

CASE STUDY:

Game ON!
The Gamification of the 2011 GMIC
Sustainable Meetings Conference

Elizabeth Valestuk Henderson
Chief Sustainability Strategist, Meeting Change
Mitchell Beer
President, The Conference Publishers Inc.



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Elizabeth Valestuk Henderson, CMM, CMP, M.E.Des. is Calgary-based Chief Sustainability Strategist with Meeting Change. She chaired the program committee for the 2011 *Sustainable Meetings Conference*, the first program of its kind to apply gamification to a live conference.



Mitchell Beer, CMM is President of The Conference Publishers in Ottawa, Canada. He served on the program committee for the 2011 *Sustainable Meetings Conference* and co-chaired the committee for the 2009 and 2010 conferences.

Game ON!

The Gamification of the 2011 GMIC *Sustainable Meetings Conference*

Introduction

In February, 2011 in Portland, Oregon, the Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC) set out to demonstrate the application of online gaming principles and theory to the design of face-to-face meetings. The resulting conference, **Game ON!**, received high praise from a large proportion of participants, while simultaneously generating a host of valuable lessons for future meetings.

During the planning process, then at the conference itself, organizers adopted a motto first stated by Samuel J. Smith, co-chair of Event Camp Twin Cities 2010:

"Experimentation is our get-out-of-jail-free card. If we weren't having tech hiccups, we wouldn't be innovating."

Not every aspect of **Game ON!** was an unqualified success, but organizers and participants understood that the experiment itself would have been less successful if it had pushed no limits and taken no risks. In a series of interviews and conversations onsite, a dozen or more participants offered extensive, thoughtful critiques of the process, after commenting that this was one of the best conferences they had ever attended. A desire to honour and reflect those critiques is one of the driving forces behind this case study.

Gamification describes the process of applying gaming concepts to business situations. Gamification was not a conference objective in itself, but a means to achieve the [purposes GMIC had set out for its annual event](#) under the headings Challenge, Collaborate, and Create:

- **Gain Insight:** Keep abreast of new development, cutting edge techniques, and best practices for integrating green strategies into your upcoming meetings and events...through field learning and interactive team activities
- **Build Your Network:** The annual *Sustainable Meetings Conference* draws a network of experienced meeting professionals who have expanded beyond green checklists into strategic sustainability action plans...
- **Develop Solutions:** Face the challenges of the rapidly changing global meetings and events industry head-on...Chart your course to positive results.

Since GMIC sought to use the game format as a stakeholder engagement tool, it was essential to integrate the **Game ON!** format into the conference design in a meaningful

way. In keeping with massively successful multi-player games like World of Warcraft—and most notably the emerging genre of [serious games](#) like [World Without Oil](#)—organizers knew that the game they designed would have to be a natural part of the conference universe, even as it largely shaped that universe.

This case study explores how the GMIC learning design team became the first to apply gamification to a meetings and events industry conference, and how the game was integrated into the overall conference design.

The Gamification Concept

Gamification is the use of game techniques to make non-game material more engaging. Several authors have explored applications of gaming principles in business settings, but none of them have sought to use game design to improve engagement and results at conferences and events.

With the **Game ON!** format, GMIC's 2011 Sustainable Meetings Conference introduced and field-tested a new method of disrupting and enhancing the traditional conference architecture, an attempt to increase both engagement and learning.

The Inspiration

[Total Engagement](#) by Byron Reeves and J. Leighton Read provided the initial inspiration for the new conference design. The initial concept presented to the GMIC Board of Directors for approval drew on several key ingredients the authors had distilled from their study of online gaming:

1. **Leaders:** In multi-player games, team leaders play a central role in making sense of situation for other players, developing key relationships on the team, providing a vision for the team's success, and turning that vision into reality through invention and execution.
2. **Avatars:** By operating through online "[avatars](#)," or personas (and, in some games, taking on different avatars at different times), players perform assigned roles that ultimately increase their engagement with the game.
3. **Narrative context:** A challenging, evocative story line is essential to any successful game. With the **Game ON!** design, GMIC sought to create a fictional conference challenge with a strong story line that would help participants develop a stronger understanding of the who, what, where, when, and why of their real-life sustainable business choices.
4. **Feedback:** Fundamentally, GMIC's annual conference is about changing behaviour by introducing more sustainable choices for meetings and events. By providing continuous feedback, effective game design supports those choices and reinforces the experience of change.

5. **Ranks/Reputation:** Online games create complex hierarchies in which tasks, privileges, and rewards are assigned by rank and reputation. A more basic way to reflect this feature in a two- or three-day conference is for teams to very quickly identify the members who have the knowledge, experience, and interest to undertake specific tasks, then divide up roles accordingly.
6. **Marketplace:** Marketplaces deliver constant feedback, in online games and in the real world, and feedback changes behaviour. In the **Game ON!** design, the virtual currency, tokens, and lives that gamers receive online were reflected in a real-time tally of team points, designed to drive engagement, competition, and learning.
7. **Competition:** A successful game needs rules to provide a sense of context and grounds for competition. Research indicates that people assigned to randomly generated teams automatically believe theirs is the better team, a phenomenon known as [in-group bias](#).
8. **Teams:** The experience of working in teams creates allegiance, a sense of obligation, and new social relationships that often extend past the lifetime of a game or event, encouraging a sense of community that can become a foundation for further success.
9. **Parallel Communication Channels:** Online games use a combination of visual, written, and spoken content and communication to build participant engagement. All three of these elements are already present in a face-to-face meeting, but **Game ON!** expanded on the standard experience. The iPad application (described later in this case study) became a dynamic new mechanism for parallel communication, while the combination of face-to-face and virtual audiences enabled participants to create new communication channels that game designers never anticipated.
10. **Time Pressure:** Countdowns and deadlines create a sense of excitement and urgency in online games. This dynamic is easily adapted onsite, since every conference has natural time limits.

The Game Universe: Creation and Assessment

Game ON! sought to apply these guiding principles in the following areas:

1. The Game
2. The Teams
3. The Case Study
4. Conference Content
5. The App
6. Pre-Conference Integration
7. Onsite Integration

8. Rhythm
9. The Whole Person
10. The Sustainable Learner

The Game

The Original Idea

The game was designed to take participants through one of several case studies that required them to map out a sustainable meeting that met a specified set of criteria and objectives. To complete their teams' case studies and earn points awarded through a custom-designed iPad app, participants had to attend and bring back key information from conference sessions, ask questions at sessions, offer solutions to sustainability challenges, meet exhibitors onsite, produce Twitter tweets or blog posts, and work with their teammates on the case study.

The purpose of the game was to immerse players in a sustainable event universe where they could immediately apply what they learned to a realistic situation. To do this effectively, they would need to rely on their team colleagues to relay and share information: with concurrent sessions scheduled throughout the conference, teams had to split up and coordinate efforts to complete their work. The expectation was that this experience would encourage trust, accountability, and teamwork. Teams would also need to apply decision-making and prioritization skills, particularly in light of the severe time limits built into the game.

The case study and the educational sessions provided the narrative context for the game. Although the teams were designed to maximize participation, team leaders were to play a role in helping their groups make sense of the reality and interpret incoming information as it became available. The feedback each team received through the iPad app provided an immediate, constantly changing picture of their rank relative to competing teams, a feature that contributed a great deal to the sense of competition that was part of the fabric of the game.

Creation of a marketplace, another idea that lends itself naturally to a conference with sponsors and exhibitors, was part of the original **Game ON!** concept. In an online game, a booming commerce emerges between players who take on different roles in the alternate universe, and success is often measured in part by gold coins and the prestigious symbols or artifacts they can buy. For **Game ON!**, major sponsors were invited to incorporate their information in the case studies with the promise of two very significant benefits: the added profile of having their sustainability messaging embedded in a key part of the conference program, and the (potentially much more valuable) strategic benefit of receiving participants' forthright, unvarnished reactions to that material.

For this year, access to the case studies was limited in scope to destination sponsors to see how exactly it could work.

