

More than a pretty place

Several years ago, we realized that to take advantage of good locations, good rates, and good timing that we needed to select our conference sites much earlier. Your board implemented a "four-year-out" schedule. In any given year, we have booked a convention center and the conference hotels for the next 3 years.

Of course, the challenge is to predict how much we will grow during those years. This growth affects the number of rooms we block and the size of the convention center we use. With the convention center, if we do not sell out, we can certainly make use of the space provided with our silent auction, food stations, etc. However, if we do not use our room block, hotels assess a very stiff penalty. That's why STMA has been using Marketing and Events (M&E) to assist us with the contract negotiations for each site. Since 2005, with their expertise, STMA has been able to accurately project its conference and exhibition numbers and has never been penalized. Thank you, M&E!

When we set the "four-year-out" plan, your board also felt that we needed a rotation pattern for our locations that would be beneficial to the attendees and the exhibitors. Thus, we have established a four-region rotation that generally moves from East to West. This rotation allows for shorter travel distances for attendees and exhibitors to two of the four locations. For 2009, we'll be in San José, 2010 Orlando, 2011 Austin, and 2012 Long Beach.

STMA also evaluates many other criteria including climate, hotel rates, food and beverage costs, convention center costs, convenience of the hotels to the convention center, meeting and banquet spaces, availability of sports venues nearby, airport/airline accessibility, freight and decorating costs to exhibitors, city safety, and more. These factors must all be favorable before your Board conducts a site visit, which is usually in conjunction with a regularly scheduled board meeting.

Your board also sets your registration fees based on the corresponding costs to STMA for the convention center, food and beverage, A/V, decorating, etc. Our registration fees have not increased since before 2004, and for 2009 we have increased our fees slightly to keep pace with our expenses.

The size of our convention is unique and allows us to economically go to mid-to-large size cities. But, for some locations, we do not fit. As much as we would love to go to San Diego, the convention center will not book us because we are too small. We must grow much larger, or wait until 2 years out. If they have not rented the space, they will try to find another group with which to pair us. Too risky.

Your board welcomes your ideas as we try to select the locations with the best value and the best experience for you.



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