

## ***Using Meeting Planner Feedback to Understand the Critical Issues***

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In today's competitive environment, meeting planners award business based upon the perceived or experienced quality of service. More than ever, conference centers need to focus on the customer's service expectations so that they can keep meeting planners happy and grow revenue.

Dr. Dan Mount of Penn State University, in conjunction with UniFocus, conducted a study to determine the top issues facing lodging venues. The survey took actual attributes most important to meeting planners. Pre-conference attributes, those attributes that come into play between the time the contract is signed and the actual event, included:

- sufficient time to plan
- follow-through
- accurate banquet event orders
- timely resumes

Post-conference attributes included:

- meal/break service
- meeting facilities
- audio-visual
- meal quality
- accuracy of the bill

Once the importance of each attribute was derived, the survey combined the importance factor with the rating (performance). This methodology surfaced the critical issues and critical strengths. Critical issue is the term used to identify an item as having high importance to the Planner, but is scoring low or lower in relation to the other questions. Critical strength is used to identify items that are of high importance and are performing, or scoring, high. Obviously, a property will want to focus on the issues and set actions in place to improve the performance of these high importance questions.

The methodology employed in this study can produce findings about the meeting planner experience that are revealing. For example, billing is ranked ninth in importance as an overall event attribute. Yet when mathematically combined with ratings performance, accurate billing is ranked second in importance as a critical issue. However, effective pre-conference meeting is ranked first in terms of importance—both as an event attribute and as a critical issue.

## The Findings

According to the findings, pre-event attributes ranking high on the list of importance for meeting planners included:

- Accurate resumes
- Timely orders
- Staff helped solve problems
- Follow-through
- Understood needs

When these were mathematically combined with the ratings performance, the top 3 pre-event critical issues were found to be:

1. Timely orders
2. Easy to reach
3. Prompt decisions

The top 3 pre-event critical strengths, according to the study, were:

1. Sufficient time to plan
2. Follow-through
3. Understood needs

According to the findings, overall event attributes ranking high on the list of importance for meeting planners included:

1. Effective pre-conference meeting
2. Banquets
3. Value
4. Conference/Catering Staff
5. Meal quality
6. Meal/Break service
7. Hotel
8. Meeting facilities
9. Billing

When these were mathematically combined with the ratings performance, the top 3 overall critical issues were found to be:

1. Effective pre-con meeting
2. Accurate bill
3. Value

The top 3 overall critical strengths, according to the study were:

1. Banquets
2. Meal/Break service
3. Conference/Catering Staff

## **Conclusion**

The methodology utilized in this study can be effectively used by any conference center facility to easily identify critical issues—before and after the event. Pre-event intelligence enables the conference center to find out what the “top-of-mind” expectations are and tailor the experience so that positive results are more likely to occur. Conference centers can also find out what is most important relative to their meeting planner population, access ratings performance, and put actions into place that drive improvements and drive customer loyalty.

By focusing on what is truly critical in nature to clients, a property can more quickly and efficiently drive meeting planner satisfaction and see measurable improvement in overall intent to recommend and return to the facility. And everyone knows the importance of this!

## **About the Survey and Author**

*UniFocus partners with conference centers and other hospitality organizations to help them better understand how their performance relates to what is important to their client (the planners and booking contacts) and to ascertain their level of loyalty to the brand and/or property. Their product, MEETINGScope, also enables hospitality organizations to compare actual service delivery to competition by price segment, brand, geography and meeting type. This information enables a service facility to know where they should invest their resources for the best return on investment or how to position their product offering.*

*Dr. Dan Mount is a member of the Research Advisory Board for UniFocus, a global pioneer in the hospitality industry for performance, workforce management and feedback solutions*

*The study utilized an industry database compiled from UniFocus' MEETINGScope feedback collected from over 100,000 meeting and booking contacts. This repository contains information concerning the satisfaction level of planners both before and after the event occurs. The key outcomes of intent to recommend and return, overall satisfaction both from the planner and attendee perspective, along with value, is also accessible from this database.*