The Reality

During the conference, the **Game ON!** motif generated a powerful sense of momentum and purpose, with many participants commenting that this was the best conference they had ever attended. Specific elements of the game, such as the case studies, the content, the iPad app, and the marketplace, are explored more fully below, but organizers generally concluded that the guiding concepts for the game format worked well.

There was a subset of participants who found the format intimidating, distracting, or less aligned with their learning needs than a more conventional conference program. An important takeaway from the **Game ON!** experience is the potential to design a conference that acknowledges this difference in participant preference in one of two ways:

- By creating an onsite format that is as immersive as possible for attendees who want to be a part of it, but offers other options for anyone who prefers not to participate.
- By creating a marketing value proposition so clear and targeted that the conference attracts few if any participants who object to the game format.

The Future

The initial **Game ON!** experiment was a strong starting point for future development. Some of the possibilities might include:

- Altering the structure to allow more individual play
- Scheduling more time for teams
- Scheduling more time outside the game
- Building in more options and opportunities for players and teams to earn points

Following on a suggestion from Samuel J. Smith, co-chair of Event Camp Twin Cities 2010, future editions of **Game ON!** could include a broader marketplace with game currency, enabling participants to purchase items that support the case study work.

For associations, in particular, there could also be considerable value in extending game play beyond the days that participants are onsite. By extending or re-creating the competitive challenge, organizations could drive chapter involvement, promote ongoing engagement with specific issues or educational content, offer year-round exposure with detailed metrics for premium sponsors, and create a platform for promoting the following year's conference or mid-year workshops or webinars.

The Teams

The Original Idea

The onsite teams were to be randomly generated, to create an immediate network for participants ("gamers" or "players") and enable them to share their skills and knowledge and quickly bond. For team leaders, GMIC set out to recruit respected sustainability leaders from within the meetings and events industry. In the original

design, groups were to be assigned onsite check-in times to introduce themselves, review their challenge/case study, and divide up roles and responsibilities within the team. The teams were to receive scheduled time to work together during the conference, then present their case study results at the end of the conference.

The Reality

The teams were randomly generated, to the extent that participants were assigned to teams as they registered for the conference. One unforeseen outcome was that players from the same organization who registered at the same time were assigned to the same team, so that the randomness of the selection was limited and a couple of teams began the game with disproportionate access to sustainable meetings expertise.

Recruiting team leaders was more difficult than expected. Prospective leaders were often reluctant to volunteer, perhaps because they were unclear of the role they would be expected to play.

The conference logistics team determined that the group check-in time would be unworkable, since team members were scheduled to arrive in Portland at different times. As a result, teams only had limited time to orientate themselves and become more familiar with the game and their case studies.

Rather than defining specific roles within the team structure, organizers left it to the teams to naturally develop their own roles for players.

Due to time constraints, the teams were not requested to present their cases at the end of the conference. While a roundup of all the group work would have given closure to the game process, a closing session with a dozen or more group reports would have had to be thought out and structured very deliberately to avoid creating a tedious, repetitive session that dissipated the energy in the room, rather than reinforcing it. Options might include crowd-sourced point scores for the most practical, doable, or gripping presentations, or facilitation/coaching to help guide the development of the final reports.

Team size was an issue. The average size of the teams was determined not only by the number of people attending conference, but by the eventual number of team leaders. This was an important issue, since teams in any setting can get too large to work effectively. As the team process progressed, there were inconsistencies of different sorts: while some groups were large enough that their work bogged down, others were small enough that their members felt they had insufficient resources to complete the case study. Some of this imbalance was driven by individual participants' decisions to opt out of the game. In at least one case, two teams responded to this challenge by pooling their resources and expertise, but still submitting separate responses to their case study.

Each of the teams was named for a different tree and, consistent with the principle of in-group bias, the imagery seemed to contribute to the atmosphere of friendly but intense competition around the game (so that Team Oak rebranded itself Team Mighty Oak).

The game judges declared themselves Team Driftwood, since their role required them to circulate among the players to check on their progress and answer questions.

An unexpected, but positive, consequence of having both face-to-face and virtual conference participants connected by technology, primarily Twitter, was that virtual attendees joined teams and became players. This spontaneous networking among participants increased engagement, both live and virtual, and also extended the teams' ability of to gather information. More technology made participation easier: some teams advertised online for virtual members, at least a couple used Skype to bring virtual members to their live discussions, and at least one group recruited a virtual participant who was a constant presence in the case study deliberations.

The teams also benefited from the improv training session that took place on the afternoon before the conference officially began. The session was added to the program toward the end of the planning period, but contributed to the tone and flow of the conference and should be considered more deliberately as a part of the preparation for future team exercises. The intent of the session, called The Sustainable Learner, was to create a greater collaborate capacity to encourage teamwork and building on ideas positively.

The role of the judges evolved more by experience and necessity than advance design. It was important to have a small leadership team available to answer questions, advise on process, and address unexpected questions or issues as they arose. (It was mostly amusing, and only a bit alarming, when participants occasionally tried to influence the judges or declare them honorary members of their teams.) The hands-on umpiring role provided useful background and continuity when the judges gathered on the last night of the conference to judge the case study responses, tally the points, and declare the winners.

The Future

The design and scheduling of future games should ensure that participants have an opportunity to check in, and teams have time for sufficient orientation, before the program begins. Addressing this gap would increase engagement and give participants greater confidence in their ability to participate in the game and complete their case studies together.

Team membership should be truly random, with lists generated in a way that does not group participants who register in sequence, then reviewed by game managers to prevent unexpected and unfair concentrations of sustainable meeting specialists in specific teams.

Problems with team size could be mitigated at both ends of the spectrum by

- Recruiting more team leaders, presumably by starting sooner and using the successful experience in 2011 as a reference point, and

- Minimizing attrition by offering alternate activities for conference participants who prefer not to join the game

Minimum and maximum team sizes should be specified in advance and respected in the final set-up of the teams.

Technological channels to promote virtual participation should be programmed into the event and announced in advance, so that technology becomes a player and a constant presence in the game. Options include live session feeds, Skype, access for virtual members of case study teams, and active integration of live and virtual players.

Organizers should consider whether to explicitly include (or even require) online recruitment of virtual team members in the rules of engagement for the game, or simply leave that decision to the resourcefulness of the groups (or the collective memory of participants who were involved in the 2011 conference). Listing the option explicitly would establish a more level playing field among more and less experienced players and social media practitioners. Leaving it out would be a way of rewarding teams more aggressively for their ideas, initiative, and experience. Depending on the structure of the game and the time available to complete it, the process could also allow for player trades among the teams.

By the time GMIC convenes the 2012 *Sustainable Meetings Conference*, there will likely be an opportunity and a need to adapt an onsite game to accommodate participants meeting simultaneously in different geographic locations. Effective communication and interaction among multiple nodes was pioneered by Event Camp Twin Cities in September 2010, and as this case study was being produced the authors understood that ECTC 2011 would likely involve seven or eight secondary nodes, compared to two last year. This hub-and-spoke model will become more prevalent—it will ultimately be essential—as meetings attempt to cope with the combined sustainability challenges of decarbonization and rising oil prices. GMIC will make a significant contribution to the overlapping fields of meeting design and gamification if it can demonstrate an affordable, engaging game format that brings multiple sites together.

The Case Study

The Original Idea

Early in the design process, there was some possibility that GMIC would invite other members of the Convention Industry Council (CIC) for permission to use their upcoming conferences as model case studies, thereby bringing an element of reality to the exercise and delivering value to CIC member organizations. The alternative was to produce fictitious case studies, each of which would present a reasonable sustainability meeting challenge and incorporate an appropriate mix of environmental, economic and/or social elements. Either way, the case studies would then be aligned with conference content, so players could attend sessions and apply what they learned to the case study.

The Reality

The game was ultimately based on six fictional case studies. The format made it easier to design specific sustainability challenges and detailed information from sponsors into the cases. The drawback was that players were not working on real-life challenges.

