

HOW COMPANIES MEET CREATING VIRTUAL OFFSITES ONLINE



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Whether it's writing a proposal, coordinating requests from suppliers, or managing a complex project, most of today's work happens in collaboration. **Fundamentally, we meet in order to get work done.**

On occasion, corporations find it necessary to get a large number of people together for an extended period of time, to focus their attention on issues of organizational concern. The traditional forum for this is the *offsite meeting*.

As organizations become more widely dispersed, and the competitive environment makes "face time" more and more precious, it's getting harder to get the right people together at the right time to create the right organizational results.

Increasingly, global 1000 corporations are addressing this problem through virtual offsite meetings.

A virtual offsite meeting is an offsite meeting that happens to be held in a different location than you've ever gone to before. To have value, it must be able to achieve the same goals. In order to do this, it must provide the same type of overall **experience** for the attendees; have the same types of components, a similar flow and process, and the same degree of interactivity.

A successful virtual offsite provides unquestioned savings of costs and production time. In addition, it has additional benefits that are unique to its modality – an "any-time" format allowing dispersed attendees to participate; the creation re-useable learning modules; and the ability to revisit the entire event after it's over.

While virtual offsites do not meet every need, and should not be thought of as a replacement for face-to-face meetings, global organizations will increasingly use them in appropriate ways to assist them in becoming "clicks-and-mortar," e-business oriented companies to compete in the new millennium.

INTRODUCTION

THE MEETING PROBLEM

Whether it's writing a proposal, coordinating requests from suppliers, or managing a complex project, most of today's work happens in collaboration. **Fundamentally, we meet in order to get work done.**

And there are many different types of meetings. Informal chats in the hall; regularly scheduled staff meetings; ad hoc committee meetings; the list is endless. Some are formal, and some are informal. Some are scheduled and some are ad hoc. Some are between two people and some between many.

On occasion, corporations find it necessary to get a large number of people together for an extended period of time, to focus their attention on issues of organizational concern.

The traditional forum for this is the *offsite meeting*.

When a corporation schedules an offsite meeting, it is signaling that this is an issue of sufficient importance to warrant the investment of significant resources of time and money.

Offsite meetings play an important role in supporting strategic initiatives and critical processes within corporations. Offsite meetings are used for product rollouts, critical organizational communications, motivating and educating a sales force, building relationships with key customers, obtaining input and buy-in for new mission statements, knowledge sharing among dispersed professional staff, and a host of other reasons.

As organizations become more widely dispersed, and the competitive environment makes "face time" more and more precious, it's getting harder to get the right people together at the right time to create the right organizational results.

Moreover, the simple logistics of putting on a 500-person meeting can take the better part of six months to arrange, by which time the problem may be stale or the right people no longer the ones that have been invited.

And, of course, there are the resource requirements. At \$1,000 to \$1,500 per person for travel, hotel, per diem, and facilities charges (not counting lost salary and opportunity costs), a 500-person meeting can cost upwards of \$750,000, and increasingly competitive corporations are hesitant to schedule an offsite unless there's a clear ROI.

This is particularly problematic, because given the increasingly rate of change in product lines and the exponential growth of intellectual capital within or-

ganizations, opportunities for communication, education, and knowledge sharing should be increasing rather than being the subject of financial constraints.

THE SOLUTION: VIRTUAL OFFSITES

The problem is clear. How can we get the right people together at the right time to solve the right problems – when we need a lot of people in an offsite setting?

Given the increasingly digital, online nature of our work lives, one answer to the problem suggests itself – to have a “virtual offsite meeting.”

Having said this, however, several questions present themselves:

- “What, exactly, is virtual offsite meeting, anyway?”
- “How does it work and what does it cost?”
- “How many of the benefits of regular offsites could be gained, and are there any new benefits that might be explored?”
- “What sort of IT infrastructure is required?”
- “I see a lot of commercials for virtual meeting websites – is this the same thing? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these different products?”

