



## EMBRACING THE IPAD

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### *Why tablets are fast becoming an essential tool for meetings*

by Michael J. Shapiro

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**A year ago**, there was a definite cool factor among those flashing their iPads in public. Now it's difficult to go 10 minutes at a convention without seeing multiple iPads (and, to a much lesser extent, other tablets). What's the appeal? Here's what some planners have to say.

Banish the binder "I'm a *huge* fan of the iPad," confesses Katja Morgenstern, CMP, a self-described "power user" of the device. Morgenstern, senior project manager for Atlanta-based Meeting Consultants Inc., typically syncs to her iPad the event orders she'll need, by day, while on-site at an event. "And I have them right there instead of having to carry the big binder around," she adds.

Finding a planner who isn't thrilled about leaving the binder behind is becoming a real challenge. "Those binders get heavy," Morgenstern says. "And God forbid you open one the wrong way -- your papers go everywhere."

Having the paperwork in electronic format lightens the load, of course, but it also makes it easier to quickly search for information, respond to client needs, revise documents on-site and send them out when necessary. Accordingly, meetings management software is responding by becoming more mobile-centric: The ootoWeb meeting registration and management platform, for example, designed its mobile app for the iPad precisely to be a substitute for the weighty binder.

"I can honestly say that the on-site paper meeting binder is history as far as I'm concerned," enthuses Christine Kelly, the Cheshire, U.K.-based managing director of events and meetings agency Gemini International, and an ootoWeb customer. "The mobile applications added so much value to our on-site management of the event. We were able to access real-time data relating to both the attendee information and event planning, using the app on the iPad."

What works as a substitute for one planner's binder is that much more effective when spread across the whole team, suggests David Weil, vice president of event services for association management company SmithBucklin in Chicago. "All of our employees got iPads," he explains. "It's just a really nice tool from a

meeting planner perspective. While we're all on-site, instead of having those big binders with all of our banquet event orders and specs and whatnot, we've loaded it all up into Dropbox and onto our iPads. It's such a great thing, because we all have all of the floor plans, specs and BEOs at our fingertips."

Planners frequently cite Dropbox among their list of favored mobile tools. It's an online file storage and sharing service -- free, for up to 2GB of storage -- that offers free apps for the iPad, iPhone, Android and BlackBerry devices. The apps make it easy to sync and access files or even download them to mobile devices.

On the other side Morgenstern is just as bullish on the iPad as an attendee tool at events. "Particularly for an educational conference, it's fantastic," she says. In addition to Dropbox, Morgenstern relies heavily on the Evernote app when she's an attendee. The app, which has both free and paid versions, creates a central repository for notes, clips, photos and the like. Attendees can create a conference workbook of notes and observations, and then sync the information to make it accessible from any computer.

Suppliers are using iPads to show off event venues and destinations in presentations to planners. Likewise, exhibitors across a wide variety of industries are embracing the tablet as a sales tool, at trade shows and on the go. "What we're seeing more exhibitors doing as well," notes Weil, "is using iPads to extend the conversation."

Weil often works with associations in the health-care and information-technology industries. "These exhibitors have videos and demos on their iPads, so when they're in the coffee shop or between sessions, just in their casual conversations and their networking, they're able to bring their products to life."