



## Five Myths of Strategic Meetings Management

*Strategic Meetings Management has been an emerging business methodology for a decade, and the industry has seen a tremendous amount of progress and evolution of the practice. From this forward momentum has come a set of myths about SMM – what it is, what it can and cannot do, and what it entails. To address these, and provide counterpoint on some of these common misconceptions of SMM, Cvent presents this white paper, **Five Myths of Strategic Meetings Management**. The intention is to explain how these myths came into existence and provide practical tips and techniques to overcome them. As with any business process improvement, there will be a continuum of experiences and outcomes with Strategic Meetings Management. By examining five of the most common misperceptions, readers can broaden their knowledge and understanding of key aspects of SMM.*

# SMM Myth No. 1:

## It's too complex and hard to implement.

From the outside looking in, Strategic Meetings Management can seem a daunting endeavor. There are many moving parts to consider – payment solutions, sourcing processes, policy creation, internal marketing, central meeting registration compliance – and the list goes on and on. Although SMM does contain many different components, it does not need to be complex. As there are best practices for the elements of SMM, there are now established best practices for moving from concept through implementation, and beyond. The secret to keeping SMM simple is to approach it one step at a time – by following a defined path and dividing the project into phases. Each organization's journey toward and through SMM will be unique to that organization's overall goals, structure, culture and capacity for change. Depending on the goals for SMM, an effective program can consist of a few components, or encompass a robust end-to-end strategy. By establishing a starting point from which to measure progress at the start of the project, the path can be clearly defined – making the entire process much simpler.

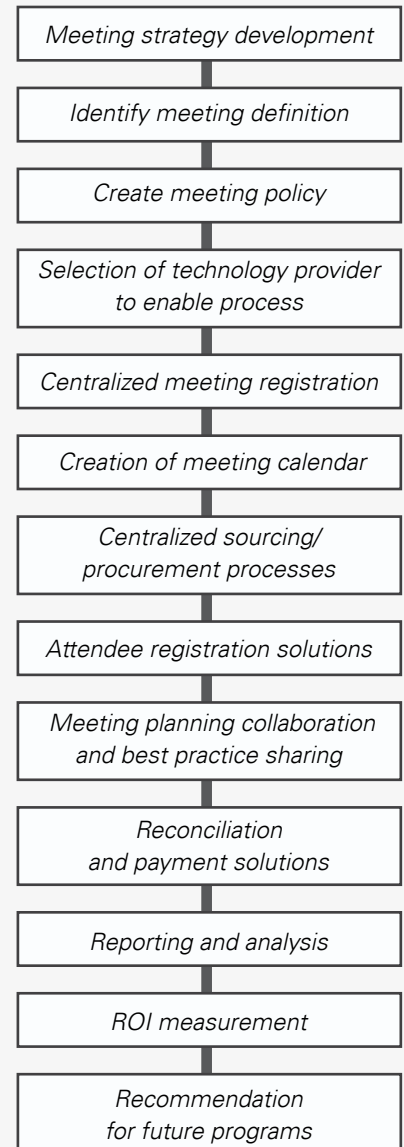
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Taking stock of the current state at your organization will lay the groundwork for the decisions to be made in the early stages. Identifying key stakeholders (i.e. procurement, legal, travel, marketing, etc.) is essential, as their support will be needed in conducting the needs assessment and throughout the process. Develop a survey for these stakeholders to explore their current involvement in meetings and events, and be sure to let them know what your overall goals are for the project. Take the time to review the current state from your perspective as well. Some of these questions should include:

- ▶ How many meetings are currently being held by the organization?
- ▶ Where are meetings being held?
- ▶ Who is planning meetings and events?
- ▶ How are site selection/sourcing currently being managed?
- ▶ Are meetings planned by internal staff? Outsourced to a third-party or multiple third-parties? Or a combination?
- ▶ What is the current method of payment for meeting-related expenses?
- ▶ What is the current state of ROI measurement of meetings and events?

