation is irrelevant for planning in Orlando, and Orlando can be a viable destination to

many organizations.

The recent recession seemed to affect corporate and 3rd party more than associations. All

experienced declined attendance, but associations cancelled or postponed fewer events than

corporations. This might be due to the fact that associations view their events as a source of

revenue (Toh, Peterson & Foster, 2007). Furthermore, many associations' events have an

educational component that has to be delivered within a specific time (once a year, every quarter)

and although there are other ways to deliver, face-to-face method is still the most effective one.

The results of this study offer some practical contributions for the OOCCVB (and other

similar destinations). First, as mentioned earlier, when sending a general message to the meeting

planners' community, it will be wise to remember that the majority are women. One destination

attribute that is significantly more important to women is facility quality (Kim, Kim & Weaver,

2010), and CVBs should be aware of that. Orlando has many high-quality, multi-purpose

meeting facilities, including the 2nd largest convention center in the county, and it should

capitalizes on that. Being included in Organizations' rotation schedule will generate future

booking to the destination, contribute to meeting planners' experience with the destination and hopefully lead to increased business.

Second, Orlando has great weather year round, which is one reason that meeting planners and attendees are attracted to it. Some meeting planners avoid Orlando during hurricane season, but might consider booking their events during that time anyway if they knew about the extreme weather insurance that the OOCCVB is offering. During the phone interviews it was clear that many meeting planners were not aware of the hurricane insurance. Some even commented that given the right information, they might consider conducting events in Orlando during that season.

Third, technology is taking over the planning process. In order to better market itself, the OOCCVB has created a user-friendly website with access to abundance of information. The next step might be a mobile device application that will make it easier for meeting planners to use the OOCCVB services and look at information about Orlando as a meeting destination.

Fourth, while data analysis showed that association and corporate meeting planners are in agreement that the OOCCVB provides them with ample support, 3rd party planners do not feel as strongly. Building good relationship with 3rd party planners is crucial to a destination that wants to increase business. The OOCCVB has to communicate to 3rd party planners that it has the ability to support and assist in the planning process, making it more efficient and cost effective.

Fifth, the latest recession hurt the events industry in many ways, not only decreased attendance and cancellations. If Orlando wants to thrive during a tough economy, it needs to cater to both associations and corporate market, building strong bonds with major associations. Associations are less likely to cancel meetings even when budgets are tight. In addition,

associations are less affected by public perception, meaning they are less sensitive to Orlando's image as a leisure destination.

Conclusions

This research aimed to develop a deeper understanding of meeting planners, one of the most important functions of the MICE industry. Focusing on the three main meeting planners' types – associations, corporate and 3rd party planners – this study attempted to identify some current characteristics of U.S. meeting planners and their meetings. In addition, it aimed to find differences in destination selection attributes and recession impact. In addition, the study investigated which attributes might affect meeting planners' future event booking in Orlando. Previous studies investigated meeting planners' decision making process and/or destinations' attributes importance but focused on association meeting planners, or did not differentiate between the meeting planner's types or the event they are planning. This study aimed to address this gap in literature, however very few significant differences where found between the three meeting planners' types.

Most meeting planners in this survey have been to Orlando in the past, and will come back in the future. The majority are association meeting planners that plan events throughout the year. Most events have less than 500 attendees, and many of these attendees bring their families with them. Meeting planners are in general agreement that Orlando is an overall good value for the organization. It is important for a destination to project that image, even more so during economic downturn. Association meeting planners significantly cancel fewer events than

corporate meeting planners during recessions, but all agree that attendance is declining during tough times.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study is the usage of secondary data. Relaying on existing data versus tailoring the research instrument to the objectives of the research creates challenges and limits the number and types of statistical tests that can be applied. The small sample of the online survey (118 usable surveys) in comparison to the target population poses another challenge, and the findings may be restricted to the particular community sampled (U.S. meeting planners).

