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Tourism, Terrorism, and the New World for Event Leaders

Events industry has become one of major tourism sectors and generated a significant economic contribution to the tourism industry. Recent terrorism events have spurred safety and security concerns in the events industry. This article introduces a developmental effort to establish an online knowledge-based eSAFE system based on knowledge management concepts (knowledge creation and sharing) for the events industry professionals. The goal of this system is to develop Web-based solutions for facilitating knowledge management in both individual and organizational learning in the context of safety and security of planning festivals and events.

Keywords: Tourism, Terrorism, Knowledge management (KM)

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Dr. Hu is an enthusiastic educator and researcher with experiences in hospitality sales/marketing, consulting, and education. Hu has published in a variety of journals and presented many conference papers based on his research work. His recent publications can be found in major tourism and hospitality journals. His major research focus is in knowledge management and discovery to research and develop systems for knowledge creation, transfer, sharing, and coordination for tourism & hospitality industries.

Tourism, Terrorism, and the New World for Event Leaders

According to the Tourism Industry Association of America (2003), most (75%) U.S. adult travelers attended a cultural activity or event while on a trip in 2002. This translates to an estimated 109.8 million U.S. adults. In addition, one fifth of all U.S. travelers attend a fair, festival, or other special event during their vacation (Tourism Industry Association of America, 1999). Millions of individuals attend events throughout North America ranging from the Super Bowl to small town festivals and parades. These events have been described by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as “soft targets” because they enable terrorists to quickly make a powerful statement during a vulnerable and easily penetrable event.

Research conducted in the National Laboratory for Tourism and eCommerce (NLTeC) at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania seeks to reduce these possibilities through the development of an online knowledge-based system called eSAFE (electronic Safe Festivals and Events) System based on knowledge management concepts. The goal of such a project is to develop Web-based solutions for facilitating knowledge management for both individual and organizational learning.

This project is an important step involving the events industry and its stakeholders (potentially including the government) in planning secure events. Two major features of this forward-thinking development as:

(1) Knowledge base – A knowledge-based system that facilitates fast yet flexible access to the integrated knowledge from explicit knowledge source (structural knowledge deconstructed from the respectfully publications) and tacit/implicit knowledge (expert interviews guided by meaningful knowledge structures through text-mining and ontological research from the explicit

knowledge). Such a process of knowledge acquisition and creation enables continuing improvement and enhancement of the knowledge base about security/safety issues in special event planning.

(2) ExpertNet – an expert-driven network (online community) that helps members of the community to connect with one another to locate specific event security knowledge on demand through a meaningful knowledge distribution structure that is constructed and based on the domains and levels of knowledge expertise, expert relationships, geographic distance, language abilities, and preferred communication methods.

The system attempts to ensure that the learned knowledge in secure event planning can be both efficiently and effectively identified, transferred, shared and reused by the event organizers.

The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation defines terrorism as “The unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a Government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives. (Kushner, 2003, p. XX)”

Historically, public events such as those associated with sports or entertainment have provided terrorists with a perfect storm within which they may commit violence, intimidate and coerce a Government or civilian population, and advance their political objectives. Effective event security is a collaborative effort between planners and their communities, most importantly their law enforcement at federal, state, and local levels. Until the U.S. Department of Homeland Security began to monitor and coordinate security for major events such as the U.S. national political conventions or the Super Bowl, these events were always under the radar screen of the federal government. The very fact that the U.S. multi-level government agencies recognize the

potential threats associated with these events further confirms that there is need to develop an industry-oriented knowledge management system wherein event organizers and security experts can exchange information that may mitigate or eliminate future threats.

According to Tarlow (2002, p. 135), “Terrorism has a number of nuances, and it is essential that the event risk manager understand these differences.” Tarlow states that the reason for the interaction between terrorism and events includes the following reasons:

- Events are often close to major transportation centers which may be interrupted and cause panic.
- Events are big business and may cause economic interruption and panic.
- Events impact many other industries such as restaurants, hotels, and entertainment and the negative impacts resulting from terrorism could cause widespread damage.
- Events often draw media coverage that enables terrorists to promote their cause to a large audience.
- Events require tranquility or places where business can be conducted in a peaceful manner and therefore an act of terrorism interrupts this peaceful environment.
- Events must deal with people who have no history, thus risk managers often do not have data bases on delegates or attendees. This lack of history makes it difficult to develop accurate profiles of the event stakeholders (attendees, participants, staff, volunteers) and anticipate terrorist activities.

The organizers of the summer Olympic Games in Athens, Greece reportedly invested three to five times more money for safety, security, and terrorism prevention than did previous

summer Olympic Games in Sydney (Hellenic News of America Inc., 2004; People's Daily Online, 2004). This shift in priorities further suggests that knowledge that is cultivated and transmitted through knowledge management concepts subscribed by the eSAFE System may be one of the major innovative influences in the process of reducing or preventing terrorism before, during, or following live events.

The sages wrote in the Babylonian Talmud Tractate Sanhedrin 37A "He who destroys a life, it is as if he had destroyed an entire world; He who saves a life, it is as if he had saved an entire world." (Tarlow, p. XI) Event organizers have an even greater responsibility than other managers due to greater vulnerability and higher potential for injury and loss of life inherent through live events. The eSAFE System is a vital advancement in the sharing of critical information that may create a safer and more secure environment for the public to confidently attend and enjoy live events.

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