Once armed with information, the next step is to determine the SMM opportunity. A measurable goal for the SMM initiative should be set, so that success can be monitored and measured. The goal (or goals) of the initiative will shape the overarching strategy for the project itself. Once the goals and strategy have been determined, a clear path can be laid out for the entire project. Figure 1 shows a typical SMM path.

Figure 1: An SMM path.



## The best approach to Strategic Meetings Management is to take it step by step, avoiding the common pitfall of trying to tackle every aspect at one time.

For SMM initiatives with enterprise-wide or multiple goals, it is also ideal to divide the overall project into phases. Doing so allows for central focus on each phase as it happens and the opportunity to course-correct and measure the success of each phase. SMM paths can be divided into phases based upon the SMM path, or can be rolled out in phases to business units or geographic areas. Figure 2 shows an SMM path with typical phases identified. Dividing the path itself into phases allows for stakeholders to learn new processes in stages, mastering one phase at a time, and capitalizing on the ongoing adoption of new processes. Phases based on business divisions or groups can also be a successful strategy. Consider starting with a business division with strong compliance with the existing travel policy, or one that has expressed interest in the SMMP itself. With geographic phases, companies typically start with their main geographic location first, prior to rolling out SMM processes in different languages

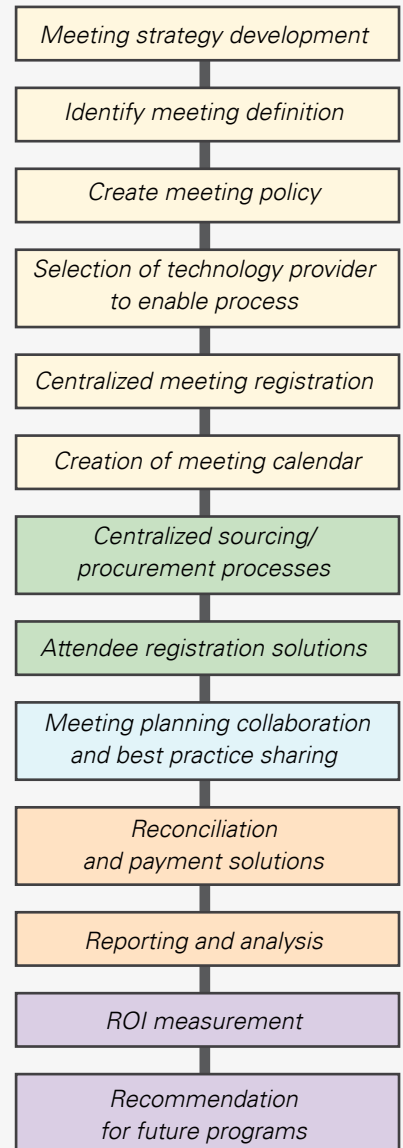
and currencies. For example, a company in the United States may focus on launching their SMM initiative in North America before venturing to expand to Europe or the Middle East.

The best approach to Strategic Meetings Management is to take it step by step, avoiding the common pitfall of trying to tackle every aspect at one time. "One of the biggest obstacles with any company deploying strategic meetings management programs with or without technology are some of the change-management and political hurdles that you have to overcome," says Lisa Palmeri, Director of Professional Services at Cvent. She adds, "It's the ability to rally the troops, to get employees to see the benefits, achieve buy-in and focus on the inclusion of all the right stakeholders that leads you down the path of success. It need not be complex if approached in a methodical fashion."

**"It need not be complex if approached in a methodical fashion."**

**-Lisa Palmeri  
Director of Professional Services,  
Cvent**

Figure 2: An SMM path with typical phases identified.



