

# Profiles of Excellence

## Ann Godi, CMP

### A Vision of Marketing

When Ann Godi, CMP, started her own business 15 years ago, she used her marketing vision to build a niche in the ever-changing meeting industry. Now, as the President of Benchmark360 Inc., Godi has made her mark by meeting her client's objectives and fulfilling their vision. "There is nothing more exciting than being a part of the vision of other organizations and delivering on that vision," Godi said. In fact, Godi got her start in this industry not in logistics and tactical planning, but in strategic marketing. She was a product and advertising manager for McGraw-Hill, and then moved to Konica where she was part of the product marketing team. In this role, she led the team that managed live events marketing, public relations and communications. "I believe the core of any business is an understanding of strategic marketing," Godi said.

It is this emphasis on strategic marketing that allows her company to meet client goals and objectives. According to Godi, you must first determine a hierarchy of objectives, which then drive all the decisions that will be made for the meeting. "This is one of the places in our industry that we face a disconnect by not delivering on objectives, Godi said. "We base our success on what we think is important-did the food arrive on time, was the speaker the best choice-not on what the major stakeholders in the meeting think is important. "

When Godi left the corporate world and went out on her own, she started as a consultant and used her marketing skills to gain an edge. She now uses these skills to teach marketing for meeting managers at the University of Georgia. "If you are looking to start your own business then develop a good marketing ability," Godi said. "You can have the best product or service, but it doesn't do any good if no one knows about it." Once the objectives are set and the marketing plan is in place, Godi focuses on meeting her client's return on investment goals. Her company determines the success of their meetings by looking at measurable results. "We developed a proprietary technology that can be customized for each client," Godi said. "We use a myriad of reports that are laid out from the beginning to track objectives," Godi said. As a member of the Meeting Professionals International Board of Directors, Godi helps determine the objectives for MPI's strategic plan. She is a board liaison to the Professional Development Strategy



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Group, which is developing MPI's Career Pathways. She is also on the Nominating Committee for future MPI board of directors and on the Finance Committee, which includes members of the Executive Committee. "It is a phenomenal experience to be a part of this premier meetings organization," Godi said of her role on MPI's board of directors. "It is such a dynamic time in the industry."

It is perhaps her participation on MPI's Multicultural Committee that gives her great insight into global planning. Godi believes it is essential to have an understanding of the culture you are operating in and to develop good strategic partners. "It is difficult to operate in a vacuum," Godi said. "Even Canada has distinct customs, but Americans think Canada is just an extension of the U.S.

You cannot bring a U.S.-centric focus when operating in a different country."

Godi's company plans both association and corporate meetings, each with its own challenges and similarities. "Usually with corporate meetings attendance is mandatory so marketing is not as critical,"

Godi said. "However, for corporate customer events you have to attract the right attendees at the right level so marketing has an impact in delivering the right audience." Godi also sees more stringent financial objectives for corporate meetings, which now have a revenue side.

"Corporate planners are delivering in a shortened lead time but they cannot sacrifice quality," Godi said. "There is an expectation that the level of the meeting should be raised from the previous year, but in most cases the budget has not increased. In fact, it may have decreased."

As Godi looks ahead to trends in the meeting industry, she sees more consolidation of corporate meeting departments due to mergers and acquisitions of companies. "The meeting industry is a microcosm of all businesses," Godi said. "It is a coming of age of the industry where we have to do more with less-whether time or money."

Godi said strategic sourcing is also a growing trend in business due to the large amount of money meetings account for. "There is a growing involvement from procurement," Godi said. "The Sarbanes-Oxley Act is a new legislation that holds to a higher level of accountability in purchasing decisions."

Of course return on investment reporting is the true test of accountability for measuring the success of any pro-

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gram. "We have to deliver ROI and measurable results," Godi said. "Our decisions are more driven by metrics and data." Godi believes these metrics are critical to keeping a client. Gone are the days when relationship is everything. Reporting ROI is essential.

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"Business is more transactional and it's getting harder to ensure the continuity of an account," Godi said. "Relationships are still important, but they may not be the driving force as they were in the past. You must deliver the metrics and measure on deliverables."

Seeing her company's clients achieve their results is fulfilling for Godi and enables her to keep her passion for a job that can produce "burnout" in many. "My passion for the job comes easily; I love variety," Godi said. "Few jobs allow you to be apart of so many different industries and diverse business segments." These varied industries allow her to be creative and use her marketing expertise to fulfill her client's vision. "We have an innately creative team," Godi said. "We keep up with the leading edge of what's going on in the industry and add new twists."

One of these new twists was purchasing Guidelines Atlanta in 2003, the destination management arm of Benchmark360° Inc. "This allowed us to deliver even more of a 360 experience," Godi said. "There is a synergy between both companies and an inter-coordination of systems. We can provide everything from staging and production to a proprietary full-service registration system."

Godi credits her high energy level to the tremendous support she receives from her staff and her family. "I am blessed with a great family and the opportunity to work with wonderful people," Godi said. "Our staff is exciting to be around and we really enjoy what we are doing." It is that enjoyment that fuels Godi's vision, and ultimately, her success. ❖