The case studies included:

- An annual conference that was under pressure to reduce costs, increase revenues, and report more effectively on environmental impact
- A meeting of an international corporation that had identified corporate social responsibility (CSR) as one of its top three priorities and had decided to document the sustainability of its meetings program as part of its Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) sustainability report
- A gathering of a North American association of professional accountants whose new financial reporting standard called for closer scrutiny of environmental costs
- An international oil and gas exploration company that wanted its conference to reflect its growing commitment to CSR and community development
- A launch meeting for a fine foods company that was repositioning itself to take advantage of a growing sustainability movement and needed a meeting format that would help it walk the talk.
- A promotional products expo facing significant economic pressure, combined with heightened scrutiny around CSR issues.

The case studies generally provided the right tone and level of detail to help participants engage without overwhelming them with detail.

The Future

Using real case studies would deliver value to the organizations that submitted them and give participants a sense that their work had real-world value. However, the link back to real organizations and events would leave designers with less control in shaping the cases to the specific challenges they want participants to address, aligning case study content with the conference program, and incorporating data from sponsors.

Conference Content

The Original Idea

In past years, the design of GMIC's annual conference had emphasized the need to meet meeting professionals' training and education needs at different points along the sustainable meetings continuum (2009), and to provide extensive content in support of the sustainable meeting standards developed by the CIC Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX) and ASTM International. For 2011, the conference programs committee was asked to develop a format with fewer sessions but more opportunity to go "beyond basics" to real-time application. The program was ultimately crafted to deliver specific knowledge that supported the nine APEX/ ASTM standards (destination,

accommodation, venue selection, food and beverage, communications, exhibitions, transportation, on-site office, and audio-visual), then support that learning with hands-on application through the case study.

Conference content was also designed to encompass a larger sustainability aspect, focusing not just on the environmental impacts of meeting logistics but on the economic and social dimensions of sustainability.

To meet this mix of expectations, the program committee agreed to hand-pick suitable speakers and learning facilitators to deliver the needed information, rather than defaulting to a call for speakers that would minimize the scope for this kind of customization.

The designers originally proposed to use a series of “curveballs” to introduce an element of reality -- as well as reality TV – to the game. In the original scenario, each refreshment break was set up as a Curveball Café, where team leaders would each be handed a plain envelope that might contain an additional sustainability challenge to incorporate into their case study.

The Reality

The conference content aligned relatively well with the nine APEX category without calling explicit attention to the fact. Each case study included a list of relevant sessions that would help teams solve the case effectively. Hand-selecting speakers was an effective method of tailoring content, but preferred speakers were not available and some sessions changed focus as a result.

Effective speaker briefing is a perennial problem, particularly for volunteer committees, and the **Game ON!** team was not immune to the challenge. Although speakers were sent advance copies of the case studies and asked to incorporate relevant content in their presentations, the uptake was inevitably inconsistent. And the law of (relatively) large numbers dictated that at least a handful of participants would suspect that at least a couple of presenters had veered away from educational content, in favour of veiled commercials for their products or services. Neither of these problems is uncommon in the design and delivery of conference programs.

The Curveball Café evolved into two curveballs that were delivered via the team iPad application. While some teams incorporated the curveballs into their cases, others chose to ignore them.

The Future

Apart from aligning the content behind a future version of **Game ON!** with GMIC’s educational priorities and conference objectives for that year, it may be possible to integrate the game format more fully with program development by:

- Designing the shell of the case study earlier in the program planning process, so that session topics can be matched more specifically to the game challenge

- Briefing speakers more fully and deliberately on the game format, and on the specific areas contestants will be looking to them to cover in their sessions, so that session learning objectives are clearly aligned with the overall program and more fully reflected in actual presentations
- Using curveballs to emphasize some of the emerging strategic sustainability issues (peak oil, corporate social responsibility, ethics, climate change) on GMIC's content and policy agenda

Even if timing is a challenge, the 2012 design team should make best efforts to insist that speakers attend a pre-conference webinar, in which organizers explain the game concept and convey expectations for educational sessions, including alignment of content with the case studies and special caution to avoid product or service promotions in the guise of educational content.

The App

The Original Idea

Although the **Game ON!** iPad application was not a part of the original concept presented to the GMIC Board, it became a central feature that added to the intensity and creativity of the game experience for most participants.

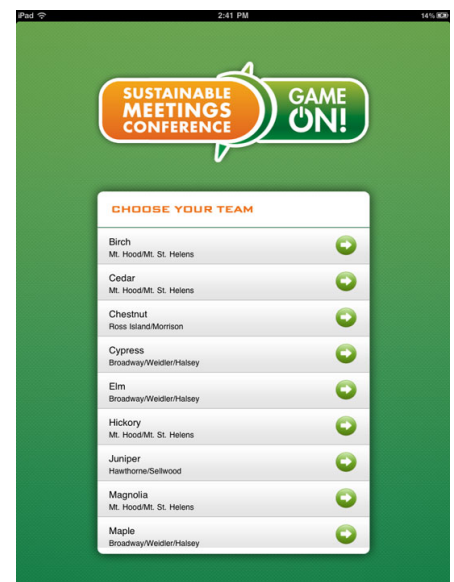
The Reality

When team leaders checked in at registration on the Sunday afternoon or Monday morning of the conference, they each received a Team iPad and a team leader ribbon for their name tag. They were also asked to sign a disclaimer/release form before claiming their devices. The iPads were pre-loaded with:

- A customized iPad application developed by QuickMobile, a mobile solutions firm based in Vancouver
- The conference program
- The room assignments for their team meetingsinks to profile information on the five sponsoring destinations
- The case study response template

After selecting their teams by name, the team leaders could use the iPad app to navigate through:

- **Venue:** A link to the Portland Doubletree layout, so attendees can get a visual on where sessions will take place
- **Portland Guide:** A link to information on local attractions, restaurants, public transportation, and other destination details



- **Speakers:** A link to profiles and photos for each speaker
- **Sponsors:** A link to sponsors' logos, company profiles, sponsor levels, and websites
- **APEX:** A link to a short summary of the APEX standards
- **Facebook:** A link to Facebook

In the game handbook, team leaders were asked to:

- Read their case studies in advance and familiarize themselves with the details
- Meet their teams to facilitate introductions and give everyone an overview of the case study, the case study template, and the points system
- Encourage team members to divide tasks so that someone from the group attends every session
- Manage the Team iPad
- Guide the team through the stages of the game, including
 - Attending sessions and reporting back
 - Visiting exhibitor tables
 - Participating in the community service activity
 - Using social media
 - Analysing the team's travel footprint
 - Tracking leader board announcements
 - Responding to curveballs
 - Filling out the case study template during team meetings.



The iPad application was a powerful addition to the **Game ON!** design. It tied the concept together and gave a visual and participatory link to the game through the leader board, case studies, and sponsor content. Moreover, by replacing a process of tracking points by hand that would have become cumbersome for the teams, the app became an essential component of a successful game experience.

The Future

The introduction of a new software application, operating on a relatively new hardware platform, raised the stakes on a pre-conference orientation session that not all team

leaders were available to attend. Even after participating in the orientation, some of the leaders were nervous about their ability to integrate the technology and optimize their teams' work. After the conference, one team leader recalled that:

For the technically uninitiated like me who had never actually seen an iPad, overwhelming fear would be a kind way to describe the look on the faces of the "over 40" captains as we came to grips with the reality of our obvious technological ignorance and resulting hurdles...Sitting directly between us and being able to even discuss our teams' sustainability obstacles was our first game-changing decision: choose between sleep or 'cramming' all night to learn what younger, tech-savvy captains already knew and were exploiting before we'd even left our orientation session.

In the end, "the use of the tool was brilliant...In just two days, it helped us take teams of people who in most cases had never had any prior contact with each other, and communicate and collaborative in ways we'd never suspected." But future games should be set up to anticipate and mitigate the initial extreme nervousness that some team leaders experienced—particularly if GMIC hopes to attract a larger number of team leaders, as suggested elsewhere in this case study.