- Phase 1
- Phase 2
- Phase 3
- Phase 4
- Phase 5

## **SMM Myth No. 2:** **It's too expensive.**

One of the myths of Strategic Meetings Management Programs (SMMP) is that it is too expensive an endeavor to consider at most organizations. Although considerable up-front investments were often common in years past, today there are options that allow for the adoption of SMM practices with minimal initial investment. After all, one of the most compelling reasons for applying SMM is to drive savings across the board. Since the early years of SMM, then called meetings consolidation, there has been a steady increase in services and service-providers in this arena. SMM practitioners have been presented with increasing resources, case studies, and success stories as companies have launched SMM initiatives. With more companies entering the marketplace, these services, which were initially cost-restrictive, have become more attainable. The first investment, in most cases, is the technology platform which will support and enable the entire SMM process. However, this does not have to be expensive, especially when the savings and business automation benefits are considered. Best practices also suggest a phased approach to SMM implementation, which also keeps technology investments flexible and modular.

Building on the success achieved by travel managers, SMM practitioners can step quickly and easily into SMM processes with managed investments in technology. Early adopters of SMM often used faxed meeting registration forms and Excel spreadsheets to register meeting activity and build a centralized database. While this can still be done, best practices now call for the selection and implementation of flexible and dynamic technology solutions to facilitate this, along with many other processes.

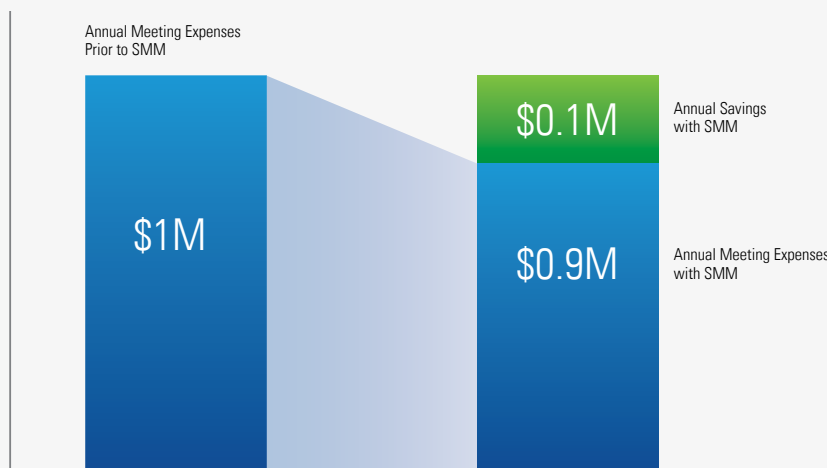
When considering technology solutions to support an SMMP, it is sometimes beneficial to use an incremental approach to its implementation. Depending upon an organization's priorities, implementing high priority technology modules first can be a successful strategy to achieve initial wins, prior to introducing a more comprehensive end-to-end solution. Starting, for example, with attendee registration and sourcing, an organization may not need to invest in modules to manage enterprise activities, reporting and surveys until phase two of the project. This allows for the opportunity to show savings generated at the end of the first phase, in order to further justify the additional technology investments.

**With an average savings of 10–15% typically actualized within the first two years, it may be too expensive not to implement SMM.**

Although technology may require an initial investment, the efficiencies and business automation advantages provided will quickly justify this expenditure. With an average SMMP savings ranging from 10–15% after the implementation of technology, most organizations can realize a return on their technology investment within the first year and a half (see Figure 3).

The savings opportunities that drive SMM cannot be overstated when dispelling the common myth that SMM is too expensive. With an average savings of 10–15% typically actualized within the first two years, it may be too expensive *not* to implement SMM.

Figure 3: SMM Programs yield an average savings of 10–15% in the first two years.



## **SMM Myth No. 3:**

### ***It only works for large organizations.***

Strategic Meetings Management was born from the practice of corporate travel management, which began to take shape in the late 1970's. At that time, organizations began to look at the overall management of business travel and its components (airfare, hotel bookings, rental cars, travel expenses, etc.). Corporations began creating centralized travel centers, through which all business travel was to be booked and confirmed. Strategic procurement practices and payment solutions soon followed. These are the same principles after which SMM was first modeled. Early adopters of corporate travel management principles were, for the most part, large corporations and government agencies. Thus, it is these same types of organizations who first adopted what was then called meetings centralization, and what we now call SMM.

