

Sustainability in Meetings and Events

The world is now beginning to recognize the significance of sustainability.

Global Trend



Source: Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau

On World Environment Day (5 June 2007), UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon spoke of the need “...to explore ways of making the United Nations more climate friendly and environmentally sustainable, and to develop a climate-neutral approach to its premises and operations.” Since then, all UN agencies have a commitment to measure and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions wherever possible and to consider the option of offsetting the remainder. All UN initiatives on this topic are reported in Greening the Blue, the portal for a more sustainable UN. Furthermore, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has introduced the Sustainable United Nations (SUN) guidelines to assist the United Nations and other organizations to reform towards climate neutrality with tools, methodologies and assistance services that will enable the practical implementation of activities aimed at reducing GHG emissions and at improving the overall sustainability of each organization.

Although conferences, concerts, sports competitions and festivals have clear and unique social, economic and environmental benefits, the organization of these events can generate considerable waste and have a negative impact on the environment. A study by the Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC), a non-profit membership based organization founded in 2003 that is dedicated to sustainability in the event industry and is a member of the Convention Industry Council, revealed that the environmental impact of the average conference delegate during a 3-day event:

- produces **62 lbs of solid waste** (or 2 large trash bags)
- uses **846 gallons of water** (or 3 times more than at home)
- produces **1419 lbs of GHG** (equivalent to operating your car for one month)

With concepts such as Corporate Social Responsibility and Going Green increasingly being adopted by organizations worldwide, the meetings industry must create a more sustainable path in order to validate its societal permit to operate, deliver value to clients and shareholders, and deliver acceptable returns to shareholder.

As defined by the Convention Industry Council, **Green Meetings** are those that “incorporate environmental considerations throughout all stages of the meeting process in order to minimize the negative impact on the environment and make a positive impact on host communities in terms of environmental and social legacies.”

The notion of green/sustainable events, as defined above, is increasingly and extensively acknowledged, practiced and developed to global standards, including the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and British Standards Institute (BSI) as notable examples.

The ISO is in the process of developing an international standard governing the sustainable management of events under the direction of the ISO/PC 250 Sustainability in Event Management project committee. About 30 countries are already involved as participants or observers. “The future standard will provide a framework which event planners, venues and other members of the event supply chain can use to implement, maintain and improve sustainability within their way of working.”

The standard (ISO 20121) will take a management systems approach requiring identification of key sustainability issues like venue selection, operating procedures, supply chain management, procurement, communications, transport, and other areas. In addition, the standard will respond to the unique needs and nature of the events sector with an innovative and flexible approach geared to producing results. It will be applicable to any organizations or individuals working with all types of events. The proposal for the development of ISO 20121 was jointly submitted by the ISO member for Brazil (ABNT) and for the United Kingdom (BSI). ISO 20121 is expected to be finalized in 2012.

Concurrently, following London’s original bid for the 2012 Olympics that recognized the need for such a standard, BSI developed a national standard BS 8901 that has generated international interest. BS 8901 has been developed specifically for the events industry with the purpose of helping the industry to operate in a more sustainable manner. The standard defines the requirements for a sustainability event management system that ensures an enduring and balanced approach to economic activity, environmental responsibility and social progress relating to events. It requires organizations to identify and understand the effects that their activities have on the environment, on society and on the economy both within the organization and the wider economy; and put measures in place to minimise the negative effects. BS 8901 shares many of the common management principles of other management system standards such as **ISO 9001** (Quality Management), **ISO 14001** (Environmental Management) and **BS OHSAS 18001** (Health and Safety Management) including the Plan-Do-Check-Act approach. The key requirements of BS 8901 include:

- Sustainability policy
- Issue identification and evaluation
- Stakeholder identification and engagement
- Objectives, targets and plans

- Performance against principles of sustainable development
- Operational controls
- Competence and training
- Supply chain management
- Communication
- Monitoring and measurement
- Corrective and preventive action
- Management system audits
- Management review

Implementing BS 8091 consists of three phases:

- **Phase 1: Planning pre-event**
- **Phase 2: Implementation during the event**
- **Phase 3: Review post-event**

BS 8901 standard has already been successfully implemented (by, for example, Reed UK, BM, Earls Court & Olympia, COP 15)

Meeting International Professionals (MPI) was the first to certify an event - MPI's European Conference 2008 - to BS 8901.

