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Communication means have been changing continuously. The use of mobile phones, pdas, blackberries has been increasing, showing how "access to information" is the key-concept nowadays. With the result of delegates staying on-line constantly and doing several things simultaneously. The meeting industry cannot ignore it

The world



and most probably don't even get remarked any longer. However the fact that he names them is because he puts a link between these separate events, products and services: they have changed and are changing the world drastically. Although the whole book is interesting I will not provide you with a

summary of it. However two of the issues he mentions are of particular interest, especially relating to our work, the field of conferences and meetings.

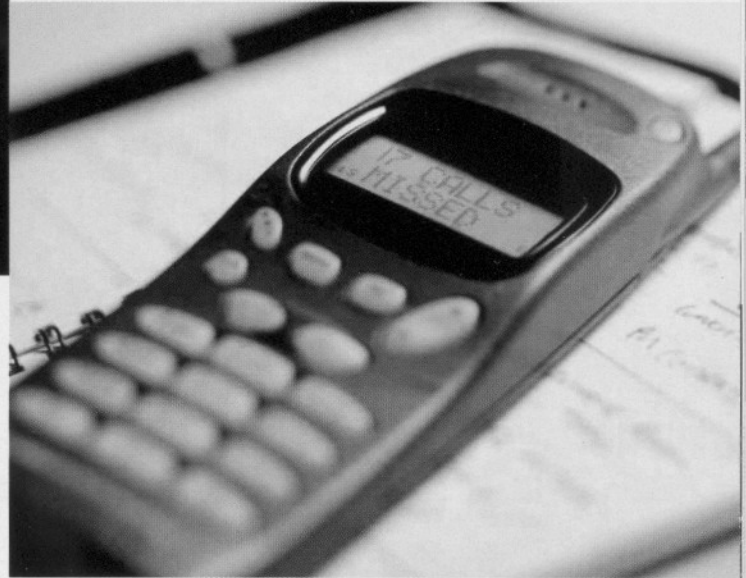
Two important issues

The first I want to mention is the issue of open-sourcing, the act of releasing previously proprietary software under an open or free software license. By doing so a new, free flow of (digital) communication starts and (almost) anyone can obtain access. An example of this is Wikipedia, the biggest multilingual open access encyclopaedia on the In-

ternet. Its slogan is "The Free Encyclopaedia that anyone can edit" and, indeed, if you have an interesting subject you can put it online and everyone can take advantage of this knowledge. Apart from the fact that anyone can participate, also the fact that whole new communities, or as Friedman calls them, "self-organizing collaborative communities", can start, is an extremely interesting aspect. Upon writing this I visited the Dutch Wikipedia site and there the relation with our business was found: the second Dutch Wikipedia meeting is already taking place this month. The emergence of self-organizing collaborative communities, in the beginning only digital, will be followed up and bring us a whole new range of (physical!) meetings.

The second issue I want to bring to your attention, is the increased use of mobile phones, pdas, blackberries, etc. When was the last time since you asked the audience of a plenary session during a conference to switch off digital equipment as mobiles? And when was the last time they all did? In the beginning of the digital era everyone did. **Nowadays, everyone stays on-line resulting in having participants**

Thomas Friedman, the renowned columnist of the New York Times, has hit again. In his latest book "The World is Flat" he gives a meticulous account of changes in the (post)modern world. Reading the book, one is almost overcome by what the Germans would call a "Aha-Erlebnis" (something which can be translated as an epiphany, although that would be a little exaggerated. Literally it would be translated as "aha-experience", something that makes you say, "aha"). The events, products and services he is mentioning are by most of us known



is flat...



doing several things simultaneously. One cannot be any longer sure that delegates being physically present are also mentally present. Not to talk about intellectual or spiritual presence...

Both examples probably make you say "Aha", what is new? There has always been new sorts of gatherings stemming from new backgrounds. Communication means have been changing constantly. Both are true. But the first one has not such much to do with the

upspring of new sorts of meetings but with the development of new communities. Inextricably with the emergence of these, the key-word access comes into play. **In this (post)modern world, one "owns" not longer but one "has access". One handles no longer in products but in information.** The second development, change of communication means, shows how important access to information is. If every moment of the day one wants to be reachable by phone or pda, it has to be important, not to say indispensable, to be constantly on-line. Having access to information is having power...

"Unnoticed" changes

These developments are not new at all. These changes have been slipping in daily life almost unnoticed. However, they are really altering life and not in the least the way we are communicating with each other. And with that, the way meetings are perceived. For us, the meeting industry, whether being planner or supplier, it means that more than ever we have to delve into what our conference delegates want, how they communicate, how they disperse their attention. It will be essential to

retain the delegates attention or in some cases to regain their interest. For the newcomers in the world of conferences, the recent graduates, it will be vital that communication is adapted to their common way of communicating, to a large extent digitally thus. The meeting industry will have to take care of mixing "old" and "new" communicating means. Of blending the virtual and physical world. Because a lot can change but one thing will stay: we always will communicate! ●