### ***The development of flexible, modular technology platforms have made SMM technology available to organizations of all sizes.***

Because it was large corporations and associations who were the forerunners in this space, a common myth has developed – that SMM is only for large organizations. This could not be farther from the truth. SMM principles, such as centralized meeting registration and data consolidation, strategic sourcing, and payment reconciliation processes can be implemented at all types of organizations, regardless of size. In fact, smaller, less diverse companies may see much quicker success, and incur fewer roadblocks, due to their size and nimbleness.

Some challenges that smaller organizations may incur in the SMM process include the lack of internal expertise and resources. This can be easily overcome by capitalizing on the large amount of research, best practices, and resources now available. Refer to sources such as the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA – formally NBTA), the Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE), Meeting Professionals International (MPI), and Cvent, who regularly publish resource information and/or provide training in the area of Strategic Meetings Management.

The advantages large organizations held in this space have, in the past, included the ability to make large initial investments in technology solutions. As discussed in the previous section, the development of flexible, modular technology platforms have made SMM technology available to organizations of all sizes. Brian Ludwig, Vice President of Sales at Cvent, has seen tremendous interest from small to medium (SME) organizations. "Clients that signed on with Cvent many years ago for attendee registration management are now exploring SMM and how our platform can address their needs to better manage the full lifecycle of the meeting, versus just the attendee registration component," says Ludwig. "In fact, Cvent has built SMM solutions with SME clients in mind. We have been helping small and midsize companies implement SMM programs and reap the benefits for the past few years."

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***-Brian Ludwig  
VP of Sales, Cvent***



## **SMM Myth No. 4:**

### **Success requires a mandate from the executive floor.**

One of the first steps in Strategic Meetings Management is to create a clear and inclusive meeting policy for the organization. Standard operating procedures (SOP's) should be developed to support the meetings policy, inclusive of policy and process compliance tactics and goals. Enter the concept of a mandate. Early adopters of SMM often sought to have their programs mandated from the C-suite, thinking that their initiative would not be taken seriously or adopted otherwise. Although mandates can be successful, they are in no way required to achieve SMM success. In fact, the absence of a mandate can actually work to the advantage of the SMM project leader.

When any new policy is delivered to employees from senior management as a mandate, there is an assumption that employees will take that policy seriously – as a business practice they “must” adhere to it, or suffer adverse consequences. In some organizational cultures and environments, this can be very effective. Compliance to SMM policies and processes can easily be monitored via a technology platform, so that deviations from such policies/processes can be identified and addressed. Those who are not complying with SMM policies/processes can be retrained or counseled as necessary to bring their business behaviors into compliance. The ability to report compliance metrics based upon a mandate can also be compelling when showing the return on investment from SMM implementation.

What cannot be underestimated in the SMM space is the importance of understanding the stakeholders to whom the new policies/processes are applied. The majority of stakeholders in any SMM initiative are professional meeting planners, as well as marketing and administrative professionals who plan meetings and events as part of their duties. These individuals, by design, are often extremely detail-oriented, organized, creative and highly-autonomous individuals, who are revered for their “personal touch” and “care” of the meetings and events they plan. Thus, this can be a group who is highly resistant to control or oversight of any kind, especially when it is in the form of a mandate. One way to quickly alienate this crucial stakeholder group is to present them with a new or different way of getting their jobs done, just because the executive floor has said it must be so. This can introduce barriers in the implementation of an SMMP, again based upon the organization's culture and readiness for change.

