MAKING THE CASE FOR MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

4 Steps to Achieve Buy-in for a Program
Data Speaks Volumes: Know Your Numbers

It’s a fact: Real data and financial information should be the foundation for your business case. The numbers will resonate with decision makers and others at your organization. While a program will immediately lead to more organizational transparency into the costs of running meetings, this actually may be the most difficult step in the process. One of the main drivers of implementing an SMM program in the first place is the need for transparency into meeting spend. Your senior executives want that transparency, even if they haven’t completely embraced the idea. So, it may very likely take some thorough research to build your case, but the information gleamed will be illuminating to your team.

So where do you start looking? Well, you’re also not a researcher or financial analyst, so don’t go into it alone. Partner with essential internal (and external) contacts, and utilize these relationships to gain access to financial data you may not have at your fingertips. Potential partners, and the best places to search include: card services, accounts payable, national accounts, and hotel partners. By digging through this data to estimate your meeting spend, you’ll create a strong base for your business case. If you’re a global organization, and the prospect of gathering all of this information seems overwhelming, choose a starting point. North America, for example. Don’t conquer the world just yet!

Remember:
- Form key internal and external partnerships
- Gather your supporting data
- Start with smaller samples if it appears overwhelming
Address the Elephant in the Room: Why SMM is Critical for Your Organization

Okay, hopefully by now you have your supporting data, and the numbers speak directly to the need for your organization to address the problems around meeting spend. But, a simple summary won’t cut it. You’ll need to cite specific examples within the organization to highlight your case. These instances should resonate with decision makers, and bring to light additional problems that could be solved with an SMM program. Make sure to clearly define the problem (what’s broken), point out systematic symptoms, and causes for major concern. How are we doing things today? How successful are we? What are our challenges and obstacles that are barriers to our success? This will serve as a nice segue to the solution.

This is the time for your “sales pitch.” Carefully outline why SMM is critical to your organizational success. But, be sure to point out the risks involved with implementing one, and the risk of doing nothing at all by continuing with the status quo. This shows you’ve done your homework, and by clearly articulating both sides of the issue, your pitch will be stronger. What will be the positive impact of such a move? What are the costs, benefits and ROI? TIP: See our ROI calculator! Lay out your case, pros and cons, and let the numbers speak for themselves.

Need more information on the importance and value of a meetings management program? Visit Cvent’s Meeting Management Resource Library.
You presented an outline of the solution based on some higher level, but essential and effective, generalities with specific examples. Next step? Get more granular. Begin by compiling data from all possible sources. Take a walk throughout your office and collect some more specific data. Include: Procurement, Finance, PO Systems, Credit Card Data, and Vendors. You will, after assembling this data, find gaps. Since there is no crystal ball available, or time travel machine invented yet, you’ll have to build in some assumptions. This is where your internal partnerships will pay off. Get the blessing from your peers, including the internal experts in Finance and Procurement. This is vitally important. For assumptions based on industry benchmarks, these credible sources will support your case. When it comes to risk assessment, compliance and/or audit resources can be a great help.

Again, offer your own counter-argument to initiating an SMM program by addressing the questions and risks involved in a do-nothing scenario. Offer reasons for not recommending each alternative. This analysis will solidify your proposal and support the need to put greater control on spend, how the meeting’s process is handled internally and the need to bring in outside consultants to examine current processes. Finally, discuss how a technology solution can fit the current culture, or enhance it by introducing new processes that will lead to the greater success of your meetings program.

Remember:

- Compile data from all possible sources
- Get Finance’s blessing on all assumptions used in financial modeling
- Offer alternative analysis
- Make sure the new technology is a cultural fit
Lay out the Resources Needed for Implementation

Your vision is set, and the next step in the process is focusing on human capital, technology and the staffing needed to support your proposal. Depending on the size of your organization, this could mean increasing or decreasing head count. Look at all scenarios, and present them, including in-sourced model vs. a hybrid/outsourced model. Be sure to include a responsibility assignment matrix, or RACI chart in your models. Essentially, this chart should define current roles and responsibilities and add clarity to new, changing roles within the organization. Create new job descriptions.

Present all of the technology and consulting costs. Technology and your technology provider play a vital role in the success of your program. Consult your technology provider to ensure that the technology will meet the needs of the program you’ve outlined. Start with a simple technology implementation to ensure you’re meeting the needs, and then increase your adoption over time. The technology will improve your program, but isn’t a magic bullet! It also won’t solve all of your problems, but will empower you to make vast improvements. Reiterate the way SMM technology will help you manage workflow more efficiently, making employees more productive and compliant. Again, our ROI calculator can quickly help you support your case.

Cost around change management must also be accounted for. Don’t forget to include internal and external full-time equivalent (FTE) costs, roll-out communications and training for socialization, and funding model(s) to answer how the program will be funded. Lay it all out on the table. Effective communication can make or break the success of this initiative. Define what really constitutes savings and cost avoidance when it comes to meetings and events at your organization. This is a crucial phase of your case-building efforts. Address the challenges associated with implementation, including realistic time lines and all costs associated with it. This should include change management challenges of onboarding SMM technology, including training employees on the system. Break down your ROI over three years, showing cost reduction for the long-term, and the lasting positive effects of the solution. Set the right expectations.

Remember:
- Lay out the staffing resources needed
- Weigh the costs of technology and consulting
- Include the costs associated with change management
- Explicitly lay out meeting and event financial justification
Summary

When it comes to presenting your case, be clear, concise and comprehensive on the optimum recommendation. Be sure to include all possible options and clearly define the problem before presenting your solution. Be completely transparent with defendable points and articulated risks. Show all sides of the situation clearly, defining all positives and possible negatives and risks. It's all in the storytelling.

Make sure the key stakeholders are present, and focused. Don’t let them become distracted (laptops closed, mobile devices turned off). Be direct and keep things at a high level by avoiding the weeds and getting bogged down in minutiae. Describe the positive organizational impact of the project, and provide a high level project description and strategic plan including:

- Goals and objectives
- Major project milestones and target dates
- Performance metrics
- Project constraints
- Set realistic expectations within the organization

Build your case forward-looking. And one size does not fit all. Not all plans are the same, and your business plan or case may need to be reinvented depending upon your audience. Procurement professionals may need a different pitch than meetings execs. International executives face different challenges than those in the states. Look one way in the presentation to the c-suite, and adapt for other audiences. You need buy-in from all levels. This is an ongoing education or “pitch” within your organization, until you get buy-in. Redesign for the audience you may see to renew traction with them. Keep your energy and drive to complete the “sell.”
Access the Starter Kit tools and begin building your case for meetings management.

Want to find out more about Cvent’s Meetings Management technology? Speak with an expert today:

Cvent, Inc. is a leading cloud-based enterprise event management platform, with 1,700+ employees and more than 12,600 customers worldwide. Cvent offers software solutions to event planners for online event registration, venue selection, event management, mobile apps for events, e-mail marketing and web surveys. Cvent provides hotels with a targeted advertising platform designed to reach event planners looking for suitable venues. Cvent solutions optimize the entire event management value chain and have enabled clients around the world to manage hundreds of thousands of meetings and events.

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