In conducting this study, the research team used lists of meeting planners that were provided by the OOCCVB. As a result the sample was limited only to meeting planners that the OOCCVB was interested in. A larger sample may have revealed significant differences between the three meeting planners' types (associations, corporate, 3rd party). However, this study is meaningful at an exploratory stage to encourage future research as to any differences between the three meeting planners' types in regards to destination selection attributes.

Another limitation derives from the missing data from the phone interviews. Since the phone survey was mostly open-ended, the information that was gathered from the different meeting planners was inconsistent and made it impossible to rely on it for meaningful analysis other than in regards to meeting planners and industry characteristics.

This study aimed to determine if there are differences between the three main meeting planners' types (associations, corporate, 3rd party) in regards to destination selection attributes,

destination attributes that affect future booking, and the affect of the recent economic downturn. A second and maybe even a third wave of email surveys should be sent in order to increase response rate, and the destination attributes that are presented to the meeting planners should be modified and extended to include some of the more traditional destination selection attributes such as "safety and security", "number of meeting / sleeping rooms" (in addition to "variety") and more. Increasing the sample and extending the list of attributes might provide better results.

The research at hand focused on the U.S. event planning industry. There are many international organizations and planners that operate within the U.S. and around the world. Future studies can include them in the research sample.

During this last recession, the meetings and events industry has experienced some unique challenges, including a shift in public perception. An investigation of the affects of recent events on best practices, budgeting and Return on Investment measuring can be beneficial to suppliers and destinations that want to offer the best value for meeting planners and their organizations.

APPENDIX A: SEMI STRUCTURED PHONE INTERVIEW

Hello there, my name is _____ and I am a student at the UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management in Orlando, FL. Our school is partnering with the Orlando / Orange County Convention and Visitor's Bureau in order to learn about meeting planners' needs and perceptions, especially in regards to Orlando. Do you have a few minutes for a quick conversation?
It should only take about 5 minutes. Thank you so much, I really appreciate it.
Before we can begin I do need to confirm that you are 18 or older. Please be assured everything we discuss will be kept confidential, only those directly involved in the project will view this information.

Highest Priority – average of 3 minutes

- What is the typical time of year when you hold your meetings?
- What is the average number of attendees for your events?
- Have you planned or held a meeting or event in Orlando?
- IF NOT: Sorry to hear that, why is that? OR do you mind telling me why?
- How was your experience? Did it meet your expectations?
    - Alt. wording: Tell me about your experience with your accommodations? Transportation? Event itself? Extra activities?
    - Alt. wording: Do you remember anything specific about your experience with your accommodations? Transportation? Event itself? Extra activities?
- What can Orlando do to improve itself as a meeting destination?
    - Follow up: What is Orlando doing well as a destination that we should continue to do?
    - Alt. wording – What are Orlando's strengths & what are Orlando's weaknesses?
- Follow Up: Do the attendees tend to bring family with them?
- What is the average length of your event?
    - Follow Up: How many room nights do you require on average? (peak nights)
    - Follow Up: is it usually on weekdays or weekends?
    - Follow Up: Does that include pre-conference and post-conference activities?
- Are you considering bringing any future meetings to Orlando?
    - Alt. wording: Are you currently considering Orlando for an upcoming meeting or event?

- **IF YES:** Great! That's wonderful! For when is this meeting planned? What are your needs for this meeting?
- IF NOT: Where are you planning your next meetings? (We also need to find out why)
    - Alt. wording: What cities are you currently considering? What are some of your preferred cities? Why do you prefer these cities?

- Alt. wording: What are the cities that you have recently held a meeting or event?
- Follow Up: REASONS

- Since we are partnering with the CVB we are offering you the opportunity to…
  - Establish a contact at the CVB
  - Have an account executive contact you and answer any questions that you may have
  - Receive some complimentary information
  - Take advantage of their complimentary services
  - *(Remember to find out what type of info and how to be contacted)*

Middle Priority – average of five minutes
- Where did you stay or hold your meeting (in Orlando)?
- Does your organization have specific needs or requirements when it comes to site selection?
- How has the change in the economy affected the planning of your organizations meetings / events?
- How does your organization choose a destination?
  - Follow up: Who is involved in the decision process?