A best practice in SMM initiatives is to create demand for the services and business optimizations being offered by the new SMM processes/policies. “We were surprised to find that adoption flourished faster with some of our new clients that chose not to go the mandate route,” says Anil Punyapu, Vice President of Enterprise Sales and Partnerships at Cvent. “In fact, creating incentives and facilitating the roles of the meeting planners appears to be a faster way to adoption,” adds Punyapu.

### ***The absence of a mandate can actually work to the advantage of the SMM project leader.***

Rather than an executive mandate, an SMM project leader can involve the organization's meeting planners and identified stakeholders in the development of the meeting policy, create an internal marketing plan for the project that involves key participants, and generate a good reputation and “buzz” about the services being offered. An advisory board or steering committee should be created as well, made up of meeting planners from a variety of perspectives at the organization, as well as stakeholders from procurement, travel, legal, and marketing can help guide the SMM initiative and foster a culture of co-creation. Additionally, the creation of an internal meeting planning community, facilitated by technology such as a presence on the company Intranet site, can promote idea exchange and increased adoption. This good news will travel throughout the organization, and soon the benefits will be realized – increased meeting registration in the system, increased use of new sourcing tools and processes, and increased data capture across the board.

The myth that mandates are required for SMM success is simply that – a myth. Although executive mandates can be effective in some corporate cultures, they are not required for success. Many SMMP's have found success without mandates. Rather, they have done so by creating a culture of inclusion, focusing on internal marketing, and sharing success with all stakeholders. “If you create SMM solutions that solve people's problems, address their pain points, and include them in the process, a mandate is not required. You don't have to find the people at your organization that are involved in meeting and events – they will find you!” says Lisa English, CMP, CMM, Marketing Manager, Strategic Meetings Management at Cvent.

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Marketing Manager, Strategic Meetings  
Management, Cvent***

# SMM Myth No. 5:

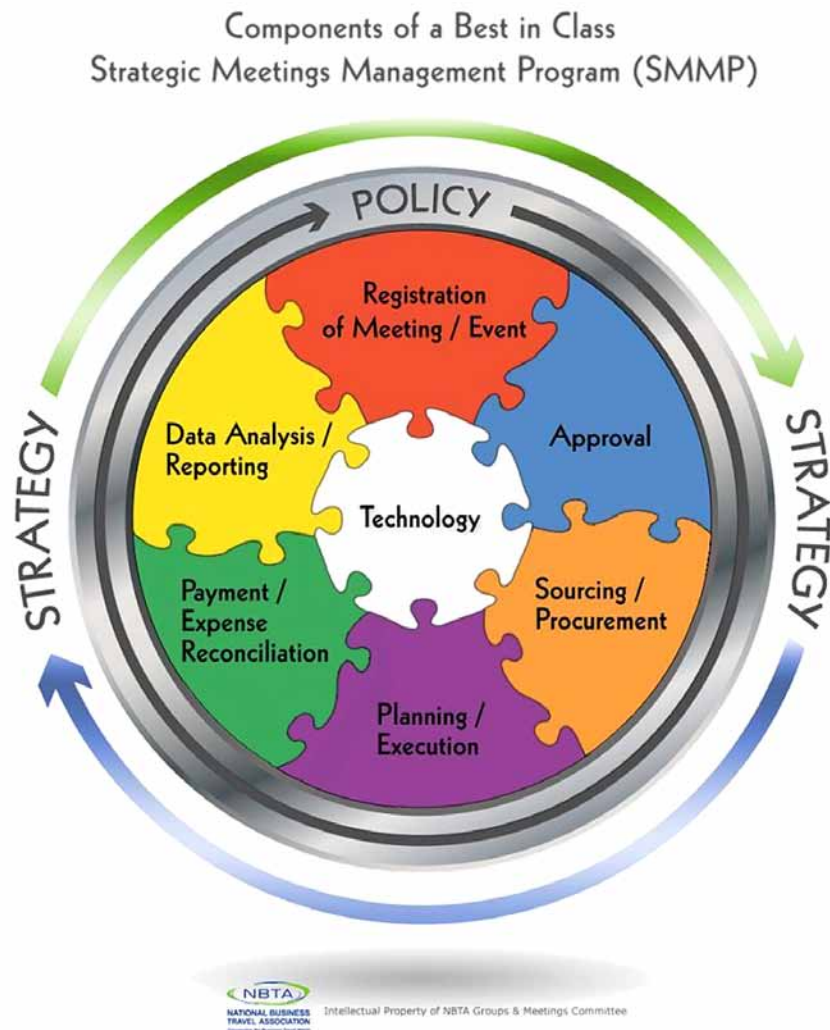
## Technology is the silver bullet.