These are exactly the questions we hear when we start talking to people about virtual offsites, so it isn’t surprising if you have some or all of them. To answer them, we need to start by looking at how face-to-face meetings work.

HOW OFFSITES WORK

COMPONENTS

Think, for a moment, about the different types of offsite meetings that are sponsored by major corporations. There are sales meetings, user group meetings, executive retreats, key client meetings, conferences, professional development workshops, planning/visioning meetings; the list goes on.

Consider what components are included in these meetings from the standpoint of the attendee. These “front-end” components include:

A **registration** process, which lets you know that your attendance is expected, often followed by...

An **information packet** that gives you information about the meeting, the topics, and the presenters. For certain types of meetings, this is very useful in helping you plan what sessions you may want to attend. For others, it lets you

know what type of preparation you should make to be able to contribute effectively to the meeting.

Either before or during the offsite, you may be provided with an **attendee list**, to provide you with a way to network with folks that you meet during the meeting.

Then, once you arrive, there are presentations. These may include **plenary** or **keynote** sessions – the purpose of which is to highlight the unifying theme of the offsite, and possibly to motivate, entertain, or communicate key points to the attendees.

There may be other types of presentations as well. **Breakout sessions** allow participants to explore points of interest with each other and possibly presenters. **Workshops** provide a venue for acquiring new knowledge and skills. **Panel discussions** allow you to hear conversations between subject matter experts, and some newer offsites include **open space**, in which participants can bring up topics that are not already on the agenda.

Depending on the type of offsite meeting, partners and suppliers may be included, and there may be an **exhibit hall** for them to showcase their products and services. The meeting may even be designed to allow **private sessions** for employees or senior executives.

If the offsite is educational in nature, there may be **product showcases**, a **bookstore**, or a **resource room** to allow participants to obtain hands-on experience and further information about topics of interest.

Regardless of what else is included in the offsite, there is certain to be a **lounge** or **café** where folks can get together and chat, because the informal networking and conversations at the offsite are often where the major added value is obtained!

But what you see is only the tip of the iceberg. For a successful offsite to take place, there are a host of other things that happen in the background. Before the event ever starts, these include:

The preliminary work: Getting a firm “go” decision, selecting a theme and identifying goals, obtaining an approved budget.

The logistics involved in site selection and contracting, participant selection, internal communications, and participant registration.

Selecting presenters, getting commitments, and obtaining presentation materials for inclusion in the proceedings.

Arranging for entertainment and the other **social aspects** of the event.

Then, starting on opening day, the organizers need to **host and facilitate the event**. They must ensure that everyone gets where they need to go, that all the A/V and facilities arrangements take place as agreed, introduce presenters, act as M/Cs and provide ongoing “help desk” assistance to attendees, and a host of other tasks to ensure that everything goes as planned.

Of course, all these components aren’t needed for every type of offsite meeting, but these are the typical ones.

**If the offsite meeting is virtual rather than face-to-face,
which of these components will still be needed?**

Perhaps this is a “trick question,” and you might want to look again at the last couple pages, *but in our experience, hosting 50 to 2,500 person virtual offsites, the answer is very clear.*

All of them.

Whether the offsite is virtual or face-to-face, a café is needed. If a keynoter would be needed in a face-to-face offsite, the keynoter will be needed in a virtual offsite. If some presentations would be employees only if the meeting were in Atlanta, the same presentations will need to be restricted if the meeting is on the web. The functions are the same; the venue is changed.

THE PROCESS

If the components of a virtual meeting parallel their face-to-face counterpart, what about the processes involved – the flow of activities, how people participate?

While there are some obvious differences, there are also some similarities, and many of the best practices of face-to-face meetings carry over into the online world.

The best meeting you ever attended

Think, for a moment, about the best meeting you ever attended. What was it that made it so good?

