About Pearson:

• Founded: 1844
• Number of Employees: 35,000 in 70 Countries
• Annual Revenue: £4,513 million (2017)
• Number of Meetings and Events Annually: 250 in USA, 3000 in UK

Pearson International is a leading supplier of services to educational institutions such as the New York State Dept. of Education, GreyCampus, and Que Publishing. In addition to providing assessment and training programs for organizations, Pearson owns several educational media brands including Addison-Wesley, Prentice Hall, and eCollege.

Pearson holds well over 3,000 world-wide meetings and events annually, encompassing small meetings of less than 10 people to large sales kickoffs with over 6,000 attendees. Meetings and events were managed by 36 internal meeting planners, four unregulated conference suppliers and a single travel management company (TMC) servicing North America.

The Challenge:

With a workforce of 35,000+ employees in 70+ countries, Pearson’s travel costs for meetings and events were large and relatively unmanaged. An official relationship between the meeting planners and the TMC did not exist. When a meeting or event was advertised, attendees would book their travel directly with the TMC. In the case of Pearson’s Sales Kickoff of 4,000+ participants, it led to a complete breakdown of the travel booking system. The vast number of individuals looking to make simultaneous travel bookings made enough calls to completely overwhelm the travel team and the telephone system; leading to many hours of hold times and major dissatisfaction with the event accommodation portion of the registration process.

Additionally, Pearson uncovered that many executive assistants in the organization were creating smaller meetings without engaging the meeting planners. This limited Pearson’s ability to track how much it was spending annually on meetings and events. From the procurement
perspective, Pearson was unable to gain the financial transparency necessary for them to regulate and manage spend in the organization.

To uncover its total meeting spend, Mitchell Stern, Procurement Category Director at Pearson, hired a consulting firm to dig through accounts payable, credit card receipts, and expense reports for meeting and event related charges and payments. After eight weeks of intense scrutiny, Stern was able to ascertain that there was $50M total spend on meetings and events in 2014 in North America alone. Additionally, Stern suspected that much of that spend was addressable with the proper management controls in place.

“I started to investigate how we bring the fragmented way in which we dealt with meetings together and come to a place where we could make better business decisions.”

The Solution:

In December 2014, Stern began laying the foundations for a strategic meetings management program (SMMP) pilot in the United States. It was agreed to launch a project by comparing the company’s five active event technologies to arrive at one enterprise-wide platform, create a policy to regulate meeting and event processes, and have it championed by senior leadership.

Once Pearson zeroed in on Cvent as the SMMP platform of choice, the next step was to secure buy-in from Pearson managers for this new initiative. Stern was able to communicate the value of a meeting and event policy in a manner that won approval from the Pearson executive and gained support of change and migration into overall strategy and multi-vertical coordination within Pearson.

Cvent assisted during the creation of Pearson’s meeting and event policy by providing guidance to best practices as well as by providing knowledge, visual collateral and metrics that supported the overall promotion of this initiative.
Under Cvent’s guidance, Pearson was able to arrive at an initial meeting and event policy that monitored and qualified meeting requests. Meetings requiring 10 or more room nights had to be booked in accordance with Pearson’s meeting and event policy. Any meetings under 25 attendees required the completion of a meetings request form with budget information in order to track spend and offer support. This policy laid the groundwork for a number of sub-policies that support the various business units within Pearson.

When someone wants to host a meeting or event at Pearson, they submit a meeting request form (MRF) to initiate the planning process. For smaller events, the budget and event must be pre-approved using a departmental approval process and tracked in Cvent before any action is taken on the sourcing or production side.

Once a meeting is approved, the event information is automatically sent to Pearson’s preferred site selection company, ConferenceDirect, for venue sourcing using Pearson’s instance of Cvent. This provides insights and status monitoring of all meetings and helps meeting planners keep informed about their event registrations.

In order to improve the overall attendee experience, Pearson integrates Cvent with its online booking tool (OBT) which enables attendees to make their travel booking as part of their registration. “It’s a slick branded experience, plus it enables immediate visibility to registration and travel details,” says Stern. “the stress on the TMC service team has been dramatically reduced. It’s a win-win-win.”

The Benefits:

In the end, the SMMP powered by Cvent provides Pearson with the necessary transparency and insights into its meetings and events. The Cvent platform promotes adhesion to the Pearson meeting and event policy and ensures all reporting and analysis is consistent and repeatable, which allows for meetings and events growth. “We could see who was actually attending the meetings. We benefited from clear insights into the actual spend and we persuaded the organization to take more responsibility for travel costs. This allowed us to make better business decisions” said Stern.

Another advantage to having a technology-driven SMMP in place is automation capabilities. Many departments in Pearson have the need to engage customers in face-to-face interactions but simply do not have enough bandwidth or expertise to organize and plan an event. Pearson’s SMMP provides access to a full range of event services and delivers a forum for these departments to request and receive the necessary support to hold essential meetings and events.
Pearson has also reaped tremendous cost savings with their SMMP. “We completed implementation of Cvent a year and a half ago and within the first nine months we saved $13M of our meetings and event spend (based on savings/cost avoidance) through venue sourcing and negotiation” says Stern.

Since the program launch in March 2016, Pearson has consistently tracked a 26% non-travel cost avoidance, calculated from the initial venue proposal to final negotiated prices. Additionally, the online registration provided by Cvent, not only saves time but converts telephonic TMC call fees to online booking fees, resulting in further savings.

**Whats Next:**

After the success of the initiative in the USA, Pearson is now looking to expand the SMMP out to the rest of the organization. Once the process is rolled out and the technology is in place, Pearson will have global visibility into the costs of its meetings and align it to the value provided.

“**We can start to refocus our meeting strategy based on return***”

Ultimately the SMMP provides Pearson a true means to capture and control costs. And Pearson is now looking forward to attributing a value to each meeting coming through this new process based on:

- Prospect-to-customer conversion
- Customer/Institute retention
- Attendee revenue
- Market to registration success ratio
- Survey and NPS results

In addition to expanding the scope of the SMMP to the UK, APAC, India and South America, Pearson has created a path moving forward to support its learning programs by integrating Cvent into virtual platforms, marketing automation, ERP invoicing, certifications, event polls, and data integrations with its CRM system.

Pearson hopes to go beyond events and support an entire ecosystem of institutions, schools, and customers using a single data source and integrated technology using the lessons learned with Cvent.