DUAL TREATMENT

As the economy continues to struggle, more medical and pharmaceutical meeting planners are turning to eMeetings to extend the reach of their face-to-face events.

But without solid planning and support, webconferences can become disastrous experiences, with even minor glitches throwing off the flow of a meeting and the live event it supports. *Successful Meetings* recently spoke with Bill Cooney, CEO, president, of MedPoint Communications, Inc. (www.medpt.com) in Evanston, Ill. Since founding the company in 1990, Cooney has presided over the growth and transformation of MedPoint into a leading provider of digital medical communications and information services. We asked Cooney to give his best advice to planners of medical and pharmaceutical meetings who are looking to combine eMeetings and live events. Here's what he had to say:

Successful Meetings: *How much can adding an eMeeting component to a live event save a medical or pharmaceutical company?*

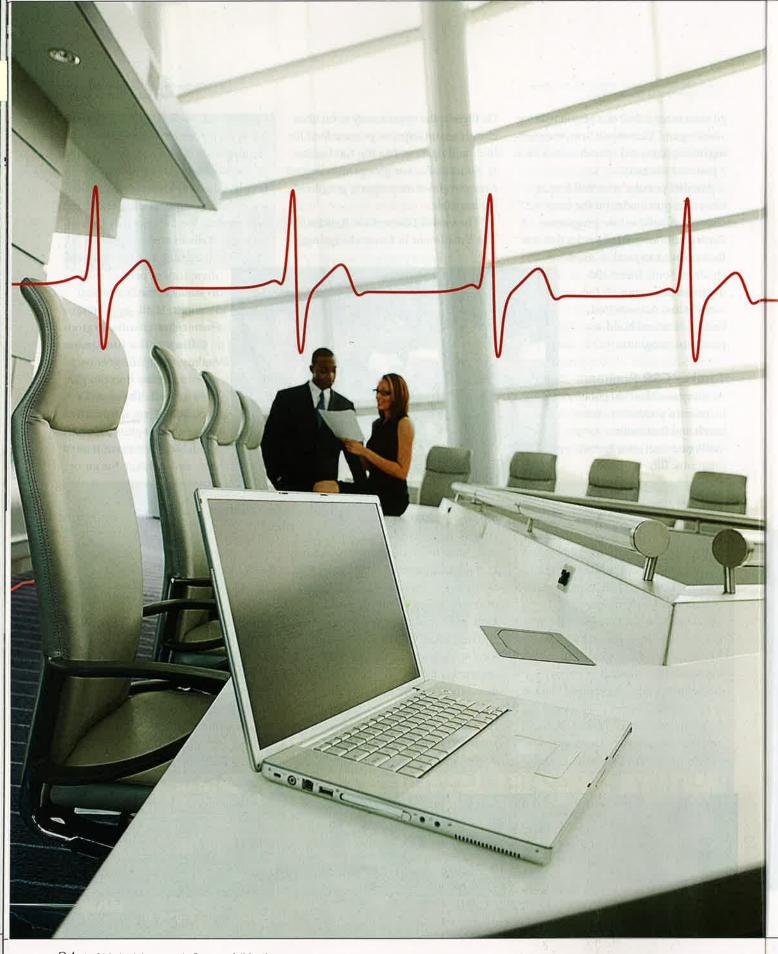**Bill Cooney:** The answer varies greatly depending on the scope and format of the event. A one-time meeting with extensive support, but serving only a few attendees, can cost up to $1,000 per person. In contrast, an efficient full-service meeting format serving a larger audience can cost $100 per person or even less. For baseline comparison, fly-to meetings average $2,000 per person or more. Thus, the potential savings by adding an eMeeting to a face-to-face event are in a range from 50 percent to 95 percent. Using an average 80 percent savings rate, a shift of as few as 625 face-to-face attendees becoming eMeeting participants can yield $1,000,000 in savings.