This is one of our standard exercises in our design kick-off meetings, and some of the answers we often hear include:

- **“It was well organized.”** There was a good flow to the activities, and it was easy for us to know what was going on.
- **“It was friendly.”** The people went out of their way to talk to each other, and there was plenty of time to network with other folks.

- **“It was interactive.”** It wasn’t just a bunch of “sages on stages” talking at us; there were activities where we could ask questions and drill down into things that interested us – but we were never pressured to if we didn’t want to.
- **“It was memorable.”** The speakers were exciting, it was in a great setting, and they really wowed us with some of the things they arranged for us.

**“The best meeting you never attended”
- lessons learned for virtual offsites**

Our experience leads us to conclude that these same factors lead to successful virtual offsite meetings. Some of the lessons learned from our experience in hosting virtual offsites are:

- **It’s about people.** Attendees at a virtual offsite must hear one univocal message from start to finish: There are real people hosting the event who have friendly personalities, are there to help them, and want to make the event a success. At Caucus we call our project managers “event moms [or dads]” – an appellation that came from our attendees, who consistently give them credit for how much they enjoy the experience. One of the main lessons we have learned is that it’s about people – the technology is important, but needs to recede into the background, highlighting the people who make the event a success.
- **Interaction is vital.** All the research is clear on this point. Interaction is vital to ensure that communications are understood, to allow people to reinforce and apply learning, to generate new ideas, to garner support and buy-in for new initiatives...for virtually all the goals one holds an offsite meeting to achieve. The design and technical infrastructure of a virtual offsite must not only include opportunities for interaction, *they must ensure that interaction is at the heart of the experience*. Listening to a speaker may be boring and create a sore fanny, but reading or listening to one-way online presentations reduces a “virtual meeting” to a computer work session.
- **Presenting isn’t the same as teaching.** This is certainly true face-to-face – there’s nothing worse than sitting through a “sage on the stage” reading from notes that you could have read yourself. This is even more true in a virtual environment. Presentations – even rich-media presentations – are a one-way communication of content. True learning happens when the learners actively process content, via exercise, case study, Q&A, etc. Thus, the virtual meeting design and technology must foster active processing, if learning is one of the desired outcomes.

- **Most learning happens in hallways – as does virtually all networking.** Thus, it's vital that the design and technical infrastructure includes an informal area within a virtual offsite, appropriately hosted and facilitated to create rich and stimulating conversations, so that it becomes the social hub of the event – the place where “things are happening.”

MEETING VIRTUALLY

WHAT IS A VIRTUAL MEETING, ANYWAY?

There are many different interpretations of what a virtual meeting is, provided by vendors of different computer-mediated communications products.

Some believe that a virtual meeting is an “electronic room” where you can allow a number of people to have an asynchronous conversation using threaded discussion software, and sometimes associated productivity tools like a rudimentary shared calendar or filing system.

Others think of them as electronically enhanced same-time meetings, in which software enables several people to see the presenter via real-time video, share applications, and communicate via a text-based chat applet or voice over IP.

Still others use the term to describe rich media presentations that may integrate streaming audio, video, slideshows, and transcripts. These presentations can be accessed asynchronously, and multiple presentations may be organized in a menu so that users can pick the ones they want to view.

All of these are types of virtual meetings, and each has their use. The first two can be helpful for assisting a small group to have a specific meeting; the latter for instances where information needs to be broadcast to a large group of people (but there is no “meeting” about the material per se).

While useful, none of these can achieve the goals for which organizations usually hold major offsite meeting events.

VIRTUAL OFFSITES: THE CAUCUS APPROACH

At Caucus, we use the term “virtual offsite meeting” to refer to a time-bounded event, in which a large number of people experience a rich process characterized by a high degree of interaction that parallels that of a face-to-face offsite, which can achieve the same goals as its face-to-face counterparts.

We distinguish a virtual offsite from other types of virtual meetings, and see the role of virtual offsites as being appropriate when an organization would otherwise consider getting a large number of people together to achieve corporate goals such as education, knowledge sharing, strategic planning, decision-making or creating a shared vision.

