



# Create Year-Round Community

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**PART OF THE** frustration of spending so much time and energy to create the perfect conference is felt when the curtain comes down and the show is over. All that work to create a meaningful connection with our attendees, but only for a fleeting instant? And yes, there will be next year's event...but what about all that time in between?

Savvy event marketers are finding new ways to connect the dots across the calendar. The beauty of a live event is the spontaneous interactions that take place between the parties involved — attendees, faculty, and even supporters and sponsors. The event planner who captures that spirit and keeps it alive across a longer timeline will be successful.

## A Smarter e-Newsletter

Technology has evolved beyond the conference CD or the official Web site. These are great tools to communicate what happened at the event, but they are one-way media. One new idea was recently introduced by a company called IMN (iMakeNews Inc.) in Newton, Mass. Its core product is a "smart" electronic newsletter. It is essentially a content-bearing Web site that is connected to a complex database of your attendees or readers. The system is very user-friendly — just a few minutes to set up a core template, and you are ready to go. Content can be segmented by area of interest. So, you could develop 15 articles and then decide who gets which ones — cardiology topics to the cardiologists, and oncology topics to your cancer specialists, etc.

On the reporting side, the system tracks not only who read your newsletter, but which articles were of most interest, and how much time the reader spent with the content. In the event planning world, this tool has interesting implications.

### **Build Your Meeting's Buzz**

You can create a forum for the attendees to register, receive updates on hotel availability, and get news about workshops and meeting tracks. You can send advance articles to get your audience excited about your event's topics. You could introduce your speakers in advance by sending a bio or an article by that faculty member only to those attendees who have signed up for a certain lecture. You can also include links to your conflict-of-interest policy to help clarify any concerns that attendees might have.

For faculty, you can provide easy updates on anticipated attendance, introduce fellow faculty, or even set up a weblog to track core questions about meeting development or logistics. You could integrate a tool to send survey questions to attendees in advance and report the findings back to faculty to help them better prepare their presentations.

From a commercial support perspective, the opportunities are great. Newsletters can be designed to include a banner advertisement from commercial supporters (thus increasing the value of commercial support) with links to the supporter's Web site. You can report back to commercial supporters the depth of interaction that readers had with their Web site, because the system tracks when readers follow through to an advertiser's site. You can even ask readers to respond to an optional survey from a commercial supporter, with results going back to the grantor.

The beauty of this tool is that you can extend the reach of your meeting to include pre- and post-meeting interactions. Suddenly, all that hard work extends beyond the magic moment of the live event. You can keep your meeting community alive and interacting over the entire course of the year.

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