As *meetings consolidation* and *meetings centralization* evolved into what we now call Strategic Meetings Management, technology platforms were developed to facilitate the SMM process. What began as simple online meeting registration systems have now progressed into highly-sophisticated, enterprise technology solutions. Early on, technology platforms were developed to automate the meetings consolidation and meetings centralization initiatives, with many of them marketed as “off the shelf” solutions for enterprise-wide meeting management. Some were simply anxious to capitalize on the increased popularity of SMM, while others chose to enter the market more strategically. Whatever the case, misconceptions have developed regarding the role technology plays in Strategic Meetings Management, and the scope of what it is intended to do.

### Below are some of the things technology will not do by itself:

- ▶ Decide the overarching strategy and goals for an SMM initiative
- ▶ Define an organization’s meetings policy and create processes
- ▶ Decide what data should be tracked by an SMM enterprise-wide solution
- ▶ Define reports and validate return on investment

Figure 4: GBTA's SMMP Best Practices Flow



## **Conversely, below are some of the things a comprehensive SMM enterprise-wide solution will do:**

### ***Technology creates a framework for achieving organizational SMM strategy and goals.***

How? Technology is the conduit for information exchange and collaboration between stakeholders. Technology creates the central repository for data and is the tangible framework that enables all of the processes involved in SMM. In order to do this successfully, technology requires the development of strategies and goals that are clearly defined, measurable and accessible. Keep SMM objectives top of mind when selecting the right technology system, and throughout the entire process. Without a vision for the program's the desired outcomes, the requirements for an SMM technology platform cannot be properly assessed, and the likelihood of repeating implementation steps is greatly increased. Armed with this information, however, the process is fluid and achievable (see Myth 1).

### ***Technology facilitates the adoption of an organization's meetings policy and procedures.***

How? At the onset of an SMM initiative comes one of the most important steps – the development of a clear and comprehensive meetings policy. Best practices include starting with any existing travel policy at the organization, which will likely have high traction and a solid adoption rate. Using this policy as a guide, the meetings policy is developed to identify stakeholders, outline processes, and set expectations across an organization. Meetings policies also include a meeting definition, which describes succinctly what constitutes a meeting, for the purpose of inclusion in the SMMP itself. But left adrift, the policy and procedures have little chance of success – which is where the SMM technology platform plays a crucial role. Vital technology components such as the meeting registration form, approval processes and filters that can be applied to facilitate the adherence to the established meetings policy. Savings can be tracked and measured against policy guidelines via a budgeting component. Compliance with travel programs can also be controlled via integrations with global booking tools such as Concur Cliqbook Travel or GetThere. It is technology as a central processing system, and the means of automating workflow, that allows for the integration of a meetings policy into the day-to-day operations of an organization – taking it from a policy on paper to guidelines in action.

### ***Once defined, technology facilitates the capture, reporting and warehousing of meeting data.***

How? One of the most compelling and often invoked reasons for SMM itself is the need to generate greater visibility into meeting activity and spend. In a non-SMM environment, meetings and events are planned and held in separate silos, and information regarding how and why meetings are held (and how money is spent) stays isolated and segmented. With the implementation of an SMMP, organizations are able to, often for the first time, see an over-arching picture of what meetings are being held, where, by whom, and at what cost. By asking the right questions up front in order to identify what data is to be tracked in the system, an organization can gain valuable information that can inform and facilitate stronger supplier relationships, support overall brand management strategies, impact decisions at the executive level, and provide understanding of the results achieved by meetings and events.