Thus, a Caucus virtual offsite isn't one-way rich-media presentations, although such presentations can be included. It isn't video conferencing, teleconferencing, or chat, although those are often part of it. It isn't a threaded message board, though any-time written conversation is a key element in it.

A Caucus virtual offsite is a time bounded environment that contains all the elements one would find in its face-to-face counterpart: keynote presentations, concurrent sessions, workshops, panel discussions, a bookstore or resource room, a café, a help desk – even ways to communicate privately with other participants one to one or in small groups.

A Caucus virtual offsite has a rhythm and flow to it: a discrete beginning and end; different events happening at different times; public spaces and areas that are open only to certain attendees.

A Caucus virtual offsite is about interacting with people. It's about Q&A sessions with presenters. It's about participating in workshops and professional development sessions. It's about hanging out in the café and sharing stories and best practices. It's about facilitators and hosts that help you register, introduce presenters, provide assistance, report interesting happenings, and weave discussions together.

A Caucus virtual offsite feels familiar, providing a graphical environment that uses familiar palettes, icons, and shapes; using metaphors that stem from your own experience (Lizard Lounge...Open Space Café...Henry's – the names reflect where your people let their hair down.)

With a Caucus virtual offsite, participants attend any time of the day or night. They participate from home, from work, or while on the road, with just a computer and a browser.

ATTENDING A CAUCUS VIRTUAL OFFSITE



When you log into a Caucus virtual offsite using your secure password, you see all the familiar meeting components:

1. Main Conference Area for keynote sessions
2. Break Out Rooms to focus on specific topics
3. Café area for social gatherings and discussions
4. Bookstore or Resource Room
5. Welcome Center for orientation
6. Help Desk for Question and Answer information.



Attending a presentation is easy. Keynotes can consist of rich me-

dia presentations that include streaming audio and video, PowerPoint slideshows, and scrolling text. Workshops and seminars can include similar media. However, one-way presentations do not a meeting make!

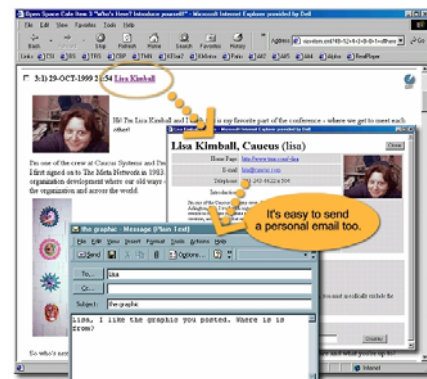
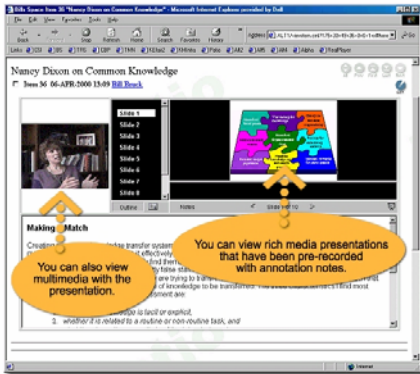
After listening to and reading the presentation, you have the opportunity to ask the subject matter expert questions about the presentation. This allows you to drill down to points of interest, and apply concepts to your specific situation.

The conference occurs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for a one to three-week period of time. This allows you to reflect on the material and ask questions at your leisure.

It also allows your colleagues to participate world wide – no matter what time zone they might be in. After a day or two, you find that participants answer each others’ questions, and conversations include presenters and attendees at all levels, from all parts of the globe, attending from work, home, or on the road. Caucus remembers what you’ve read and what’s new to you, every time you come back to the offsite.

Caucus virtual offsites allow you to present “stuff” (new product information, sales methods, technology trends, etc.) and then have focused discussion about that “stuff” – all in an environment that is familiar to participants, consisting of plenary/keynote and breakout sessions. In fact, participants can attach contribute their own “stuff” to the discussions, by attaching linked files, embedding diagrams and charts in their responses, or even including fully operational linked web sites – right in the flow of their discussions!