Lowest Priority – average of seven minutes
- How many meetings does your organization hold a year?
- How does group dining and leisure activities affect your property selection?
  - Alt. wording: Does the availability of on site or nearby group dining options or leisure activities affect your property selection?
  - Alt. wording - How does your transportation needs affect your property selection?
- Do you prefer to work with the area CVB or directly with a hotel?
  - Follow Up: Are you generally familiar with what services the CVB offers?
  - Follow Up: Is your experience better when you work with a CVB?
- How many years have you been involved in meeting planning?

APPENDIX B: ONLINE SURVEY

Survey Questionnaire

In order to ensure that your responses are recorded correctly, please provide your reference number.

This number can be found in the e-mail that you received from us.

Reference Number [   ]

We appreciate your assistance.

Section #1

	Yes	No	Comments
I plan meetings/events for multiple clients.	○	○	[ ]
I plan primarily for one organization.	○	○	[ ]

Section #2

		Comments
I primarily plan:	Association Meetings ▾	[ ]

Section #3

The average number of attendees at my meetings/events is (please select all that apply):

1-25 ☐
26-100 ☐
101-250 ☐
251-500 ☐
501-1000 ☐
1001-3000 ☐
3001-5000 ☐
5001+ ☐
Comments [   ]

Section #4

	Fall	Winter	Spring	Summer	All Year	Comments
The meetings are scheduled mainly in (please select all that apply):	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	[ ]

Section #5

		Comments
The average length of my meetings / events is:	1 day ▾	[ ]
The average number of peak nights of my meetings is:	1 night ▾	[ ]

Section #6

	Yes	No
I have planned a meeting in Orlando	○	○

  If "no", please proceed to section 8

Section #7

Please consider your past experiences with Orlando as a meeting destination:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do not know	Comments
My attendees can bring friends and family	○	○	○	○	○	○	[ ]
There is a variety of accommodations/venues	○	○	○	○	○	○	[ ]
Orlando is easily accessible	○	○	○	○	○	○	[ ]
Orlando offers quality city-wide transportation	○	○	○	○	○	○	[ ]
Orlando has pleasant weather	○	○	○	○	○	○	[ ]
My organization received high quality service	○	○	○	○	○	○	[ ]
Orlando is an overall good value to my organization	○	○	○	○	○	○	[ ]
I received ample support from the Orlando Convention and Visitors Bureau	○	○	○	○	○	○	[ ]

Section #8

	Yes	No	Comments:
Would you consider conducting any future meetings/events in Orlando?	○	○	[ ]

  If "No", please explain why in the comments section:

69

Section #9

When thinking of Orlando as a meeting destination:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do not know	Comments
Orlando is a "fun" destination	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Orlando is a destination that matches my organization's goals and objectives	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Orlando is easily accessible	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Orlando offers a variety of activities/venues	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Attendees enjoy being able to mix business and pleasure	○	○	○	○	○	○	
In order to save time and money, someone from the organization needs to be located in the area	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Orlando is on my rotation schedule	○	○	○	○	○	○	

Section #10

Please consider any economic impact on your meetings or events:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Do not know	Comments
Meetings have been cancelled or postponed	○	○	○	○	○	○	
The meetings and events department has been scaled down due to budget cuts	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Meetings must be near our headquarters or region	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Attendance has decreased	○	○	○	○	○	○	
We can now plan our meetings only in certain destinations because of "black lists", etc.	○	○	○	○	○	○	
We have begun to utilize technological resources to hold our meetings and events (e.g. virtual meetings, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Room rates have taken a higher priority	○	○	○	○	○	○	
The cost of food & beverage has taken a higher priority	○	○	○	○	○	○	

