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If you're involved in meetings business it's time to be a 'locavore'

Are you a "locavore?" For the sake of global warming and the environment, you should be.

The "2007 Oxford Dictionary Word of the Year" was first crafted to describe a food trend in using locally grown ingredients, taking advantage of seasonally available foodstuffs that can be bought and prepared locally and protecting the environment by avoiding shipping. Locavore exemplifies how food-lovers can enjoy what they eat while still appreciating the impact they have on the environment.

Based on its concept of using local resources to preserve the environment, all companies—especially those in the meetings and conventions arena—should adopt a locavore philosophy with regard to event technology.

Each of us, along with the products and services we use and consume every day, has a carbon footprint—a way to measure the relative impact of our actions as individuals, as businesses, communities and countries in terms of the contribution made to global climate change. Measured in carbon emissions, a carbon footprint is the total amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases emitted over the full life cycle of a product or service.

Everything has a carbon footprint, one of the largest of which is left by transportation. Transportation in turn is a significant portion of a meeting's environmental footprint. That includes the shipping of audiovisual and technology gear for an event. These emissions are completely avoidable when using locally sourced people and gear. A single truck can contribute more than five tons of carbon in a round trip. That statistic is based on a 1,400-mile trip each way on a 53-foot truck with a 75% load that gets six miles to the gallon on diesel fuel. Each gallon of diesel contributes 22 pounds of carbon dioxide. And a single show can mean several trucks of gear.

By reducing our energy use and chang-

ing our reliability on long-distance transportation, we can easily cut back on the size of our individual and corporate carbon footprints and become more "carbon neutral," which was the "2006 Oxford Dictionary Word of the Year." To be carbon neutral means remaining conscious of the total climate-damaging carbon emissions we are emitting, reducing them where possible and balancing what remains by investing in green technologies.

For the meetings industry, the ability to



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reduce the carbon footprint is relatively easy—if practiced. One of the best ways to avoid negative environmental impact is to limit shipping imposed on event technology companies that bring in heavy gear. This can be accomplished by working with a company with a broad national and even global footprint of local gear and people in virtually every key meeting city. Working with a local company that also provides local on-site support dramatically reduces the carbon emissions footprint because meeting planners avoid freight transportation costs/emissions for equipment and airline costs/emissions for workers.

Other benefits also arise when teaming

with a local supplier. For example, instead of using multiple off-site vendors to coordinate with hotel services for a single event, a local and/or on-site vendor can remain at the facility all day, every day, removing complications that can infiltrate any show. As part of the facility's event team, technicians will have intimate knowledge of the meeting or convention space, operations and staff. Technicians also know which scenes, sightlines and lighting levels are best for any room onsite.

But let's get back to the green matter at hand. Customers and employees are demanding "green" leadership in the meet-

ings and events industry. This can easily be achieved through simple corporate social responsibility. Audiovisual and event technology suppliers must establish a "Greener Gear" policy for processing equipment in a way that minimizes negative effects on the environment.

From "procurement to retirement," the event technology team engaged by a meeting planner or facility must have a knowledge of, and a commitment to, buying equipment that demonstrates efficient use of electricity, minimal use of hazardous substances and practical recycling.

possible. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency began its Energy Star program in 1992 to promote energy efficient products.

One aspect of Energy Star compliance, however, provides a significant challenge for commercial AV gear: products burning electricity while idle must power down during these periods of apparent inactivity. Obviously, complying with this basic requirement would be counterproductive for a projector, for example, running during a lengthy general session.

Beginning in 2006, European countries approached these environmental challenges in a different way with "the restriction of the use of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment" or what is known as the RoHS Directive. RoHS mandates that levels of hazardous substances (like lead, mercury, cadmium and others) be significantly reduced when built into products in the first place, which appreciably simplifies recycling and reduces contamination threats to humans and the environment.

Event technology companies need to

look to both Energy Star and RoHS for guidance in environmentally processing its equipment. It's not that difficult to achieve 100% compliance in several Energy Star and RoHS product categories. At the end of the day, the bottom line is hospitality companies that promote "green meetings" need to first commit to being socially responsible companies and team only with business partners, such as event technology suppliers, that do the same. Only then are we meeting the demand for greener practices and leading the way toward a greener future for the meetings and events industry.

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The right gear

The Convention Industry Council recommends meetings incorporate Energy Star-compliant equipment whenever

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