The café provides a similar space for participants to start their own discussions, to relax and unwind, and to take the opportunity to get to know colleagues that they never have a chance to sit down with face-to-face. And, of course, Caucus has many ways of helping people get to know each other better.



IS A VIRTUAL OFFSITE FOR YOU?

WHEN ARE VIRTUAL OFFSITES USED?

Virtual offsites can be used in the same types of situations that you would hold a face-to-face offsite meeting: any time that it you need to get a sizable group of folks together for a special occasion, in which some type of important information is going to be shared that is of strategic importance to the company.

For example, corporations like IBM, HP, Warner Lambert, USAID, and NEA have used Caucus virtual offsites for:

- Sales meetings
- Product roll-outs
- Visioning & planning processes
- Professional conferences
- Knowledge sharing & educational events
- ...others...

Sometimes, virtual offsites take the place of a face-to-face meeting. At other times, customers use them for additional meetings between regularly scheduled yearly events. On occasion, clients hold a virtual event before and/or after a face-to-face meeting – allowing them to increase attendance, prepare the audience, and/or extend the learning opportunity.

WHAT BENEFITS CAN YOU EXPECT?

An effective virtual offsite should be able to provide you with a variety of benefits; some related to savings, and some related to added value.

Money

The benefit that customers often see first is the financial savings. Industry estimates suggest that the average cost for sending a person to an offsite meeting is over \$1,350. A Caucus virtual offsite can save 80% of the cost of a face-to-face meeting, which can reduce the cost of a major sales meeting by upwards of \$2,000,000.

Time

The virtual offsite also reduces time away from the office (or the territory for a sales meeting). To be clear, the time investment is approximately the same.

If a person would be attending offsite activities for 15 hours in Atlanta; they will spend about 15 hours attending the virtual meeting. However, it is a different type of time. Since the 15 hours is spread over two to three weeks, and can be invested at any time of the day or night; attendees can schedule their participation for down times at work, for early mornings when they couldn't meet with clients; for the extra hour they have in the afternoon. As a result, people can schedule their meeting time more intelligently.

People

Because of the financial savings and the flexible scheduling, organizations are no longer put into the quandary of deciding who can go to the offsite. Typically, companies send two or three people from the office and hope (often futilely) that they will effectively communicate what they've learned with others. With a virtual offsite, sending everyone doesn't "break the bank," and it doesn't leave "no one minding the store." Thus, organizations can send everyone who would benefit from attending the meeting.

Deliberative Discourse

Virtual offsites also provide additional value to their face-to-face counterparts in several ways. One is in the depth of conversation that emerges.

In a typical face-to-face, there is little time at the end of a presentation or workshop for Q&A. Worse, dialog has a rushed characteristic: only a attendees have a chance to ask questions; the presenter needs to quickly think on his/her feet to answer them; the participant can't follow-up with additional questions in a considered manner, and only those people who can think quickly on their feet can "play".

The nature of dialog in a virtual offsite is different. Participants have the time they need to consider the points in the presentation and drill down into the specifics of the points that will help them in their work. Presenters can think through their answers and take the time to give the right examples and data that will help the attendees. The questions can be followed up length by the original person or other interested parties until the point is clarified and applied in specific situations of interest.

Re-useable learning modules

The nature of presentations at virtual offsite is that they are permanent, rather than transient. Thus, the rich media presentation is still available after the virtual offsite is over. It can be reused for new employees, or reworked for sales presentations. Better yet, the rich Q&A accompanying the presentations and

workshops are also permanently saved. These provide an excellent record that can be mined for knowledge nuggets and best practices, or worked into enhancements of future presentations.

WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS TO VIRTUAL OFFSITES?

This is a fair question, and one that should be considered in making the decision to virtualize a meeting process. There are two areas where virtual offsites are much less valuable than their face-to-face counterparts.