These examples underline the essence of sustainability and the future of the meetings industry. The Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC), the only organization focused exclusively on the development of sustainable events, envisions a transformed meeting and event industry driving towards sustainability which:

- achieves strategic goals that serve the economic, environmental and social interests of all stakeholders;
- incorporates the principles of sustainability into its management, organization and reporting;
- impacts positively on local and global society through diversity and inclusivity;
- promotes health and well-being, creativity and business effectiveness.

The key to achieving this transformation will be leadership and knowledge. The industry stakeholders must commit to collaboration in sharing knowledge, training personnel and including sustainability as part of the measurement of success for any event. GMIC calls for the meeting industry to address the following key areas:

- **Dematerialisation of the Value Chain:** Realise the increased use of innovative technology to remove waste and increase efficiency.
- **Reduction of Carbon Emissions from Buildings:** Over 40% of global emissions come from the built environment. According to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), technical infrastructure efficiency projects have the capability of reducing global carbon emissions by over one third during the next 20 years.

- **Focus on Size and Location:** On average, more than 90% of carbon emissions for large international events are produced by delegate flights. As part of the meeting design, planners need to carefully select size and location of events to optimize business results with environmental impacts. Delegates should be motivated to use trains where possible instead of short-haul flights.
- **Improvement in Meeting Design:** If a meeting does not satisfy objectives and deliver results, it is not sustainable. It is important in the event planning phase to consider better meeting design and architecture. Educational, networking and motivational needs and techniques must align with sustainable development principles to make meetings more fun and effective for delegates and organizers.
- **Motivate Lifestyle Changes:** Current generations are becoming increasingly more urbanized, physically inactive and accustomed to high calorie diets. Event organizers can promote healthier lifestyles that create more sustainable people, which in turn make more sustainable businesses.
- **Integration of Virtual Technology:** Tele-presence and holography technology will, increasingly, become part of the new hybrid meeting. Planners must learn quickly the differences in organizational strategy between the virtual and physical, and how to combine them for optimum effect. Technology has the power to make meeting content more inclusive and accessible to people from around the world: wherever they are and whenever they want to see the content.
- **Labour and Human Rights:** Greater understanding and attention to social issues. A key example is the need for equal rights and diversity in the work environment. With an ever-changing global workforce, the successful businesses will be ones that embrace diversity, building multi-cultural, multi-aged, multi-gendered and multi-skilled teams.
- **Measurement and Reporting:** Demand and requirement for measurement disclosure, certification and balanced reporting of events, destinations, venues, hotels and suppliers will continue to grow in importance.

Thailand is very attentive to environmental concerns and has introduced a series of collaborative efforts to set standards for the tourism and meetings industries. Mr. Prakit Chinamornphong, President of the Thai Hotels Association, has encouraged member hotels to moderate the tourism industry's impact on the environment by using items that can be recycled, making their hotels smoke-free, as well as organizing Tourism Awards to recognize hotels that care for the environment. This year the Green Leaf Foundation signed an MOU with the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, Metropolitan Authority Waterworks (Thailand), Thai Hotels Association and the Association for the Development of Environmental Quality to promote more joint activities to conserve the environment.

