

Sustainable Meetings: A Case of Marriott's Connect Responsibly Program



Source: Pexels (2018)

Background

In modern society, the pursuit of a more sustainable future is increasingly prioritized, and the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) industry is no exception. Event organizers are actively seeking ways to reduce the carbon footprint of their events. Marriott International has responded to this demand with the launch of its Connect Responsibly Program in October 2024, aiming to help meeting planners embed sustainability into their events at participating Marriott Bonvoy properties worldwide (LODGING, 2024). This initiative offers more than just event space—it provides opportunities for events to contribute positively to the environment. The program is divided into two main components: impact measurement and carbon offset (Marriott, n.d.).

After an event, organizers receive a Meeting Impact Report detailing event-specific sustainability practices, as well as the event's carbon and water footprints (PR Newswire, 2024). The report also includes additional indicators, such as the amount of leftover food and its disposal, and the number of plastic bottles saved by using sustainable alternatives (Business Traveller, 2024). Available in 11 languages, the report is compiled using established hospitality industry methodologies (LODGING, 2024). This comprehensive feedback not only helps event planners assess how their event met sustainability goals, but also provides valuable insights for improving future practices.

Additionally, Marriott has partnered with sustainability consultancy South Pole to offer event customers access to a curated selection of carbon offset projects (PR Newswire, 2024). Through the South Pole online shop, organizers can offset their event emissions by supporting global environmental initiatives such as reforestation, wildlife preservation, and economic development in emerging regions (South Pole, n.d.). This collaboration encourages and supports clients on their sustainability journey, while also providing a meaningful cause to promote to their audiences.

Challenges

As an international hotel brand, Marriott manages properties of varying sizes, which presents unique challenges in measuring sustainable impact and compiling comprehensive reports. Smaller establishments may find the process particularly time-consuming due to limited staff and resources for tracking and recording relevant data. Moreover, while Marriott provides industry methodologies, it has not established standardized guidelines for participating hotels to follow when composing these reports. This lack of standardization can make consistent measurement and documentation of sustainable impact difficult across the brand. Additionally, the industry's need to balance sustainability with profitability raises questions about whether event organizers will be willing to allocate funds for carbon offset projects, as Marriott encourages.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the potential benefits and drawbacks for hotel brands like Marriott to offer support to their event clients in embracing sustainability?
2. In what ways can Marriott address the challenges associated with manpower and consistency in measuring and reporting the sustainable impact of events across its diverse range of properties?
3. How effective is Marriott's initiative to encourage event organizers to invest in carbon offset projects? How can the group increase the motivation of organizers despite concerns about profitability?
4. How can Marriott balance profitability with the push for more sustainable events?
5. What incentives could Marriott offer to increase participation in the Connect Responsibly Program?

References

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Keywords

- Hotel
- Event planning
- Sustainability
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- Carbon offset
- Environmental reporting