



## MEETING OF MINDS

Katherine Woods, Founder of Meeting Magic, shines a light on the need for face-to-face meetings

As a result of globalisation, technological advances and more recently the state of the economy, the use of virtual meetings (conference calls, video conferences, web-based) is on the increase. They are an obvious solution at a time when budgets are being slashed and travel bans enforced – but unfortunately their use is not always appropriate. Whilst virtual meetings are useful for disseminating information, it is face-to-face meetings that allow us to have powerful conversations, ones that lead to action and changes in the workplace.

Research\* from the USA shows that while participating in audio conferences:

- 23% of participants gave their full attention
- 27% did other work
- 13% surfed the web
- 8% were not fully dressed!

Good decisions and organisational agility lie at the heart of success. It is both my opinion and experience that these things can only be achieved effectively through face-to-face meetings.

One of the most powerful uses of face-to-face meetings is in decision making and the key to this is:

- a) Making the right decision, and
- b) Making decisions that stick.

Most important business decisions are complex. Business functions are often geographically spread with different expertise and different perspectives on a situation. From the board room and operations to

sales, marketing and manufacture, it is rare that one person will have all the knowledge. The solution is to pull the relevant parties into a meeting, pool knowledge and make informed decisions. As an aside, this of course requires the meeting to be well designed, allowing for collective knowledge-sharing and decision making.

As for making decisions that stick, failure is much more likely to happen after a virtual meeting than a face-to-face one. In a face-to-face situation you can engage people and reach the bottom of their concerns. This leaves them with genuine commitment to carry out what they have agreed to do, which leads to aligned action and powerful business results.

At the moment, most businesses are paying particular attention to the way they are organised, with a view to increased efficiency and 'leanness'. To succeed, businesses need to be able to innovate ahead of the market, whilst learning fast and making swift changes. Both of these require effective face-to-face meetings. I am, for example, facilitating a meeting for an Open Innovation project. The process involves four companies collaborating to create new intellectual property, keeping them ahead in their markets. This can only be done face-to-face.

An agile, well-run business needs people to come together to make decisions, share wisdom and create new futures. Virtual meetings are a useful tool, offering a variety of benefits but they are still just a tool to be used at the right time in the right place. Despite the current economic situation, cutting back

on face-to-face meetings can be a false economy. If businesses really want to reduce the cost of time wasted in meetings I offer these suggestions:

- **Challenge the need for the meeting in the first place!** By being clear about how decisions need to be made, and not involving people for the sake of involving people, a lot of time wasting meetings could be eliminated entirely.
- **Make the most of the face-to-face time.** Most meetings suffer from lack of preparation and when preparation is done, it is focussed on the wrong things – usually the Powerpoint! By doing the right preparation for meetings, you can make them highly productive working environments that get the most from the brainpower present and deliver results.

*Katherine Woods is the founder and Managing Director of Meeting Magic Ltd. Meeting Magic facilitates participative and productive meetings. From strategic planning with leadership teams, to large group meetings and conferences, the company helps participants to deliver better results. Meeting Magic works with organisations worldwide. Clients include Mars, Microsoft, Coca Cola, Department of Health, Metropolitan Police and Big Lottery. The company has affiliate partners in Australia and the USA.*

\*Statistics courtesy of 'Speed Lead' by Kevan Hall  
Visit [www.meetingmagic.co.uk](http://www.meetingmagic.co.uk) to download your free guide to meeting preparation.



## Be a winner in Belfast

Businesses in Belfast are invited to enter the 2010 Belfast Business Awards, hosted by the city council in partnership with Belfast City Centre Management. The awards are all about celebrating success and in a period of economic downturn, it's important to take time out to reward and recognise the hard work and dedication of local companies.

The newly-refurbished City Hall will be the venue for the awards ceremony on 29 April, and host for the evening will be Belfast-born Nicky Kinnaid, Founder and Creative Director of prestigious beauty chain Space NK. A total of 19 awards will be presented in a range of categories from Best New Business to Best Marketing Initiative. For more details, visit [www.belfastbusinessawards.com](http://www.belfastbusinessawards.com)