Section #11

	Hotel Websites	CVB Websites	E-mail	Phone	In Person	Printed Materials	Other, Please specify
When planning meetings I prefer to use these tools (please select no more than 3 items):	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Section #12

Please select all that apply to each of the following destinations

	My organization prefers these destinations	I have held meetings here previously
Atlanta	☐	☐
Boston	☐	☐
Canada	☐	☐
Chicago	☐	☐
Dallas	☐	☐
Daytona	☐	☐
Denver	☐	☐
Houston	☐	☐
Las Vegas	☐	☐
Los Angeles	☐	☐
Miami	☐	☐
New Orleans	☐	☐
New York	☐	☐
Phoenix	☐	☐
San Antonio	☐	☐
San Diego	☐	☐
San Francisco	☐	☐
Tampa	☐	☐
Tucson	☐	☐
Washington D.C.	☐	☐

Section #13

Because we are partnering with the Orlando CVB we would like to offer you the opportunity to take advantage of their complementary services.

	Yes	No
Would you like an Account Executive from the Orlando CVB to follow up with you?	○	○
Would you like a Meeting Planners' Guide about Orlando to be sent to you?	○	○

How would you prefer to be contacted?   [Phone ▼]

Please provide your preferred contact information   (including your first and last name)

[   ]

Section #13

Because we are partnering with the Orlando CVB we would like to offer you the opportunity to take advantage of their complementary services.

	Yes	No
Would you like an Account Executive from the Orlando CVB to follow up with you?	○	○
Would you like a Meeting Planners' Guide about Orlando to be sent to you?	○	○

How would you prefer to be contacted?   [Phone ▼]

Please provide your preferred contact information   (including your first and last name)

[   ]

The following information is for classification purposes only:

Gender: [Please Select ▼]

State: [Please Select ▼]

Organization(s):   [   ]

[Submit]

APPENDIX C: OOCCVB LIST OF SEGMENTS

Adm/Supp - 1	Info - 12
Ath - 35	Manuf = 27
Agr/For - 39	Med - 46
Agri - 2	MedHealt - 13
Aut/Tran - 31	Mgmt - 14
Construc - 43	Mine/Qua - 36
Cult - 3	Milit - 15
EduServe - 4	Other - 16
Edu -51	PubAdmin - 42
Env - 37	ProfServ - 17
Eth - 5	RealEst - 18
Fam Reun - 48	Relig - 19
Finance - 6	Retail - 20
Food / Acc - 32	Science - 21
Fran - 47	Sport/Rc - 22
Franchis - 7	Technol - 23
Frat - 8	Tech - 38
Gov - 26	Trade - 24
Health - 49	Union - 45
Herit - 9	Utility - 41
Hobby - 10	Waste - 33
Incentiv - 11	Wholesal - 25
Incent - 40	3rdPrty - 34
Ins - 50	ZZZ- 44

APPENDIX D: DATA ANALYSIS ITEMS

Identification items:

- Contact number (ID)
- Timing of call (month)
- Gender of meeting planner (MP)
- Segment
- Organization's state (where is the MP planning from)
- 3rd party (is the MP apart of a 3rd party MP services? e.g. Helms Briscoe)
- Meeting type
- Average number of attendees in events
- Timing of meetings
- Average length of events
- Have the MP been to Orlando?

Destination statements:

Positive

- Attractions
- Good services to MPs
- Good general services
- Suitable to different segments
- Ability to mix business and pleasure
- Easy access
- Good CVB support to the MPs
- Good accommodations
- Familiarity with Per Diem
- General positive experience (vague answer, with no specifications)
- Variety of activities
- Variety of venues
- Good value for money
- Team building atmosphere