Although the iPad application was a bonus for the majority of the audience, some participants saw it as a distraction or an annoyance. The availability of game points for tweeting or writing blog posts from the team iPads led to some reports of team members diving across each other to get their hands on the electronic device, or prioritizing social media commentary to the detriment of session content. Future game designs could correct these dynamics by adjusting the point balance between live and online game elements, and by assigning credit to tweets and blog posts from team members' personal mobile devices.

Pre-Conference Integration: Marketing Through Peers

The Original Idea

Integration is an important part of the effort to create an immersive alternate "universe" through gamification. Most emerging theory on gamification focuses on the intense sense of community that forms in a game environment and seeks to apply that momentum, loyalty, and sense of purpose to real-world tasks. **Game ON!** pointed to the opportunity for meetings and associations to extend the concept by using a game to reinforce and build on pre-existing networks, intensify them onsite, then continue the interaction beyond the days onsite. This flow is consistent with current [efforts within the meetings industry](#) to position face-to-face events as part of a year-round dialogue for participants and their organizations.

Before the conference, organizers attempted to treat key people attending the conference as [opinion leaders](#) for marketing purposes. Within GMIC, as in any professional community or community of interest, certain people have large networks, and there has

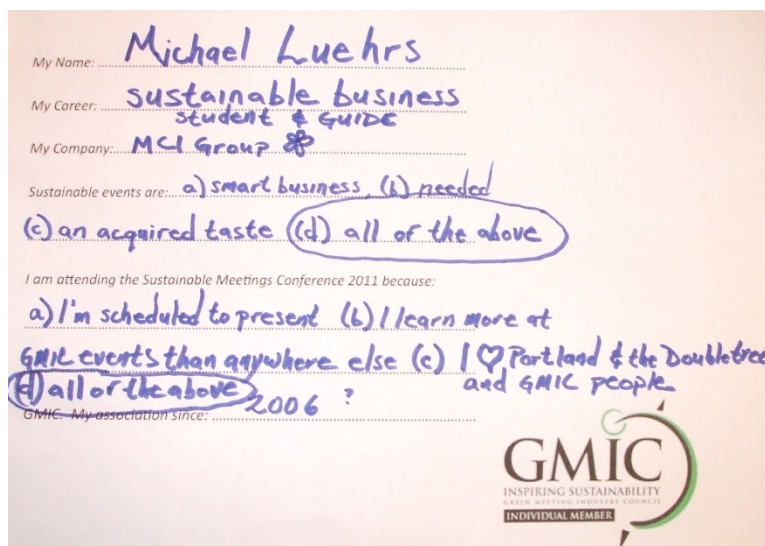
been [some belief within meetings and events](#) that their participation might act as a lightning rod for others to participate (and, often, make the decision to attend at the last minute). Specific individuals associated with GMIC and the sustainable meetings movement, including potential team leaders, were identified and asked if they would participate in this marketing strategy.

Two examples of this type of marketing were the “personal ad” and the “American-Express-type” ad. An example of a proposed personal ad, to be accompanied by a photograph, was:

Creative life-long learner who can immediately apply unique concepts to real-world situations, for a short-term professional relationship (February 20 – 23, 2011) with sustainability practitioner with experience in standards and sustainable events. Apply at (website for conference registration)

The Reality

This marketing concept was introduced via social media platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn, and was not very effective, possibly because distribution began very late. An example of an actual American-Express style ad on the Facebook site was:



My Name: Michael Luehrs
 My Career: sustainable business student & guide
 My Company: MCI Group
 Sustainable events are: a) smart business, (b) needed
 (c) an acquired taste (d) all of the above
 I am attending the Sustainable Meetings Conference 2011 because:
 a) I'm scheduled to present (b) I learn more at GMIC events than anywhere else (c) I love Portland & the Doubletree and GMIC people
 (d) all of the above 2006 ?
 GMIC - My association since: _____
 GMIC INSPIRING SUSTAINABILITY GREAT WESTERN INDUSTRIES COUNCIL INDIVIDUAL MEMBER

The Future

If opinion leader marketing begins at least four months before the conference, there will be more opportunity to post a continuing sequence of social media messages, allow time for potential new registrants to respond, and build visible momentum as more and more community leaders sign up for the conference and make their intentions known via social media. To more fully tap the potential of this two-step communications flow, organizers should strongly encourage participants to telegraph their participation in the conference to their own social media contacts and help announce and promote the

conference via specific Twitter hashtags, possibly by rewarding their teams with game points or currency for contributing to the pre-conference buzz.

If marketing begins at least six months out, there will be sufficient time to research a wider range of social media sites and find prospective participants, including those who may be hearing about the conference for the first time, wherever they congregate.

Onsite Integration: Involving Sponsors in the Game

The Original Idea

Involving sponsors and, to some degree, exhibitors in the game was seen as an important form of onsite integration, and the primary means of building a marketplace into the first application of **Game ON!** concept. The limited appeal and effectiveness of traditional trade shows is becoming an urgent discussion point within the meetings and events industry, and sustainable meeting practitioners are also concerned about the large environmental footprint that trade shows create through shipping and merchandising, not to mention the waste left behind at the end of a standard show. GMIC sought to integrate key sponsors into the case studies in a way that increased the sponsors' exposure onsite, thereby creating a new and innovative revenue opportunity for the association.

The case studies were written specifically around sponsoring destinations, with each of the sponsors providing profile information on hotels, other venues, and local attractions for inclusion in the iPad app. The intent was to deliver a dual benefit: Beyond conveying promotional messages to participants, sponsors could glean valuable strategic intelligence from the teams' decisions as they completed the case study, and from their positive *and* critical assessments of the destinations' sustainability strengths and limitations.

The Reality

The integration of sponsors was a qualified success, with five destinations signing on as sponsors. Selling the concept was a challenge, since neither the sponsorship team within the logistics firm nor the destinations had any idea of what the opportunity would look like in practice. In the end, large numbers of conference attendees were driven to the sponsors' sites for an in-depth tour of their information, suggesting a strong return on the sponsors' investment.

In early discussions within the design team, there was some hope that sponsors would see their participation in the case study as a form of free focus group, as well as a promotional opportunity. At the outer edge of this characterization, it would have made sense for sponsors to welcome any negative feedback along with the positive if it enabled them to hone the substance, as well as the presentation, of their sustainability credentials. However, this idea met with resistance when the conference planning team tried to introduce it to prospective sponsors. For future programs, organizers should

encourage prospective sponsors to embrace of forthright feedback from a key target audience, possibly using actual feedback from 2011 (with names and identifiers removed) to illustrate the value.

The Future

Creating an actual marketplace with limited amounts of currency to buy items as needed would add immediacy and edge to the decision-making and prioritization of the game, while providing a basis for teams to engage more deeply with sponsors and exhibitors. As well, more parties would get greater impact from the sponsors' participation if the program included dedicated time for groups to meet the sponsors and interview them on the value they each bring to the case study.

Rhythm

The Original Idea

The design team wanted to create a different rhythm based on effective learning and networking strategies. Knowing that [adult learners tend to acquire knowledge more effectively](#) in shorter spans than the typical one-hour or longer conference session, the team suggested a rhythm that consisted of 30 minutes from the presenter, 15 minutes for questions and discussion, and 45 minutes for group application. With white space and group interaction built in, players would have had the opportunity assimilate and apply learning throughout the conference.

The Reality

Sessions were generally scheduled for 45 minutes, but since speakers and facilitators were accustomed to longer, less interactive sessions, the new format called for a good deal of adaptation. As well, since the teams were expected to assign individual members to different breakout topics, there was no opportunity for them to work together during the educational sessions.

As program development progressed, GMIC leadership became concerned that more sessions would be needed to deliver value for participants' money, so the 45-minute time slots allocated for group reflection were compressed into two short team sessions a day.

To some degree, the three days of the conference each had their own timing, breaking up a typical repetitive conference program. For example, the second day incorporated longer, offsite, and hands-on sessions.

