Strategic Meetings Management: The Next Generation

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Introduction

The world has become substantially smaller owing to globalization and technologic advancements, while strategic meetings management (SMM) has become increasingly more complex due to evolving rules and regulations worldwide. The Life Sciences industry is rapidly advancing into a world of centralization of all meeting activity, spend, and automated healthcare professional (HCP) interactions.

This white paper focuses on strategic meetings management programs (SMMPs) — it highlights the rationale for **next-generation SMM** to ensure compliance as meetings expand globally and compliance requirements become universal. It also provides important insights from key stakeholders in SMMP: The Life Sciences organization professional, the solution provider and the meeting professional within the meeting agency.

SMM: Then and Now

SMM is not a new service. In fact, it has existed since the 1990s. According to the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), SMM is defined as, *"A disciplined approach to managing enterprise-wide meetings, processes and data to achieve measurable business objectives that align with the organization's vision and deliver value in the form of quantitative savings, risk mitigation and service quality."* (GBTA, 2016)

SMM put into motion not only the centralization of meeting activity for security reasons, for example, affording companies the ability able to track employees in the event of an emergency, as well as allow companies to do more comprehensive meeting activity cost analysis. A SMM effort by companies also allows organizations to establish their overall buying power and gives them a better ability to leverage their scale. Where there used to be a strong firewall between clinical activity and commercial activity, Life Sciences organizations are slowly shifting promotional programs into their SMM portfolio in order to better capture a 360-degree view of events occurring within their organization. In doing so, they have recognized the void and lack of capabilities within their current processes and technology platforms to achieve these goals.

SMM: The Wider Remit and Value Throughout the Event Planning Cycle

According to Andrew Gilkerson, Client and Procurement Director at WRG, a European- and US-based creative communications agency, "An SMMP program seeks or should seek to generate value throughout all aspects of event activity." While the focus is on a technology platform that helps to realize many of these aspects, the technology platform is an enabler and just part of an SMMP that's designed to optimize the following "pillars:"

- Preferred supplier programs (MICE hotel, event agencies, production, etc)
- Meetings and congress policy
- SOPs for planning team/outsourced agencies
- Virtual meetings strategy
- Technology Platform

MICE, meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions; SOP, standard operating procedure.

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The scope of programs that are part of SMMPs is highly varied. In order to enhance buying power and create leveraged positions in the event marketplace and to ensure the majority of the Life Sciences organization benefits from the optimization, the scope of programs that are part of SMMPs should be as wide as possible. The definition of scope can be divided into 3 key areas:

1. **Meeting types: HCP meetings, congresses, internal meetings, etc.;**
2. **Organizational structure and the event departments of the Life Sciences company: Headquarter Functions, Global, Commercial, Research and Development, etc.; and**
3. **Geography: the countries, regions, states, and territories.**

Where the majority of events spend occurs (i.e. at the country level or at the regional/global level) will influence both where the focus of the strategy needs to be. It's important to note that these issues around event spend can be highly variable if different countries each hold their own budgets and exert influence over the spend rather than just the organization's headquarters having control over the event spending. For example, a mature program that has optimized each of the SMMP pillars (i.e., supplier, policy, SOP, strategy, and technology) may only include meetings that occur within headquarters or meetings that are limited to HCP attended meetings.

All in all, SMM is still about effective communication. Mr. Gilkerson added that, "While strategic programs have the ability to create significant value to the Life Sciences organization—not least in quality reporting to meet compliance demands—the reason for face-to-face meetings and congresses is effective communication. As such, an organized program does not and should not impact quality engagement, as this should be the main focus." The following summarizes the "value proposition" for a next-generation SMMP:

✓ *Channeled and managed spend to create leverage/position*

✓ *Consolidated and managed supplier base to achieve standardization and shared good practice (supplier innovation)*

✓ *Data visibility and quality*

✓ *Enables better compliance, clarity, and consistent application when planning and reporting*

✓ *Scalable operating platform with flexibility to meet changing demands*

✓ *Unburden the business and allow it to focus more on core activities*

✓ *Monitor and record spend and savings*

✓ *Manage/mitigate risk (regulatory, FCPA, HSWA, and business continuity)*

FCPA, Foreign Corrupt Practices Act; HSWA, Health and Safety at Work Act.