SM: *What is the key challenge that must be met when integrating an eMeeting component into a live medical or pharmaceutical event?*

Cooney: Many medical eMeetings are high-profile VIP events, which makes excellent technical performance a basic requirement. It's important to note that the "self-service"

READER ROI
- Key elements to integrating eMeetings and face-to-face events
- How speakers must adapt to be successful in both formats

webconference solution normally used for internal company conferences may not be the best service when connecting with medical VIPs outside your corporate network.

Instead, your external meeting may require a higher level of pre-event planning that includes presenter preparation, media development, event moderation, audience logon support, etc. In

"For eMeetings to make sense they must do more than lower costs"

—Bill Cooney, Medpoint Communications, Inc.

such cases, a full-service meeting provider should be considered to deliver wrap-around production services that will ensure thorough pre-event preparation and smooth technical performance on site.

For eMeetings to make sense, they must do far more than lower costs and perform technically well; they must deliver an effective meeting experience that achieves your communication and business goals. This requires an informed approach to planning and executing your meeting, which can make the difference between a highly successful conference and a painfully dysfunctional event.

SM: *What sort of pre-event planning is necessary for a hybrid meeting?*

Cooney: A media plan should outline the use of single and multiple video cameras, as well as use of recorded video and animation sequences. A plan for interaction can keep participants engaged with a steady mix of polling, text/chat, and Q&A. A detailed script should be developed with verbatim introductions, disclosures and housekeeping notes. The script and other elements of the web meeting should be delivered by a moderator who ensures the web meeting proceeds at a brisk pace. All of these elements must be pulled together by an meeting planner who provides guidelines and assists presenters in preparing an exciting, engaging web meeting.

SM: *Do on-site speakers need to adapt their presentations for a hybrid format?*

Cooney: The only thing worse than a long PowerPoint presentation is a long remote PowerPoint presentation. Presenters must learn to downsize their slide sets for web meetings, with an emphasis on brevity, focus and clarity. Planners can help by setting a tighter agenda, giving presenters 33 percent less time than usual and setting limits on the number of slides per minute. Encourage presenters to use fewer text slides and more graphic slides, remembering the "6 x 6" rule (no more than six bullet points per slide and six words per bullet) is a great rule of thumb for text slides. And if possible, have a professional instructional designer rework slide material into web meeting-friendly versions.

Almost all of us are fast talkers and when we make presentations, we tend to speed up even more. When presenting to remote audiences, it's important to control the pace and speak clearly because audio clarity tends to be degraded, and attentiveness is taxed when audiences strain to hear. This is especially true for international conferences and multilingual audiences. Presenters need to be coached during rehearsal and reminded to slow down and talk clearly prior to the presentation, while the use of a "slow down" signal can also help overly energetic or nervous speakers. Hybrid meeting success can hinge on the very simple matter of getting presenters to speak slowly and deliberately.

SM: *Can the level of interaction achieved in a face-to-face event be duplicated in an eMeeting?*

Cooney: Studies show the key to an effective meeting is getting the audience involved. For medical professionals, it is even more important to avoid long lectures and engage the intelligence of audience members. Web meetings face the additional challenge of generating interaction with audience members at remote locations. Such interaction is necessary to prevent a web meeting from devolving into a passive and ineffective experience.

The good news is that most web conference platforms have built-in features that do a great job of fostering audience involvement. Perhaps the most popular tool is audience polling, which allows participants to choose answers from among multiple choices with results instantly displayed as cumulative responses on bar charts. Polling is fun and allows large numbers of participants to have a "voice" in the meeting. Another interactive tool is the "chat" feature, which allows participants to submit comments or questions by text at any time during a web meeting.

A medical meeting planner can establish various best practices for web meetings, but it's all for nothing if your colleagues ignore the rules, as so often happens. So the golden rule is to develop a web meeting plan, and work the plan. Your mission is to provide presenters and hosts with a clear set of best practices, and insist that they follow through with them. **SM**