Negative

- Airport challenges
- Area is too spread out
- Transportation difficulty
- "Attraction distraction"
- High price – Hotel
- High price – Restaurants
- High price – Activities
- High price – Parking
- High price – Travel
- High price – General
- Overwhelming amount of options
- Unappreciated business
- Poor quality – Hotel
- Poor quality – Restaurants
- Leisure destination image
- Incompatible with organization
- Not mature / distinguish / polished
- Inland destination
- Schedule conflict w/ competitor
- Lack of history / heritage / philanthropic involvement
- Not within region

Neutral

- Ability to mix business and pleasure
- Sophisticated destination
- Weather
- Rotation schedule
- Someone form the organization must live in the area

Economic impact

- Meetings cancelled/ postponed
- MP position eliminated
- Meetings must be close to the main location of the organization
- Conducting smaller meetings
- Attendance is down
- Travel expenses were eliminated
- Orlando was blacklisted
- Using virtual meeting tools
- More conservative cost management

Alternative destinations

- Atlanta
- Chicago
- Dallas
- Las Vegas
- Miami
- Phoenix
- San Francisco
- San Diego
- Tampa
- Washington DC
- All over the country

APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL FORMS

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901, 407-882-2012 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Notice of Exempt Review Status

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board**
FWA00000351, Exp. 10/8/11, IRB00001138

To: **Fevzi Okumus**

Date: **April 07, 2009**

IRB Number: **SBE-09-06207**

Study Title: **Orlando/Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau (OOCCVB) Telemarketing Research Project**

Dear Researcher:

Your research protocol was reviewed by the IRB Vice-chair on 4/6/2009. You may begin your research study. Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.101, your study has been determined to be **minimal risk for human subjects and exempt** from 45 CFR 46 federal regulations and further IRB review or renewal unless you later wish to add the use of identifiers or change the protocol procedures in a way that might increase risk to participants. Before making any changes to your study, call the IRB office to discuss the changes. **A change which incorporates the use of identifiers may mean the study is no longer exempt, thus requiring the submission of a new application to change the classification to expedited if the risk is still minimal.** Please submit the Termination/Final Report form when the study has been completed. All forms may be completed and submitted online at https://iris.research.ucf.edu.

The category for which exempt status has been determined for this protocol is as follows:

2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures, or the observation of public behavior, so long as confidentiality is maintained.

    (i)   Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that the subject cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subject, **and/or**

    (ii)   Subject's responses, if known outside the research would not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing or employability or reputation.

The IRB has approved a **consent procedure which alters, some or all of the elements of informed consent** as set forth in the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.116(d)(1-4). Due to the nature of this research which includes oral consent via telephone participants do not have to sign a consent form.

All data, which may include signed consent form documents, must be retained in a locked file cabinet for a minimum of three years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained on a password-protected computer if electronic information is used. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

On behalf of Tracy Dietz, Ph.D., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 04/07/2009 08:45:56 AM EDT

IRB Coordinator

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Fevzi Okumus:**

Date: **October 02, 2009**

Dear Researcher:

On 10/2/2009, the IRB approved the following modifications (received on 9/11/09) as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Modification/Addendum
Project Title:	Orlando/Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau (OOCCVB) Telemarketing Research Project
Modification Type:	Revised survey questions, request to increase enrollment
Investigator:	Fevzi Okumus
IRB Number:	SBE-09-06207
Funding Agency:	Orlando Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau(OOCCVB)
Grant Title:	Orlando/Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau (OOCCVB) Telemarketing Research Project
Research ID:	1048792

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Janice Turchin on 10/02/2009 04:51:53 PM EDT

IRB Coordinator

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University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Fevzi Okumus**

Date: **February 26, 2010**

Dear Researcher:

On 2/26/2010, the IRB approved the following modification – addition of an online survey to collect information from meeting planners – to human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	Orlando/Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau (OOCCVB) Telemarketing Research Project
Investigator:	Fevzi Okumus
IRB Number:	SBE-09-06207
Funding Agency:	Orlando Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau(OOCCVB)
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	1048792

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 02/26/2010 04:23:36 PM EST

Joanne Muratori

IRB Coordinator

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