SMM: A Look Ahead

Continuous technologic advancements are better enabling meeting professionals to be intimately and instantaneously involved in all aspects of the meeting planning cycle. The overarching objective is, of course, to help organizations with their efforts to remain compliant and to collect accurate and timely HCP interaction data for reporting. Yet with all the welcomed progress comes challenges: high cost, compliance gaps and risks, data inaccuracy and overload, and a complex vendor environment. In fact, findings from a 2016 survey conducted by Penton Research and commissioned by AHM, revealed that **52% of respondents from leading Life Sciences organizations cannot track participation of HCPs across their meetings globally.** Concerns around compliance appears to be one of the leading challenges for industry today, and some of the causes for concern are multiple disparate systems, multiple vendors, inaccurate HCP data, lack of resources to handle data tracking and reporting, and costly manual data feeds. (AHM/MeetingsNet. Benchmarking Survey, 2016)

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It's important to reinforce that SMMP is an overarching program that includes compliance as just one component. The convergence of compliance and SMM seizes the opportunity for Life Sciences organizations to help reduce risk, increase transparency and efficiency while providing a consistent and improved attendee experience.

Today's clients of SMM technology are in search of greater functionality and perhaps a single, agile, and robust tool to facilitate HCP management and transparency reporting. The next-generation SMMP technology "must-haves" include the following elements:

Centralized data capture (no data feeds or multiple systems)	**Assistance with increased compliance**
Automated processes and fewer systems	**Greater efficiency**

SMM: Stakeholders, Savings, and Best Practices

According to SMM subject matter expert, **Betsy Bondurant, CMM, CTE, HMCC, President of Bondurant Consulting**, key SMMP stakeholders at Life Sciences companies include Procurement, Compliance, Travel, Security, Finance, and Information Technology. In addition to these, *"Other departments such as Audit, meeting owners in Research and Development, Medical Affairs, Commercial, and key global offices should be included in the SMM discussions. It's always helpful to include major suppliers in some of the discussions, too."*

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SMMPs were designed to provide insight into the enterprise-wide meeting and event spend, not just pockets of the spend. Thus, for most mature programs, there has been a desire to capture spend not just for commercial meetings, but for all meetings, including those that have HCPs in attendance. The challenge has been finding the optimal tools that help to enable the process to occur most effectively and efficiently. Some of the savings drivers of SMM include:

• **Strategic sourcing**
• **Demand management**
• **Process improvements**
• **Compliance and adoption**

When it comes to SMM best practices, developing a sourcing strategy, based on type of meeting is critical, especially when managing both regulated and non-regulated meetings. One major pitfall that stakeholders should avoid is over complicating process and procedures. Try to balance the data reporting requirements with the SMMP program data; keep it as simple as possible, while still achieving regulated reporting requirements. Ms. Bondurant underscored that, "The fewer the technology tools needed to make this happen, the less likely that the SMMP will be complex to manage."

Once a good process has been established with the end users, then an organization can proceed to a more global solution, with a single agency or provider. In doing so, the organization can then furnish tools for the administrative management of these agencies, while still retaining a local connection.

According to a **manager of strategic meetings management within a Life Sciences organization,** language barriers, regional familiarity with SMM processes, and accurate data are three main considerations when globalizing your program. While many SMM employees are fluent in English, there is still a sizeable percentage who are not. Translation services and constant communication are what's needed in these scenarios. Many Life Sciences Meeting Services or Vendor agencies outside the United States require language skills for SMMP training and they are not familiar with the event management technology tools, and hotel venues also may be unfamiliar with the processes involved with event management technology tools as well. **Once a good process has been established with the end users, then an organization can proceed to a more global solution, with a single agency or provider. In doing so, the organization can then furnish tools for the administrative management of these agencies, while still retaining a local connection.** At a global level the organization can help establish across the board key performance indicators and SOPs for the local partner agencies and manage them at a local level, too. Lastly, when it comes to data, the old adage of "garbage in, garbage out" can be applied to SMMP. That is, data should be controlled and reviewed for accuracy and sense.