While it was valuable to dissect and reconstitute the standard conference day in this way, the exercise revealed just how easy it is to run afoul of expectations when a program runs counter to the entrenched or "expected" model for a meeting:

- Some participants commented that they felt rushed by the shorter sessions, or short-changed by the missed opportunity to delve more deeply into specific topics.
- At least some of the panels responded to a shorter session slot by trying to fit more material into the available time, with the result that content was crunched and there was little or no time for audience discussion or interaction.

The Future

The shift in the conference program was a worthy attempt, providing a foundation on which GMIC should build in future years. However, to avoid dissonance around a program design that is quite different from the norm, future organizers should:

- Communicate the structure of the conference from the very beginning, providing participants with a clear explanation of how the program was designed and why
- Offer a more obvious mix of session timing, with shorter and longer sessions interspersed
- Offer a more deliberate mix of traditional and unconventional formats—and make sure speakers have a clear understanding of (and clearly buy in to) the set-up for their individual sessions

The Whole Person and the Sustainable Learner

The Original Idea

The designers wanted to deliver a program where participants could apply sustainable strategies to their conference selves and learn more sustainably. Conferences can be draining, with long days, frequent interaction with others, and sometimes unhealthy foods. Several members of the design team felt strongly about adding sustainable human elements to the conference, including yoga, white space, and good nutrition delivered with local and fresh ingredients. They discussed the possibility of introducing partner tour itinerary suggestions and childcare as people-oriented features that could become non-traditional opportunities for sponsors.

Organizers also hoped to help participants prepare for an optimal learning experience through pre-conference sessions or materials, by using a variety of media during the event to cater to different learning styles, and through a post-conference strategy to facilitate application of what was learned.

The Reality

The conference incorporated yoga each morning. The food was a highlight of the event, with the chef at the hotel presenting fresh, sustainable and nutritious food for breakfast, breaks and lunch. A wildly successful pre-conference session, The Sustainable Learner, gave participants an introduction to improvisation skills that would help them become better team players during the conference. However, there was no opportunity to

organize the pre- and post-conference sessions that the design team originally envisioned.

The Future

This idea, although not fully actualized at the 2011 conference, has the potential to engage players with both pre-and-post event activities and education.

Design Team Structure

The unique structure of the design team created a unique opportunity to test, critique, and improve the conference concept before it was actually introduced.

- A *collaboration team* began by developing the basic concept, using a “[yes, and...](#)” strategy drawn from improv to consider and incorporate ideas.
- A secondary *collision team* took the collaboration team’s work and used constructive criticism to improve on it, in the process solidifying the design and making it a better fit for a meetings and events industry audience.
- The two teams then merged into the final *learning design team* to lead content development and hand-pick the appropriate facilitators and subject specialists for each session.

The mission of the design team was to:

...design and implement sustainability education using a total engagement concept. The team will encourage sustainability learning at the event through attendee immersion, seeking to create achievement, exploration and networking in a semi-competitive environment. We seek to create transformational change in attendee behaviour by giving learning purpose and immediate application.

The objectives that flowed from this mission were to:

- *Change the behaviour* of attendees to create more sustainable actions in their future work
- *Enhance and extend* attendees’ personal/professional networks
- *Create a compelling event* that people will want to attend

The Bottom Line: Measuring Results Against Objectives

Onsite User Data

At the end of the conference, QuickMobile reported the following user statistics for the iPad application and associated website:

Mobile App

- 3,830 Twitter tweets
- 20,362 page views through the team iPads
- 6,779 page views on specific app pages
- 694 case study views
- 262 visits to the mileage survey

QuickMobile's Trevor Roald commented that this volume was a phenomenal result for 15 mobile devices, indicating "clear engagement" on the part of the teams.

Website

- 414 unique visitors, indicating strong interest in the conference beyond participants onsite
- 2,259 unique visits, an "amazing ratio" that demonstrated a highly engaged user base
- 13,583 page views
- Average site visit length of 8 minutes, 41 seconds, considered a very long time for a visitor to spend on a website
- 94.91% direct traffic

Evaluation Survey Results

Evaluation results reported in the month after the conference reinforce the major findings of this case study, as well as the informal comments collected while participants were onsite: **Game ON!** was an exciting and worthy first attempt to apply game theory to a face-to-face meeting, but would benefit from further development and refinement at future events.

- Participants expressed reasonable satisfaction (3.5 or higher on a 1-5 scale) with the engagement and networking opportunities in case study teams and the performance of their team leaders. They were less satisfied with the size of their teams and the advance information they received on the game concept.
- In their work on the case study, participants generally found the iPads easy to use, and they appreciated the wide range of opportunities to collect team points during the game. They were less satisfied with their teams' case study responses, the level of difficulty of their case studies, and the time they received to complete their projects. The case study's ultimate impact in preparing participants to solve their own events' sustainability problems received a 2.9 rating on a 1-5 scale.
- By a wide majority, participants agreed that GMIC should use the game design in future conferences.

Evaluation Comments

The following overall assessment was gleaned from participant interviews during the conference a post-event analysis by the GMIC Board.

Overall Concept and Design

- The team concept fostered complete participation and virtual integration through a meeting model that combined learning, networking, and fun.
- The game pushed the boundaries on the number of people who could collaborate over a short time span.
- The game format could be used to engage volunteers before the conference, make content development more transparent, and incorporate a wider pool of expertise and ideas in the conference objectives and program.
- Scheduled check-ins throughout the game would have given the judges a central role in tracking teams' progress and helping teams understand the game where necessary. Setting up the case study in sections would be consistent with the skill levels in online games, and would create automatic checkpoints to ensure that groups have acquired basic knowledge or information before proceedings to subsequent stages. A role equivalent to the "Driftwood" team should be built into any future game.
- Some participants felt the intensity of the game and the overall conference program left them with insufficient down time, networking opportunities, and time for onsite sales meetings. The game format left insufficient networking time for some exhibitors.
- The program should include time for destination representatives to make their cases and field questions. Ideally, case study teams should attend the briefings in clusters of four or five groups, so that destinations don't have to present the same content a 15 or more times.
- At least one complete agenda slot should be reallocated from content presentations to interaction within the case study teams.
- While some interview participants suggested limiting the game to a single day, others saw great value in connecting the case study with breakout session content presented throughout the conference.
- During the closing session of the conference, the case study winners could have been announced with more excitement and flair.
- A small number of participants commented that they plan meetings all the time, and saw little value in participating in a case study that required them to plan another one. Although the majority of post-conference survey respondents encouraged GMIC to incorporate game design in future annual meetings, the

ideal program would include programming and activities for participants who prefer not to participate in the game.

Team Structure and Function

- Team assignments were not as random as organizers intended. One solution would be to keep GMIC Board members out of the random selection, then assign them strategically after most participants have been assigned.
- Teams lost some of their participants on the second day of the game.
- A dedicated online work space for each case study team might have made it easier for the groups to share and develop ideas. A student or an intern could have been engaged to monitor and attach points to any online traffic that originated outside the team iPad.
- Case study groups would have needed much more time to complete specific tasks with adequate discussion, deliberation, and engagement.
- In some groups, the need to share a single team iPad led to extensive sharing and interaction. In others, a small number of players controlled the device and therefore played a more dominant role in the game process.
- The reporting template for the game should prompt each group to reach a clear decision on venue selection, and template data should be exportable to a single MS Excel tab to facilitate comparisons and scoring.
- If destination representatives are assigned to individual case study teams, it must be with the clear understanding that they're there to participate, not to promote their own communities. This is particularly important if one group includes representatives of two or more competing destinations.

Game Rules and Case Study

- The rules of the game should have been communicated more effectively before the conference.
- Review criteria for the case studies should be established and published in advance of the conference.
- If team roles and rosters were published in advance, participants would have the option of signing up in advance for specific tasks.
- Each case study team should be led by a subject matter expert with at least basic facilitation skills.
- The flow of the game could have been adjusted by shifting the balance of points between case study content and social media activity.
- The case studies did not provide enough statistical data from the destinations.