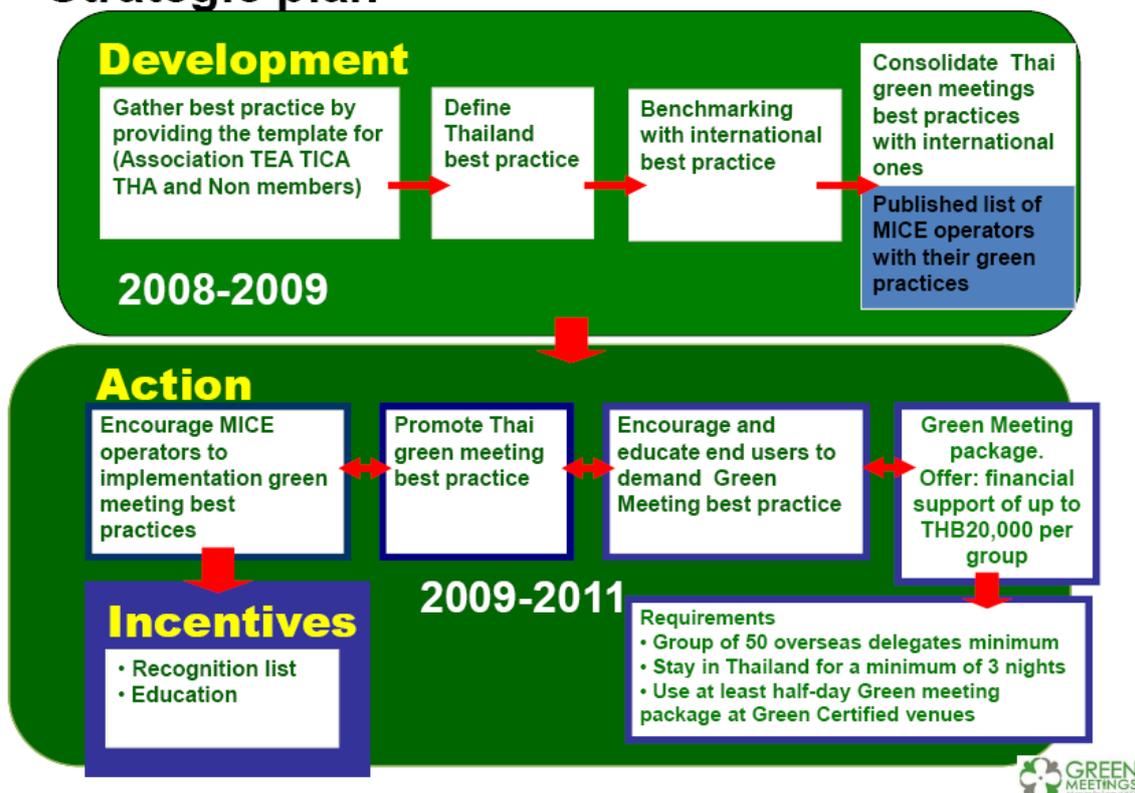
Dr. Suwat Sidthilow, Deputy Director of the TAT's Office of Tourism Development, revealed that TAT has signed an MOU with European-Thai collaborative tourism supply-chain stakeholders, under the Corporate Social Responsibility and Market Access Partnerships: CSR-MAP, in order to promote sustainable tourism in Thailand. The Office of Tourism Development will be in charge of product-KPI standard development and standard evaluation manual for five groups of entrepreneurs: community-based tourism, ecological tourism guides, green small and medium-size hotels, and community and environmentally friendly restaurants. The MOU will focus on four aspects:

- 1) Education and research of the European market towards sustainable tourism, awareness creation and determination in supporting sustainable tourism in Thailand.
- 2) Standard development of tour guides, restaurants, hotels and communities for sustainable tourism.
- 3) Building 'green' routes that integrate tourism products from hotels, accommodation, restaurants, tour guides, to tourism business partnered locations
- 4) Creating an acceptance of Thailand's sustainable tourism standards in European markets.

Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) produced its own strategic plan for Green Meetings four years ago, beginning with forming strategic partners and creating best practices, then putting them into action by means of promoting and initiating a marketing campaign to encourage tourism businesses to adopt them.

The plan takes into consideration the views, needs and support required from both the supply and demand side to walk the green journey by raising awareness of green issues through short-term support/incentives to long-term government green procurement guidelines. It has resulted in TCEB launching its Green Meetings Guideline, Green Meetings website, Green Meetings Package and Green Meetings Training, details of which can be found at www.greenmeetingsthailand.com.

Strategic plan



Source: Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau

The results mentioned above highlight the importance, systematical approach and practicality of implementation that key stakeholders must adopt. It is worth mentioning a recent initiative taken by Shangri-la Hotel Bangkok. The hotel has installed 938 sqm. of solar energy panels on the hotel's roof, resulting in the largest solar energy heated

hot water system in Thailand. It is anticipated that this will create 25 million litres of hot water annually, leading to a 30% reduction in liquid petroleum gas usage and saving 2.7 million baht each year.

The path to sustainability is a journey that cannot be ignored and its adoption will continue to be a focus for companies, associations and governments for many decades to come. Greater awareness and knowledge of sustainability helps the journey to begin. How the journey continues will be up to professionals in the meetings industry who come to realize the significance and necessity of its implementation as well as the benefits gained by doing so.

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