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Why Partner Hotels Matter: ABTS' Davide Veglia on Booking Official

January 21, 2014

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In December, **ABTS Convention Services**, which focuses on medical associations in the U.S., announced a new campaign for booking hotel rooms at conferences: "Support Associations, Book Official!" is designed to raise awareness with meeting planners, hotels and regular attendees about the negative effects of booking outside official housing blocks. Beyond that, the campaign also serves to illustrate the relationship between associations, planners and hotels.



Davide Veglia, president of ABTS Convention Services, told International Meetings Review that booking outside of official housing blocks (described as "around the block" booking) can affect association revenue both directly (through attrition fees charged to associations for unused pre-contracted rooms) and indirectly (through the loss of negotiating leverage).

According to the [campaign's website](#), housing is a key component to measuring the economic impact of a meeting: Guaranteeing rooms offers better room rates, less expensive food and beverage, and discounted meeting spaces. Beyond that, when attendees stay outside the official housing hotels, they do not have access to room drops, announcements, free shuttles, free or reduced meals, networking events and other opportunities to connect with other attendees. For the planner, a drop in attendees staying in official hotels can make it more difficult to get a favorable rate for future events.

"Once some key players and stakeholders started analyzing their own numbers and reviewing some of the suggested procedures or changes we recommended, there was an immediate effect," Veglia said, adding that ABTS has already received positive feedback from both the hotel and association communities. "The associations are very supportive because they want their face-to-face business to grow," he said, "and the hotels are supportive because they want to prove that they are true partners to the associations and that they do foster growth on behalf of the associations within the destination."

How Partner Hotels Save Associations Money

The effort has special resonance within ABTS' community, which involves medical and pharmaceutical conferences. Many international pharmaceutical companies and sponsors operate on a fixed budget, Veglia explained, and estimated a difference of 30 percent in booking official rooms vs. booking unaffiliated hotels. "This means that on fixed values, more doctors will be available to come to U.S. meetings," he said.

As an example, Veglia cited one of ABTS' oldest

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clients, the American Diabetes Association, which Veglia said saw steady growth that he connects to using room blocks at hotels. "The more bookings we had within the official housing, the more people each delegation could bring," he said.

The most important element for a healthy relationship between association event planners and hoteliers is commitment on both sides, Veglia said: "The hotel community must be committed to host meetings and support the growth of that meeting." Hotels represent a large part of an attendee's experience, he continued, noting that international attendees will frequently spend between \$4,000 and \$6,000 to come to the U.S. "Much of that is spent on lodging and food and beverage within the hotel," he said. To keep that attendee's experience positive, he added, ABTS will work with affiliated hotels to prepare the kind of hotel experience that is customary abroad, including luggage handling and breakfast. "This is something you get with your rate all over the world," he said. "We provide this kind of package to international attendees. You have to facilitate the experience, because the hotel is a key part of the experience."

More information on the "Support Associations, Book Official!" campaign is available at www.supportassociations.com. An onsite calculator will allow associations, planners and anyone interested to estimate their own revenue loss and take action to support the campaign by sharing the information with their partners.

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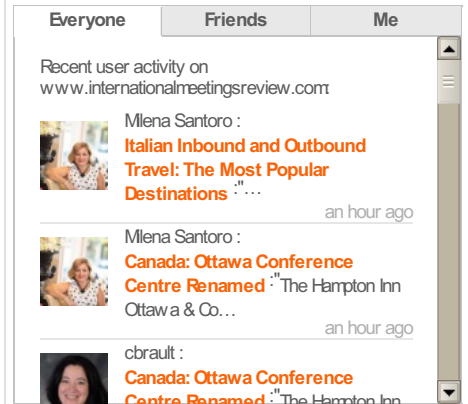
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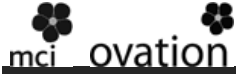


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