

Forbes Insights Study: Business Executives Prefer Face-to-Face Meetings Over Virtual Contact

New York, NY (Thursday, August 27, 2009) – According to a recent Forbes Insights study, “Business Meetings: The Case for Face-to-Face,” business executives prefer face-to-face meetings and conferences over virtual meetings, and overwhelmingly agree that they are necessary for building deeper, more profitable bonds with clients and business partners – and for maintaining productive relationships with co-workers. While web-, video- and teleconferencing have their role, they cannot substitute for human interaction when it comes to accomplishing certain business objectives.

“Face-to-face meetings and business travel are critical to business success and important drivers of our economy, so while travel is often the first budget item to suffer cuts in a recession, it can’t be the last to be restored if the economy is to grow,” said Kevin Gentzel, president and group publisher, Forbes Media. “This research shows that senior business decision makers overwhelmingly point to face-to-face interaction—traveling to meet clients, convening teams and the motivation born of live exchange—as a crucial element to their success.”

Highlights of the study:

- 58% of respondents said they were travelling for business less today than they were at the beginning of the recession in January 2008, with more than a third (34%) indicating they were travelling much less frequently.
- Lower costs and greater reliability have made teleconferences, videoconferences and web conferences more pervasive options for meetings, with 59% of executives saying their use of technology-driven meetings had increased during the recession.
- At the same time, executives still expressed an overwhelming preference for face-to-face meetings, with more than eight out of ten (84%) saying they prefer in-person contact to virtual.
- Those that prefer face-to-face meetings believe they facilitate the following:
 - Building stronger, more meaningful relationships (85%)
 - The ability to “read” another person (77%), and
 - Greater social interaction (75%).
 - Those who favored virtual meetings took more of a bottom-line approach, saying they saved them time (92%) and money (88%), or offered greater location flexibility (76%).
- Executives prefer face-to-face meetings when the decision-making process is fluid, requiring the kind of give-and-take typical of complex decisions and sales. Respondents said face-to-face meetings are best for:
 - Persuasion (91%),
 - Leadership (87%),
 - Engagement (86%),
 - Accountability (79%), and
 - Decision-making (82%).
 - When web-, video- and teleconferences were preferred, it was generally for the dissemination of data or when time was of greater concern.

- Attention is an issue of key concern among executives as well. Many executives expressed concern that attendees did not give their full attention to virtual meetings.
 - 58% admitted that they “frequently” surf the web, check their email, read unrelated materials and handle other ancillary work during digital meetings.
 - 64% of those who prefer technology-enabled business meetings like them because they allow them to multitask.
- 87% agree that there are tangible business benefits to in-person, face-to-face meetings that outweigh the cost savings of alternative, technology-based meeting methods such as webconferencing or videoconferencing.
- Executives also believe the following is true of in-person and face-to-face communications:
 - Being able to combine personal travel with business travel (64%)
 - Face-to-face interaction with co-workers is necessary for effective teamwork (80%)
 - “Down” time at in-person conferences builds stronger client bonds (81%).

This study is based on a survey of 760 business executives conducted by Forbes Insights in June 2009. Half of the respondents represented small businesses (under 100 employees), while 20% were from mid-sized businesses (100-999 employees), and 30% were from enterprises (1000-plus employees). In terms of title, 48% of respondents were either owners or c-level executives. To request a copy of the study, visit: http://www.forbes.com/forbesinsights/Business_Meetings_FaceToFace/index.html.

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