Rewards

Some corporate meeting events are held in extremely attractive resort areas, and while some content is provided, their primary purpose is as a reward for excellent employee performance, or occasionally to provide a thank you for key customers.

Let's be honest. Attending a virtual offsite in January does not compare with going to a five-star hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico. If this is your purpose, hold the meeting face-to-face.

Motivation

Part of many face-to-face offsite meetings is a motivational goal, and motivational speakers are often paid \$10,000 or more to keynote a sales meeting and get the troops fired up to meet their stretch goals. While the same motivational speaker can, in face, give a presentation online using a rich media format, it will not have the same energy and effect as it does face to face.

In our experience, we have found that the kickoff presentation given by the CEO or a professional speaker can be done virtually – often in a synchronous way via a conference call or video presentation – and it will have 40-50% of the effectiveness of its face-to-face counterpart.

If the motivational component is **the** goal to be achieved in an offsite, and if you can afford to get everyone who needs to be motivated to the meeting, then a face-to-face meeting may be preferable. If, however, motivation is one of several goals to be achieved, and if this is done not only by a “rah-rah” keynote, but by new and exciting information that's provided, and by the networking that happens in the meeting, then a virtual offsite can be perfect for your needs.

Non-Issues

While there are some valid issues with virtual offsites, such as the rewards and motivational components, there are several other issues that people worry about that, in our experience, are non-issues. Some of the concerns that we hear from customers who have not experienced a virtual offsite include:

It's not like going to a meeting, though, is it? Actually, participants consistently tell us that it is, in fact, like attending a meeting. Since the graphical and metaphorical construction of the environment, and the activities attendees experience parallel their face-to-face counterparts, folks feel like they've "really" been there. In fact, one participant called the visioning offsite he attended "the best meeting I never went to."

But real meetings aren't just about presentations. Of course, from our perspective, a virtual offsite is as "real" as a face-to-face one – they are merely different modalities. Aside from that, we'd totally agree. In fact, in reading through transcripts of our cafés, you see that it's all about networking. There are tête-à-têtes, "war stories," hilarious tangential discussions, and even contests. (A favorite of ours is the "name this baby" contest where a senior executive posts his or her baby picture and the first participant to guess the identity get a prize!)

We hold meetings to interact with potential customers. If that's the case, you may find a virtual offsite is just the ticket! In a face-to-face customer meeting, sales staff meet folks when they come in the door, chat a little bit while they get coffee, then everyone sits and listens to presenters. If you're lucky, you'll get five to ten minutes of conversation with a prospect, and little of that will be quality interaction. In a Caucus virtual offsite, you have a chance to interact with your prospects for two to three weeks in content sessions, your exhibit hall, and informally in the café. This gives you a great opportunity to build a basis for further contact.

WHO DOES WHAT?

The remaining question you might have, once you've decide that a virtual offsite might meet a need you have, is what happens next? Who does what to get a virtual offsite from idea to successful event?

WHAT DOES THE CUSTOMER DO?

In the Caucus approach, there are some things that the customer always does, some things that we always do, and some things that either of us can do – depending on the resources you wish to allocate to the project.

In general, however, at a minimum, you need to be prepared to do the following to put on a successful virtual offsite:

- Decide on the purpose, goals, and theme of the meeting
- Determine who the attendees are
- Do the internal marketing of the event and garner appropriate sponsorship and support from management
- Determine the presenters and their topics, and obtain commitments from them.
- Ensure that presenters turn in their materials in a timely fashion, and that participants attend the event.

It's that simple – Caucus can handle everything else! (Or, if you prefer, you can assume other responsibilities within the design and implementation of the project.)

WHAT DOES CAUCUS DO?

There are five phases to our proprietary methodology which we use to manage all phases of the production of a virtual offsite, to ensure that you meet your goals and that participants have a memorable experience.