### ***Technology enables comprehensive reporting on collected data and allows for analysis of overall SMM program performance, thus allowing for success measurement and ROI evaluation.***

How? A best practice in SMM, as is true for many business practices, is to configure a system or process with the desired end-result in mind. It is essential to consider what reporting is required from the technology platform at the onset, so that the right information is captured along the way. Without this step, the likelihood of reconfiguration is extremely high once reports are created. To avoid this common pitfall, interview stakeholders carefully to identify what data, reports and metrics are requested, so that these can be considered during the configuration process. When able to report on the identified key performance indicators (KPIs), it is relatively simple to measure the return on investment from the SMM initiative by comparing performance between specific periods of time. For example, a program in year two can measure its overall meeting spend in a particular category against the same category in year one.

## ***Technology is the central component of an SMM initiative.***

As illustrated by the GBTA's SMMP Best Practices Flow (see Figure 4), technology is the central component of an SMM initiative. It creates the framework and structure through which all of the other components of SMM can flow and reside. "Relying solely on technology to power your entire program was a common issue in the early days of SMM. Fortunately, we have evolved to understand technology is one of the most important components to all SMM clients, regardless of their program's maturity," says Jeannie Griffin, Senior Product Manager

at Cvent. It does not create the strategy or meeting policy, rather, it enables them to become active, actionable guidelines and processes for stakeholders. It does not identify the data to be tracked within the system; it facilitates the capture and processing of that information across an organization. With planning and forethought, technology can be the catalyst for an organization to widely adopt the new procedures and systems that are part of thorough Strategic Meetings Management Programs.



# Conclusion:

## The truth about Strategic Meetings Management.

Strategic Meetings Management is an evolving practice of applying sound business practices to the enterprise-wide management of meetings and events. SMM as a methodology has seen tremendous growth and development over the past 10 years, and along the way several myths about SMM have developed. However, by understanding each of these myths, the facts about them become clear.

### **SMM Myth 1: It's too complex and hard to implement.**

**Fact:** By identifying a clear path, identifying logical phases, and taking it step-by-step, SMM can be a simple, logical process.

### **SMM Myth 2: It's too expensive.**

**Fact:** Most organizations realize a savings of 10–15% within 18 months after the implementation of technology to facilitate the process, making it expensive not to consider.

### **SMM Myth 3: It only works for large organizations.**

**Fact:** SMM best practices, such as centralized meeting registration, strategic sourcing and attendee registration management, can benefit any size/type of organization.

### **SMM Myth 4: Success requires a mandate from the executive floor.**

**Fact:** Many SMMPs have found success without an executive mandate, simply by rallying internal stakeholders toward services and solutions that make their jobs easier.

### **SMM Myth 5: Technology is the silver bullet.**

**Fact:** Technology cannot act alone – it is the facilitator of SMM, and at the center of the entire process.

Myths typically evolve out of misperceptions and generalizations about challenges and obstacles. As Strategic Meetings Management continues to evolve and mature over the coming years, it is likely more myths and misunderstandings will develop. By seeking understanding and solutions to these business challenges and hurdles in SMM, the methodology will further develop into the standard practice for the management of meetings and events.

### **About Cvent:**

Established in 1999, Cvent is the largest strategic meetings management and site selection company in the U.S., with over 670 employees worldwide. More than 80,000 professionals use Cvent per year to create over 275,000 meetings and events. Cvent's users have sent over 850 million emails and have processed over 30 million registrations and survey responses. Over \$25 million in research and development has been invested into Cvent's proven technology solution and services. Cvent has implemented Strategic Meetings Management programs for more than 40 corporations over the past year.

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