



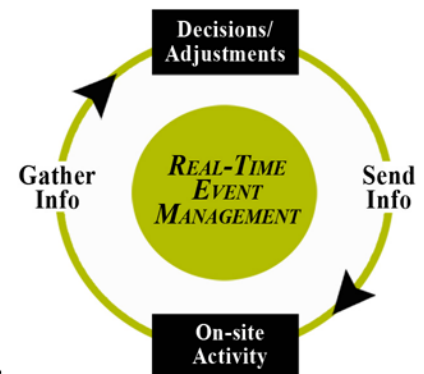
Real-Time Event Management: Overcoming the Limits of Planning

By Rick Borovoy

The key to a smooth-running event is good advance planning. But even the best planning has limits. Unpredictable changes arise at the last minute -- or even after the event has begun. And some decisions require information which cannot be easily gathered beforehand. (What session topics will be of greatest interest? Who will benefit most from sitting together? What questions does the audience most want to hear the speaker address?) Attendees also get more from their on-site time when they prepare ahead (schedule meetings, choose sessions), but many do not. What can you -- and your attendees -- do to overcome the limits of planning?

Instead of viewing these situations as problems, consider a new approach that turns them into opportunities to make your event even more valuable: real-time event management (REM). REM is based on process design principles practiced in many other industries: instead of just trying to prevent last-minute changes, create systems so that you can handle last minute changes without breaking a sweat. You'll discover that not only can you manage the unexpected with ease, but you have also created a powerful tool to increase customer satisfaction. Where before you had to answer "sorry, can't do that," now you can say "sure, no problem."

There are two essential ingredients to making REM work: the ability to gather information in real-time and the ability to act on it immediately. In other words, you need a real-time two-way channel of communication with all of your attendees on-site. (The same holds true for attendees for peer-to-peer interactions.) This is the REM circle (see Diagram). Until recently, this was pretty much impossible in the on-site environment. But now there is technology that makes this vision a reality. Systems like nTAG enable you to communicate with your attendees continuously throughout an event.



What can you do with capabilities like these? Here are some examples:

- Need to know which customers have support issues that are bugging them? Use your REM system to ask them while they're on site. Then use the system to invite those customers to a meet-up with your Director of Customer Service to address their issues on the spot.
- Want to be sure that speakers are addressing the topics most important to your audience? Use your REM system to ask the attendees what they want to hear about. Tabulate the responses and publish changes to the agenda instantly. You can even ask attendees in the middle of a session what questions they want the speaker to address at the end -- this lets you ensure that the most important questions get attention, not just the loudest people.
- Want to help your attendees make the most of their networking time? REM enables them to search for the people they most want to meet at the event and then schedule appointments -- all after they have already arrived on site.
- Need to ensure that the education sessions are really delivering? Use a REM system to test what has been learned, instantly identify those who need extra help, and provide that help on the spot.
- Use your REM system to easily manage any unexpected changes that arise after the event is underway: change seating plans, update the agenda, reassign golf groups, publish late-arriving speaker bios, continuously update the attendee list, and much more!

With real-time event management, not only can you handle the unexpected, you can manage your event to provide the maximum value to your attendees and your organization.