



# THE TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF TODAY: THE RECENT EXPERIENCE OF AN OLD TIMER

IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS, A MEETING MEANT A NICE CONFERENCE ROOM, COMFORTABLE ARMCHAIRS AND A LECTURER SPEAKING FROM A LECTERN TO AN AUDIENCE WHO HAD SENT A REGISTRATION BY REGULAR MAIL AND HAD PLAIN BADGES WITH THEIR NAMES AND LOTS OF RIBBONS TO IDENTIFY THEM....

TEXT DAPHNÉ ROMY - CEO AND FOUNDER OF THE DRM-DESTINATIONS AND RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AGENCY

My first large conference which implied a higher use of 'state-of-the-art' technological devices dates back from a little while now... 1990 with an IBM users group called Share Europe. The Internet Revolution was in its early stages. In those days, emails were brought to our desk by an appointed staff member who had downloaded it from an obscure intranet. As fastidious and obsolete as this may sound today, this was then magic for us.

A fax was somewhat of a novelty and we still used telexes. This first technologically advanced meeting took place at the brand new CNIT in October 1990. We were among their very first clients and our request to have a room filled with some 20 PCs and printers was seen as totally extravagant, not to mention our fabulous spreadsheets for our budget!

A couple of years later, in 1992, I started working for a pharmaceutical researchers association, the Controlled Release Society. My

office being located at the University of Geneva, a partner of the CERN, I discovered the Internet, had a mobile phone and gave out walky talkies during my conferences as a way to communicate with my staff. The technological innovations included an extensive use of Excel based programs, lists of participants, online registrations and new websites.

I started my own communication agency in 2001, as a virtual office with minimal office charges and maximal use of electronic devices to compensate staff and office space. Technology then really meant a gain of time and a shift from a purely administrative workforce to a multifunctional team of highly educated partners.

At our Geneva headquarters, our rather unique profile in the meeting industry in these financially constraint moments has enabled us lately to be appointed for the meeting preparation of two new but extremely prominent Organizations chaired by former UN Secretary General, Mr. Kofi

Annan, the Global Humanitarian Forum (GHF, [www.ghf-ge.org](http://www.ghf-ge.org)) and the Kofi Annan Foundation.

We held the first Forum of the GHF in June 2008 for an audience of 400 participants and some media coverage. For us, it was a real challenge, in the world's rather exclusive group of 'Meetings where you have to be', as we work as a catalyst for environment and humanitarian NGOs and organizations.

Both organizations imply extreme security, total dedication to ethics, environment compliance and major media impact. Scanning badges which include photos is a must as we have to be able to know where is at any given moment each of these VIPs (our attendees include a large number of Heads of States, CEOs, ministers, etc.). This puts our suppliers, both on the AV and online registrations in a rather tense pressure to be particularly inventive in the way to approach these meetings while maintaining a very 'green' approach.

Excel has thus been replaced by Eventure, a software allowing us to minimize the work on online registration including assessment of rooms and maximum capacity of each session. I had observed Parthen for 15 years before being able to use their efficient and user-friendly technology. We obtain a very high degree of security with



Daphné Romy



Dorier panoramic projection screen

the new *Quick Response Code*, a 2D bar code originally designed for the automobile industry which is now, thanks to the mobile phone cameras, a precious tool allowing my meeting participants to exchange their personal and business data in the easiest, simplest and most effective way, while allowing us to scan our participants in a least offensive manner.

with the ROHS, an EU environmental law which, among other elements, regulates electronic equipment. Only reduced use of chemicals and heavy metal in the manufacturing process is now tolerated in the EU and the usage of LED lights now divides by 10 our electrical consumption. Usage of videoconference, Satellite downlink and web casting can also reduce the environ-

level of privacy and security. We certainly experience the era of 'having our cake and eating it' in terms of having the world at our fingertips and obtaining information.

What still remains a challenge is to identify the proper partner and the accurate piece of information. I am constantly working on it and, as much as I am Facebooked and LinkedIn, smart-phoned and ultra-connected, I admit that nothing really changes in the fact that our delegates still eat (even though it tends to be more organic and healthier food than a couple of decades back), sleep and want the human connection... with a higher degree of concern for the environment. So comfortable armchairs are still a must even if the lecturer is now sometimes a virtual one!

## NETWORKING HAS ALWAYS BEEN ESSENTIAL AND IT IS HARD TO BE AT THE SAME TIME PERMANENTLY EXPOSED ON THE WEB WHILE MAINTAINING A LEVEL OF PRIVACY AND SECURITY

We also face the double requirement of a highly sophisticated stage management and the highest possible degree of respect for environment. This still implies erasing our meeting's carbon footprint but we can limit that carbon footprint by carefully identifying our partners. In this respect, our AV suppliers, Dorier, were selected on the basis not only of their long experience, but also of their green approach to audiovisual for conferences. This meant in our case that displays should be built with recycling material, and that the AV supplier should carry equipment complying

mental trace by reducing CO<sub>2</sub> caused by air transportation.

Dorier also came with a panoramic projection with 'picture in picture' into it, making my stage set a projected image and allowing for multiple pictures inserted into it. A must for my delegates under 30 who apparently suffer from a 'constant attention deficit' to remain attentive to our panelists.

Networking has always been essential and it is hard to be at the same time permanently exposed on the web while maintaining a

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