Social Media Component

- Twitter activity during the conference demonstrated participant engagement and helped build the conference and GMIC brand, but was identified as a distraction for some participants.
- Routing all Twitter traffic through the team iPads limited the opportunity for dialogue and retweets.
- While some participants saw the points attached to Twitter traffic as a great prompt for wider dialogue and engagement, others recalled live conversations that had been interrupted in mid-sentence to accommodate Twitter activity. It will be important to acknowledge and reflect this diversity of experience in future game designs.

Key Takeaways: The Future of Gamification at Conferences

1. Game organizers should be clear about the behaviours or knowledge they want to reinforce. Those objectives become the focus of the game design.
2. Successful game design depends on a good knowledge of the target audience. In a game environment, demographics and widely held beliefs merge with psychological and physiological factors to determine level of engagement.
3. Technology is a true enabler of conference gamification. Technology allows individuals to participate, collaborate, and track results in ways that would not otherwise be possible.
4. Leaders are important to the success of the game. Team leaders should be competent, knowledgeable, and comfortable leading a team, but willing to listen to ideas and adapt to new situations.
5. Everyone involved with an onsite game should be prepared for anything. The motto of the onsite team, quoting Samuel J. Smith of Event Camp Twin Cities, was: "Experimentation is our get-out-of-jail free card. If we weren't having tech hiccups, we wouldn't be innovating."

Appendix I: Case Studies

GMIC Sustainable Meetings Conference Case Study #1

Organization: International Society of Software Engineers (ISSE)

Vision Statement: We bring people together through technology to create a better world.

About the organization: The International Society of Software Engineers (ISSE) has a membership of 40,000 (60% professional software engineers, 20% students and 20% industry suppliers). It is based in San Francisco, California, with members in 50 countries globally. Members are required to attend a certain number of education sessions per year to keep their certification valid. There is one annual members-only conference, which typically attracts 2500 people over a three-day period. Attendees pay a registration fee as well as all of their own transportation and accommodation. They typically come from the following areas:

REGION	Conference Attendees	Total Members in Region	% of Members from the Region Attending Conference
United States	1,500	12,000	12.5%
Other North America, including Canada and Mexico	200	2,000	10%
India	200	8,000	2.5%
Europe	200	8,000	2.5%
Asia	200	7,000	2.9%
Middle East	200	3,000	6.7%
TOTAL	2,500	40,000	6.3%

Traditionally, the event has begun on a Friday and ended on a Sunday, with three days of education, one evening event, and two general sessions, one to begin the event, and one to end it.

This year, the meeting planning team for ISSE has been asked to help them do the following:

1. Reduce costs and/or increase revenue. As with many other organizations, ISSE is feeling the pinch of the global recession. They want costs reduced not only for ISSE itself, but for the members who will be attending the event. At the same time, they want to know if there are strategies they can use to increase the revenue they receive from the event.

*Elizabeth Valestuk Henderson, Chief Sustainability Strategist, Meeting Change
Mitchell Beer, President, The Conference Publishers Inc.*

2. Report on the environmental impact of the meeting. ISSE has not done this before, but several important member companies, including Microsoft, have asked about this as they themselves report on their own events. ISSE wants to create a baseline from which they can measure the relative impact of future events, and report back to their membership.
3. Communicate their efforts to the member companies. Since the impetus for change was member companies, ISSE wants to ensure that their membership knows what they are trying to do. Management wants a plan that will reach the maximum number of members and other stakeholders, but they are not certain exactly who those stakeholders are and the best way to reach them.

The ISSE executive has made it clear that they are willing to consider change in everything to do with the meeting structure. The ISSE executive has given you a shortlist of cities to consider. They are, in alphabetical order:

- Denver, Colorado
- Portland, Oregon
- Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

For each, they want a short summary of the pros and cons of holding the event in that destination and your final recommendations on the top three. They have set up a folder of information submitted by each city for you to review.

ISSE hired a consultant to help focus you on the task. The consultant has created a list of things for you to consider in making your recommendations on destination and a strategy to help meet the objectives ISSE has given to you above:

1. Create a name and a mission statement for your sustainable events team. What makes you excited about creating sustainable events?
2. What possible strategies can you use to reduce the costs of the conference for ISSE?
3. How can you potentially reduce the costs for people to attend? Specifically, ISSE is concerned that the conference has historically had membership retention challenges and poor conference attendance from students and participants from outside of North America, so have tried to keep registration fees low and select mid-range hotels.
4. What guidelines or other tools can you use to report the impacts of your event?
5. What specific sustainable meeting elements will you measure, in order to create a baseline for future events? They should at a minimum consider these elements:
 - a. Travel
 - b. Budget
 - c. Waste streams

d. Community impact

6. How will you communicate your efforts, and to whom?
7. What changes do you recommend to the traditional meeting structure to make it more sustainable?
8. How are you upholding the vision of ISSE in your event?

To help you create a sustainable event, ISSE has sent you and your team to the GMIC Sustainable Events Conference. They have highlighted a number of important sessions to help you create your own sustainable events plan, and suggest that you send part of your team to each session to most effectively cover the material. Sessions they have highlighted include:

- The Sustainable Team Player
- General Session: Business Dimensions of Sustainability
- Setting Sustainability Objectives and Goals
- Sustainable Destinations and Venues
- Sustainability and the Art of Storytelling
- Community Outreach and Strategic CSR
- It's Complicated: Juggling Your Event Portfolio to Integrate Virtual Technologies, Face-to-Face and Hybrid to Your Sustainability Strategy
- Tools and Standards
- Measure Up
- Tell it to the CFO: Sustainable Pricing Strategies

ISSE Fee Structures

Membership Fees (in USD):

- Students: \$100/Year
- Professionals: \$400/Year
- Suppliers: \$400/Year

Conference Registration Fees:

- Full Conference: \$500
- Conference without social events: \$350
- Social events only: \$150

Additional Information

- Of the out-of-town conference attendees, only 60% are booking rooms at the conference hotel. In recent years, ISSE has paid attrition fees due to this issue. Of

those booking elsewhere, 50% are finding more affordable rooms, and the remainder are booking higher-end hotels.

- The conference attendees are 60% professionals, 30% suppliers and 10% students. All of the students and most of the professionals are registering for the conference without social events. Most of the suppliers are registering for the social events only. Although most professionals would be willing to pay more to receive the certification credits, they are not interested in the social events. Suppliers would be willing to pay significantly more for the social events, but do not perceive value in participating in the educational program.
- Fixed costs for running the conference are \$25,000. Variable costs for the conference are \$200/person and for the social events are \$100/person.

GMIC Sustainable Events Conference Case Study #2

Organization: CodEx International

Vision Statement: Taking care of business through smart logistics. We deliver!

About the organization: CodEx International has offices globally. Headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, the company has a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program that is one of the three top priorities for its CEO. It excels at moving cargo globally, and has become well-known for small changes to its logistics that have saved the company millions of dollars as well as saved time, and made the work environment safer for its global employees. The events team reports to the VP of Communications. She has just been asked to provide a report on the sustainability of their global corporate events that they can include in their Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) sustainability report, and is panicked because they have not been measuring this kind of thing. She doesn't know where to start. She is relieved, however, that she has been given six months to create her first report. She has started by sending you and your events team to the GMIC Sustainable Events Conference, with the following objectives:

1. Discover what other organizations use to measure and report their sustainable events. Are there guidelines or standards that can be used?
2. Are there any core skills or knowledge that CodEx has that can help us create more sustainable events?
3. How can we use our supply chain to make our events more sustainable? What information do we need to assess the supply chain?
4. Come back with an outline of how to plan the next event using sustainable concepts. You have been given a shortlist of cities to consider, including (in alphabetical order):
 - a. Denver, Colorado
 - b. Las Vegas, Nevada
 - c. Portland, Oregon

- d. Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- e. Vancouver, BC, Canada

The event is for the global sales team. For this event, CodEx flies in 1500 of their top sales managers for education and motivational sessions, typically in June, July or August, as the busiest time for freight is typically fall-winter-spring. They come from all over the globe, with 500 coming from North America (Canada, Mexico and the United States), 500 from Europe, 300 from Asia and 200 from the Middle East.