Requirements Analysis

During this phase, a Caucus consultant will work with you to scope out the event. We go over your project goals in detail, and map them to our Caucus modules, identifying any areas where custom work needs to be done.

This phase ends when you approve a detailed requirements document that sets forth exactly what will be done, by whom, and in what time frame.

Design

During the design phase, the requirements are transformed into a set of specifications for the production team. A set of technical specs is generated for the operational capability of the Caucus environment, the modules to be utilized, and any custom programming that is required. A similar set of specifications is developed for the graphic artists who will create the customized look and feel of your site.

From the process side of the house, a set of specifications is developed for the week-to-week and day-to-day flow of the meeting, the number and type of presentations to be utilized, the requirements for hosting and facilitation, help

desk support, and all the “behind the scenes” things that make the experience of the event “work” for participants.

The design phase ends with the creation of a detailed project plan for every element of event production, including both Caucus and Client responsibilities.

Development

Once the project plan is in place, the event is developed. Graphic designs are developed, approved, and executed. The event environment is prototyped, tested, and deployed. Presenters are coached and presentations obtained and converted as needed. Communications are systematically carried out with managers, attendees, and other stakeholders. Everything is readied for opening day.

Production

From opening to closing day, our production staff provide technical monitoring of the event environment. We open and close sessions and introduce presenters. They closely monitor conversations, and work with the customer team to facilitate the process to promote or channel interactions as needed. We host the café, provide regular communications to participants, and generally create buzz and excitement around the event. In general, we provide all the services you’d expect of a five-star meeting organizer and world-class process consultant – all wrapped into one.

Closeout

After closing day, we “freeze” the environment and maintain it on our servers, or provide it to you on CD if you prefer. If desired, we can even provide “knowledge harvesting” services to distill best practices and lessons learned from the sessions. We provide a full-scale evaluation process, and a project report to you, the customer.

WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR IN A HOST?

So, you understand what a virtual offsite is, you think that it might be a good approach for you, and you have an understanding of at least how Caucus organizes the tasks to be done. You’re wondering how to select a company to work with in producing your virtual event.

Before talking with vendors, it's advisable to establish the purpose, goals, and theme of your meeting; and identify the number and type of attendees and presenters that the meeting might have if it were to be held face to face.

With this information in hand, the types of questions you might want to ask potential vendors include:

- Have you successfully done meetings for other customers that have similar goals and audiences? Can you talk with these customers?
- Does the technology used provide for all the components of the meeting that you feel are necessary: rich media presentations, multiple "rooms" for different activities, rich participant interaction, etc.
- Can you see examples of previous meetings to get a sense of what the meeting was like for attendees?
- Does the vendor provide the facilitation and hosting that can transform online presentations into a true **experience** for participants?
- Does the vendor discuss your specific desired outcomes and show you, point for point, how these have been achieved in past meetings, and will be achieved in yours?

CONCLUSION

A virtual offsite meeting is an offsite meeting that happens to be held in a different location than you've ever gone to before. To have value, it must be able to achieve the same goals. In order to do this, it must provide the same type of overall **experience** for the attendees; have the same types of components; and have a similar flow and process.

A successful virtual offsite provides unquestioned savings of costs and production time. In addition, it has additional benefits that are unique to its modality – an "any-time" format allowing dispersed attendees to participate; the creation re-useable learning modules; and the ability to revisit the entire event after it's over.

While virtual offsites do not meet every need, and should not be thought of as a replacement for face-to-face meetings, global organizations will increasingly use them in appropriate ways to assist them in becoming "clicks-and-mortar," e-business oriented companies to compete in the new millennium.

About the Author. Dr. Bill Bruck is a psychologist and futurist who focuses on the effects of rapid technological change on information intensive industries, integrating technical expertise honed over two decades with his understanding of organizational systems and the people who make them work. A best-selling author, Dr. Bruck has written ten books on the effective use

of information technology that are translated and sold internationally. Dr. Bruck is a founder and Principal of Q2Learning LLC.

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