SMM: Vendor Offerings

According to **Matthew Derner, CMM, HMCC, Director, Strategic Meetings Management at AHM**, a next-generation SMMP provides a holistic solution that allows for data capture across all global meetings and events. These meetings and events are not only defined as HCP-attended meetings but include business meetings or employee-only attended meetings which are sponsored and hosted by Research and Development, Medical Affairs, and Commercial. In their quest for SMM, Life Sciences organizations might want to consider aligning with a global agency that can provide cost and operational efficiencies with local suppliers, avoid shipping and customs fees, and provide sustainable initiatives. "Accessibility to an online tool, with real-time updates of business rules per country for global access, helps with efforts around risk mitigation and proactive compliance," offered Mr. Derner. When considering vendors, Life Sciences organizations

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might want to seek out a meeting management agency that integrates adult learning techniques, audience engagement technology, and social media which can result in content retention and brand loyalty. In addition, a provider's service abilities are just as pertinent as technological capabilities. "A high-touch approach and superior customer service survey ratings result in higher attendance." There are many features to consider when it comes to SMM and an organization might already have a program in place. Still there are five key traits that organizations might consider in the pursuit of the **next-generation of SMM:**

Does your SMMP provide all of the following?

1

STRATEGIC MEETINGS MANAGEMENT TOOLS INTEGRATED WITH CAPABILITIES WHICH CAN BETTER ENABLE PROACTIVE COMPLIANCE

Robust compliance platform unites with leading SMM tools to help an organization with its efforts around ensuring adherence to guidelines, standard operation procedures, and regulations

2

360° VIEW OF CENTRALIZED HCP ACTIVITY AND SPEND DATA

Consolidation of attendee activity, HCP spend in 1 centralized place to achieve full transparency

3

REDUCTION OF DATA FEEDS, MULTIPLE PROCESSES, AND OVERALL RISK

Mitigate compliance risks while improving efficiencies due to streamlined processes with less vendors and touchpoints

4

CLEARLY DEFINED AND ALIGNED MEETING AND EVENT TYPES AND NOMENCLATURE

Stakeholders that define meetings and interactions in the same manner result in a clear understanding and adherence to policy and processes

5

UNDERSTANDING AND LEVERAGING ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE —GLOBALLY

Achieving a global standard of operation and buying power with local application

Conclusion

Life Sciences organizations continue to expand their reach globally and compliance requirements are now universal. While compliance remains the top business challenge for Life Sciences organizations irrespective of meeting, event, or attendee type, SMMP transcends compliance and encompasses all meetings and all attendees. Transparency reporting requirements, such as Open Payments and European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) and other financial disclosure requirements of other countries, have forced companies to examine the effectiveness, accuracy, and true transparency of their activity data. As it stands today, centralized tracking of attendee engagement or HCP engagement activity and associated transparency is suboptimal across most Life Sciences companies. Moreover, a fragmented approach to address growing complexities in HCP interactions has only led to greater challenges. As global HCP interactions continue to increase, so do the regulatory reporting requirements. As such, International Life Sciences organizations need a next-generation SMMP that is robust, and offers a process-driven solution that is consistent, reduces risk, and lowers cost.

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Biographies

Betsy Bondurant, CMM, CTE, HMCC, is president of Bondurant Consulting. Ms. Bondurant offers a unique 360-degree perspective with over 30 years' industry expertise in hotel sales, and meeting and trade show management. She is considered a subject matter expert in the area of SMM and as such, has authored many articles, developed educational content, and presented to audiences in North America, Europe and Asia. Bondurant Consulting provides services to organizations that are implementing or optimizing their SMM Programs. In 2016, Ms. Bondurant was recognized as one of the Top 25 Women in the Meetings Industry by Meetings and Conventions Magazine.

Matthew Derner, CMM, HMCC, is Director, Strategic Meetings Management at AHM. Mr. Derner joined AHM in 2016 and has 18 years of Life Sciences experience. He leads AHM's SMM Department and is responsible for engaging current and prospective clients about the company's SMM compliant meeting solutions across organizations. Mr. Derner also leads a team of Event Managers and Coordinators that are responsible for the planning and execution of any meeting type outside of Speaker Bureau. Before joining AHM, he worked for Pharmaceutical Companies, as well meeting planning agencies in various roles.

Andrew Gilkerson is client and procurement director at WRG. He has over 20 years of experience in the Meetings and Events industry, including 10 years at Pfizer as a Procurement Category Lead. Mr. Gilkerson has led a regional strategic meeting management program while working in healthcare, and integrates this experience to consult with companies looking to optimize their meetings organization and spend.

Sources

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About AHM

AHM offers a comprehensive suite of next-generation, technology-enabled services at the nexus of key operational workflows and rules-based policies to facilitate compliant interactions among Life Sciences organizations, their partners, and HCPs. These services address the well-validated industry challenges: high cost, compliance gaps and risks, data inaccuracy and overload, and the complex vendor environment. For more information about AHM and its service offerings, please visit **www.ahmdirect.com.**