North America	500
<i>US/Canada East</i>	<i>150</i>
<i>US/Canada Central</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>US/Canada West</i>	<i>200</i>
<i>Mexico</i>	<i>50</i>
Europe	500
Asia	300
Middle East	200

In addition to two days of conference time, the group is usually given an extra two days in the location. This time has in the past used as “incentive”, with the group given the choice of time at a spa, theatre or other venue. Last year, however, one group chose to spend one of their days on a community service event, and it was well received. CodEx pays all costs of the event.

In addition to the above objectives, your VP has asked that you do the following:

1. Create a name and a mission statement for your sustainable events team. What makes you excited about creating sustainable events?
2. Create three sustainable event objectives for the Global Sales Event.
3. Using these objectives, assess the above cities. What are the pros and cons of each city? What are your top three, and why?
4. What guidelines or other tools can you use to report the impacts of your event?
5. What specific sustainable meeting elements will you measure, in order to create a baseline for future events? They should at a minimum consider these elements:
 - a. Travel
 - b. Budget
 - c. Waste streams

d. Community impact

6. What changes do you recommend to the traditional meeting structure to make it more sustainable?
7. How can you use the core skills of CodEx to help make the event more sustainable?
8. Do you recommend expanding the community service project? If so, what are your recommendations for this program?

To help you create a sustainable event, your VP has highlighted a number of important sessions to help you create your own sustainable events plan, and suggest that you send part of your team to each session to most effectively cover the material. Highlighted sessions include:

- The Sustainable Team Player
- General Session: Business Dimensions of Sustainability
- Setting Sustainability Objectives and Goals
- Sustainable Destinations and Venues
- Supply and Demand: Sustainable Supply Chains
- Community Outreach and Strategic CSR
- Tools and Standards
- Measure Up

GMIC Sustainable Events Conference Case Study #3

Organization: Association of Professional Accountants

Mission: We make it count for you.

About the organization: The Association of Professional Accountants is a North American association, based in Ottawa, Canada, with members from Canada, Mexico and the United States. It has roughly 5,000 members who meet twice a year for education sessions. This year, they are meeting to discuss the 2011 implementation of the new International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). Part of the new standards is increased scrutiny of environmental costs and their inclusion on financial statements such as the balance sheet and annual reports.

The semi-annual events generate approximately \$300,000/year, representing 40% of the operating revenue for the association and so are an important part of their operations. This year, the events team has been asked to cut costs and increase revenue if possible. Attendees pay a registration fee and all expenses related to their travel, including air and hotel. Typically, each meeting attracts about 1200 attendees, the vast majority of whom are from Canada, the US and Mexico. Attendance at the meeting follows the same distribution as the membership: the majority of these – 50% -- are from eastern cities

such as Ottawa, Toronto, Washington, D.C. and Boston. The remainder are from various regions, representing cities such as Mexico City, Atlanta (south), San Francisco (west), Chicago (central), Denver (Central) and Calgary (west).

Because of the environmental focus of the new IFRS, the team has been asked to reduce the environmental footprint of the event and report back out. Your boss has investigated, and he has learned that there are several new sustainable event standards and reporting guidelines available to use. He has sent you to the GMIC Sustainable Events Conference to learn more about the standards and about sustainable events in general.

He has requested that you come back to the office ready to implement the next event (in June) as sustainably as possible. He has the following objectives:

1. Using the new sustainable event standards, decide on a sustainable destination for the June, and possibly the November, event. You have been given a shortlist of cities to consider, including (in alphabetical order):
 - a. Denver, Colorado
 - b. Las Vegas, Nevada
 - c. Toronto, Ontario, Canada
2. Come back prepared to recommend five areas that the team can measure and report on. He feels that given the mission, “We make it count for you”, the executive team will appreciate this.
3. Outline several areas where sustainable efforts can help cut costs and/or improve operational efficiency.

In addition to the above objectives, your VP has asked that you do the following:

1. Create a name and a mission statement for your sustainable events team. What makes you excited about creating sustainable events?
2. Create three sustainable event objectives for the June event, focusing on the “triple bottom line” of people, planet and profit.
3. Using these objectives, assess the above cities. What are the pros and cons of each city?
4. What guidelines or other tools can you use to report the impacts of your event?
5. What specific sustainable meeting elements will you measure, in order to create a baseline for future events? They should at a minimum consider these elements:
 - a. Travel
 - b. Budget
 - c. Waste streams
 - d. Community impact

6. What changes do you recommend to the traditional meeting structure to make it more sustainable?

To help you create a sustainable event, your boss has highlighted a number of important sessions to help you create your own sustainable events plan, and suggest that you send part of your team to each session to most effectively cover the material. Highlighted sessions include:

- The Sustainable Team Player
- General Session: Business Dimensions of Sustainability
- Setting Sustainability Objectives and Goals
- Sustainable Destinations and Venues
- Good Food: Boost Quality and Lower Costs with Local Sourcing
- Community Outreach and Strategic CSR
- Tell it to the CFO: Sustainable Pricing Strategies
- Tools and Standards
- Measure Up, parts 1 and 2

APA Fee Structures

Membership Fees (in USD):

- Students: \$100/Year (10% of members)
- Professionals: \$400/Year (70% of members)
- Suppliers: \$400/Year (20% of members)

Conference Registration Fees:

- Full Conference: \$500
- Conference without social events: \$350
- Social events only: \$150

Additional Information

- Of the out-of-town conference attendees, only 60% are booking rooms at the conference hotel. In recent years, APA has paid attrition fees due to this issue. Of those booking elsewhere, 50% are finding more affordable rooms, and the remainder are booking higher-end hotels.
- The conference attendees are 60% professionals, 30% suppliers and 10% students. All of the students and most of the professionals are registering for the conference without social events. Most of the suppliers are registering for the social events only. Although most professionals would be willing to pay more to attend the education program, fees have been kept low to continue to be accessible for students. Suppliers would be willing to pay significantly more for

the social events, but do not perceive value in participating in the educational program.

- Fixed costs for running each conference are \$5,000. Variable costs for the conference are \$200/person and for the social events are \$100/person.
- Most participants only attend one meeting per year. Suppliers would be interested in attending both, but have found that so few of the participants attend the networking events that they are not achieving the return on investment (ROI) that they would like. Many of the students are only attending one due to cost considerations, and participants are not finding enough differences in the content from one event to another to justify attending both.

GMIC Sustainable Events Conference Case Study #4

Organization: Pangloss Oil and Gas

Mission: Energizing the world.

About the organization: Pangloss Oil and Gas is an international oil and gas exploration company headquartered in Calgary, Canada, and with other offices in Houston, Texas. It has active oil and gas “plays” in the western Canadian sedimentary basin, Texas, and Nigeria. Over the years, it has had some issues with both environmental and human rights abuses, but has over the past ten years “cleaned up its act” through a highly developed corporate social responsibility (CSR) program and research and investment into alternative energy production (primarily wind and solar). They are very active in communities, typically focusing on bringing alternative energy solutions into remote or under-developed areas. It has an annual staff meeting that draws 2000 employees from around the world. At this event, typically held in November annually, they focus on highlights of the year, from profitability to environmental and community activities. The company pays for everyone to fly in and attend.

This year, the President of the company personally came down to talk to the events team about the November event. He explained that since this event shaped employee and public perception of their company, he would like to see it echo their CSR efforts. He would also like to start reporting on their events as part of their voluntary commitments to both the United Nations Global Compact and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) G3 Guidelines. In order to help the events team be as successful as possible, he had asked the Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO) for Pangloss Oil and Gas to help them out. The CSO created an action plan. The first item was to send the team to the GMIC Sustainable Events Conference to learn about planning sustainable events, specifically new standards and reporting frameworks as well as logistics. The shortlist of cities for the next event are (in alphabetical order):

- a. Denver, Colorado
- b. Las Vegas, Nevada

- c. Portland, Oregon
- d. Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- e. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

The CSO requests that you decide on a location using sustainable event principles.

In addition, the CSO has asked that you do the following:

1. Create a name and a mission statement for your sustainable events team. What makes you excited about creating sustainable events?
2. Create three sustainable event objectives for the annual staff meeting.
3. Using these objectives, assess the above cities. What are the pros and cons of each city? What are your top three, and why?
4. What guidelines or other tools can you use to report the impacts of your event?
5. What specific sustainable meeting elements will you measure, in order to create a baseline for future events? They should at a minimum consider these elements:
 - a. Travel
 - b. Budget
 - c. Waste streams
 - d. Community impact
6. What changes do you recommend to the traditional meeting structure to make it more sustainable?
7. Is there an opportunity to integrate a community service event into the meeting? If yes, make recommendations as to what would be a good fit for the company.

The CSO has highlighted a number of important sessions at the GMIC Conference to help you create your own sustainable events plan, and suggest that you send part of your team to each session to most effectively cover the material. Highlighted sessions include:

- The Sustainable Team Player
- General Session: Business Dimensions of Sustainability
- Setting Sustainability Objectives and Goals
- Sustainable Destinations and Venues
- Supply and Demand: Sustainable Supply Chains
- Community Outreach and Strategic CSR
- Tools and Standards
- Measure Up

GMIC Sustainable Meetings Conference Case Study #5

Organization: Jack and the Beanstalk Fine Foods

Mission: Growing strong to provide magically delicious food to the world.

About the company: *Jack and the Beanstalk* was founded in 1947 by Richard “Jack” Haricott, and this family-owned business has grown and thrived over the last 50+ years, expanding from one store in the small-town American Midwest to a well-known chain of stores throughout the United States. Brands include *Jack and the Beanstalk* grocery stores, “*Jackstops*” at select gas stations, and, of course, the *Jack ‘n the Giants* convenience stores found on every second corner in New York City.

Jack’s grandson Elliott Haricott now runs the business, a network of over 2000 stores in the US, from his headquarters in Chicago. The company has plans to expand into Canada over the next 18 months in the test market cities of Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and Montreal, and pending the success of this venture, into Europe in 18 – 24 months. They also have plans to re-brand and take advantage of the growing sustainability movement. Right now, plans are to launch the expanded stores under the brand Green Bean Groceries. They decided to use the new name to take advantage of the “green” factor, and because market studies show the current name has virtually no street recognition in Canada. The new expansion plans are to be launched at a meeting of store operators in August. Approximately 2000 store representatives are expected to attend, not including an additional 500 partners/spouses. Because this event is so important to the future of the company, Elliott Haricott has called his event team together to discuss how to make this event a showcase for the brand.

He has given them a list of broad objectives:

1. Because the expansion plans are riding on the sustainability movement, the event needs to “walk the talk” and be as sustainable as possible.
2. Although the company can’t provide the food, Elliott wants to ensure that the food offered at the event is sustainable and similar to that which will be featured in the new brand.
3. The event needs to be a text-book sustainable event. Elliott recently read about the success of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics and its sustainability report, and wants to do something similar.
4. Choose a host city from the following shortlist (in alpha order):
 - a. Denver, Colorado
 - b. Las Vegas, Nevada
 - c. Portland, Oregon
 - d. Toronto, Ontario, Canada
 - e. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

To help out the team, Elliott has registered everyone for the GMIC Sustainable Events Conference, including your boss, the Vice President of Communications. She has reviewed the program and has created her own list of items that you need to accomplish to help meet Elliott's objectives:

1. Create a name and a mission statement for your sustainable events team. What makes you excited about creating sustainable events?
2. Create three sustainable event objectives for the brand launch event.
3. Using these objectives, assess the above cities. What are the pros and cons of each city? What are your top three, and why?
4. What guidelines or other tools can you use to report the impacts of your event?
5. What specific sustainable meeting elements will you measure, in order to create a baseline for future events? They should at a minimum consider these elements:
 - a. Travel
 - b. Budget
 - c. Waste streams
 - d. Community impact/brand recognition
6. What changes do you recommend to the traditional meeting structure to make it more sustainable?
7. How will you address the specific issue about sustainable food? Outline a strategy to make Elliott happy.

The VP has highlighted a number of important sessions at the GMIC Conference to help you create your own sustainable events plan, and has suggested that the team split up to cover all the sessions and then report back. Highlighted sessions include:

- The Sustainable Team Player
- General Session: Business Dimensions of Sustainability
- Setting Sustainability Objectives and Goals
- Sustainable Destinations and Venues
- Sustainability and the Art of Storytelling
- Good Food: Boost Quality and Lower Costs with Local Sourcing
- Menu Planning: A Sustainable Menu for Portland
- Supply and Demand: Sustainable Supply Chains
- Tools and Standards
- Measure Up

GMIC Sustainable Meetings Conference Case Study #6

Organization: Tchotchke International

Event: Triple P Expo: Plethora of Promotional Products

Mission: Making brands matter.

About the Organization: Tchotchke International runs a series of expos internationally, providing a forum for the promotional products industry to showcase what's new and now. They have traditionally had one expo in North America annually. It is a relatively large expo, covering half million square feet of exhibit space and attracting upwards of 2000 exhibitors and 7,000 buyers.

The promotional products industry has been under increasing scrutiny in the past two years for a variety of issues. First, several major suppliers of promotional products have been found to use child labour in Asian sweatshops. This first hit the news in the United Kingdom but has seen some coverage in the United States. Second, a large supplier of promotional products had to downsize significantly, as many of its large clients are cutting down dramatically on purchases, citing the economic downturn and their corporate sustainability initiatives as reasons. In addition, transportation costs were increasing as oil prices continued their steady climb. Third, awareness of the industry has increased as the parents of the future queen of England, Kate Middleton, own a promotional-product oriented business, Party Pieces; it was this business venture that made them millionaires and gave their daughter a running chance at making a royal marriage.

Buyer attendance at the show was down by 10% in each of the past two years. Several large exhibitors have indicated that if it continues to go down, they will withdraw from the show and take their business to a competitor. Your VP is worried about several things, including decreased revenue from exhibitors, decreased buyer purchasing power making it harder to attract and retain new exhibitors, decreased purchasing due to increased awareness of sustainability initiatives in large corporations, and the rumour that the Middletons will be attending the show. This would, of course, be the advantage of raising interest in attending the show and in increased press coverage, but would also create a possible security nightmare.

She has called the events team together to discuss event strategy. Her broad objectives are:

1. Addressing revenue from two angles, both cost reduction and exhibitor retention.
2. To create strategies to make sustainability work for, not against, them. She wants to specifically look at each stakeholder group (exhibitors, buyers, and venues) and brainstorm strategies that could reduce costs, increase retention, and enhance the reputation of the promotional products industry.
3. Choose a host city from the following shortlist (in alpha order):

- a. Denver, Colorado
- b. Las Vegas, Nevada
- c. Toronto, Ontario, Canada

To help out the team, your VP has registered everyone for the GMIC Sustainable Events Conference. She has reviewed the program and has created her own list of items that you need to accomplish to help meet her objectives:

1. Create a name and a mission statement for your sustainable events team. What makes you excited about creating sustainable events?
2. Create three sustainable event objectives for the Triple P Expo.
3. Using these objectives, assess the above cities. What are the pros and cons of each city?
4. What guidelines or other tools can you use to report the impacts of your event?
5. What specific sustainable meeting elements will you measure, in order to create a baseline for future events? They should at a minimum consider these elements:
 - a. Travel
 - b. Budget
 - c. Waste streams
 - d. Community impact/brand recognition
6. What changes do you recommend to the traditional meeting structure to make it more sustainable?
7. How will you address the specific issue about security? What sustainability issues are related?

The VP has highlighted a number of important sessions at the GMIC Conference to help you create your own sustainable events plan, and has suggested that the team split up to cover all the sessions and then report back. Highlighted sessions include:

- The Sustainable Team Player
- General Session: Business Dimensions of Sustainability
- Setting Sustainability Objectives and Goals
- Sustainable Destinations and Venues
- Sustainability and the Art of Storytelling
- Supply and Demand: Sustainable Supply Chains
- Tell it to the CFO: Sustainable Pricing Strategies
- Tools and Standards
- Measure Up