



INCENTIVE TRAVEL: THE PARTICIPANT'S VIEWPOINT PART I: INCENTIVE TRAVEL AS A MEANINGFUL MOTIVATOR

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Site International Foundation  **International Foundation** and the **Incentive Travel Council** 
of the **Incentive Marketing Association**

Motivational travel has long been recognized as a powerful business tool for helping organizations achieve key business objectives. However, most incentive industry research is limiting as historical efforts have only provided insights from the corporate user and provider viewpoints. Consequently, the results are frequently skewed to their point of view – what they perceive as their own needs, wants and preferences.

The Participant's Viewpoint study, which was jointly sponsored by the **Site International Foundation** and the **Incentive Travel Council** of the **IMA**, examines the participant's viewpoint—*both qualifiers and non-qualifiers*—those for whom these programs are designed to create effective motivation. It looks at what makes incentive travel *meaningful, motivational, and memorable*.

Research of the participant's view of motivational travel programs can provide indicators beyond simple ROI/ROO. The traditional financial or business related measurement of values can yield a significant disconnect with incentive travel participants. For the motivational travel participants, their level of interest and engagement hinges on whether or not the opportunity for a travel experience is worth their added time and effort—think of it as a Return on Experience or ROE model.

To achieve true breakthroughs in performance, we have to focus on Win/Win approaches—those that provide value to both the program sponsor and participant.

This first installment of a four-part series of findings focuses on the aspects of how motivational travel participants view programs as *meaningful*. For the purposes of our study, *meaningful* represents an incentive travel program that has clearly defined rules, fair and attainable goals, effective communications, and on-going feedback of performance measurement.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

■ Respondents gave management high marks for their fairness and clarity in setting goals. When asked if the performance goal required to earn a travel reward was clear, 72.6% *agreed or strongly agreed* that it was. Only 8.9% had a negative view of the goal.

■ Similarly, 77.7% of respondents *agreed or strongly agreed* that the goal was achievable, and almost 70% *agreed or strongly agreed* that it was fairly determined. Unsurprisingly, in comparing the responses from those who had earned incentive travel rewards and those who had not, those who met the goal felt it was more achievable.

■ In general—and somewhat surprising—most of those who did not achieve their goal still found the objectives to be fair and clear.

■ Management's performance scored slightly less well when respondents were asked if they received ongoing feedback that helps them understand their progress toward the travel award. While 57.5% *agreed or strongly agreed* that they did, almost 16% *disagreed or strongly disagreed*. Seventeen and a third percent took no stand. Since the success of an incentive program is highly dependent on maintaining the involvement of participants, the implication is clear that feedback is an area for improvement.

■ An interesting result of this survey is that the difference between earners' and non-earners' view of the motivational impact of a program did not differ greatly. Of those who earned the reward, 95.5% said they were a *little motivated, motivated, or extremely motivated* to earn the reward. But, 90.7% of *non-earners* were similarly motivated.

■ Asked how their level of motivation will change when working towards the next travel award, 54.1% of earners said it would *increase or increase significantly* for the same destination. Forty-seven and a half percent of non-earners agreed. Interestingly, 66.8% of earners expressed that opinion for a *different* destination as did 47.4% of non-earners. The increase in both categories supports the concept of changing destinations from year to year.



THE MEANINGFULNESS OF INCENTIVE TRAVEL

Respondents were asked about their beliefs regarding the effectiveness of incentive travel relative to other motivational options. Results were both positive and negative.

Asked if they believe that cash or a similar reward (i.e., a prepaid debit card) would be a more effective motivational tool than travel, 36.6% said they did while 31.7% did not.

The good news is that there is not an overwhelming preference for cash as might be expected given western cultures' viewpoints on the optional value of money.

In comparing travel with merchandise, 61.6% believed travel to be a more effective motivator.

An interesting observation may point to a benefit of using individual incentives. A plurality of respondents (40.9%) feel that paid vacation time would be more motivational than motivational travel. This is an area that could benefit from more research to see if individual incentives are viewed as similar to vacation benefits since group incentive travel is a more structured product.

NON-EARNERS' VIEWS

Non-earners—those who did not qualify for the travel reward—

were asked about their attitudes toward the program and their company. Only 11% said they didn't strive for the award because they weren't interested in it, as opposed to the 66% who said they were interested in winning the reward.

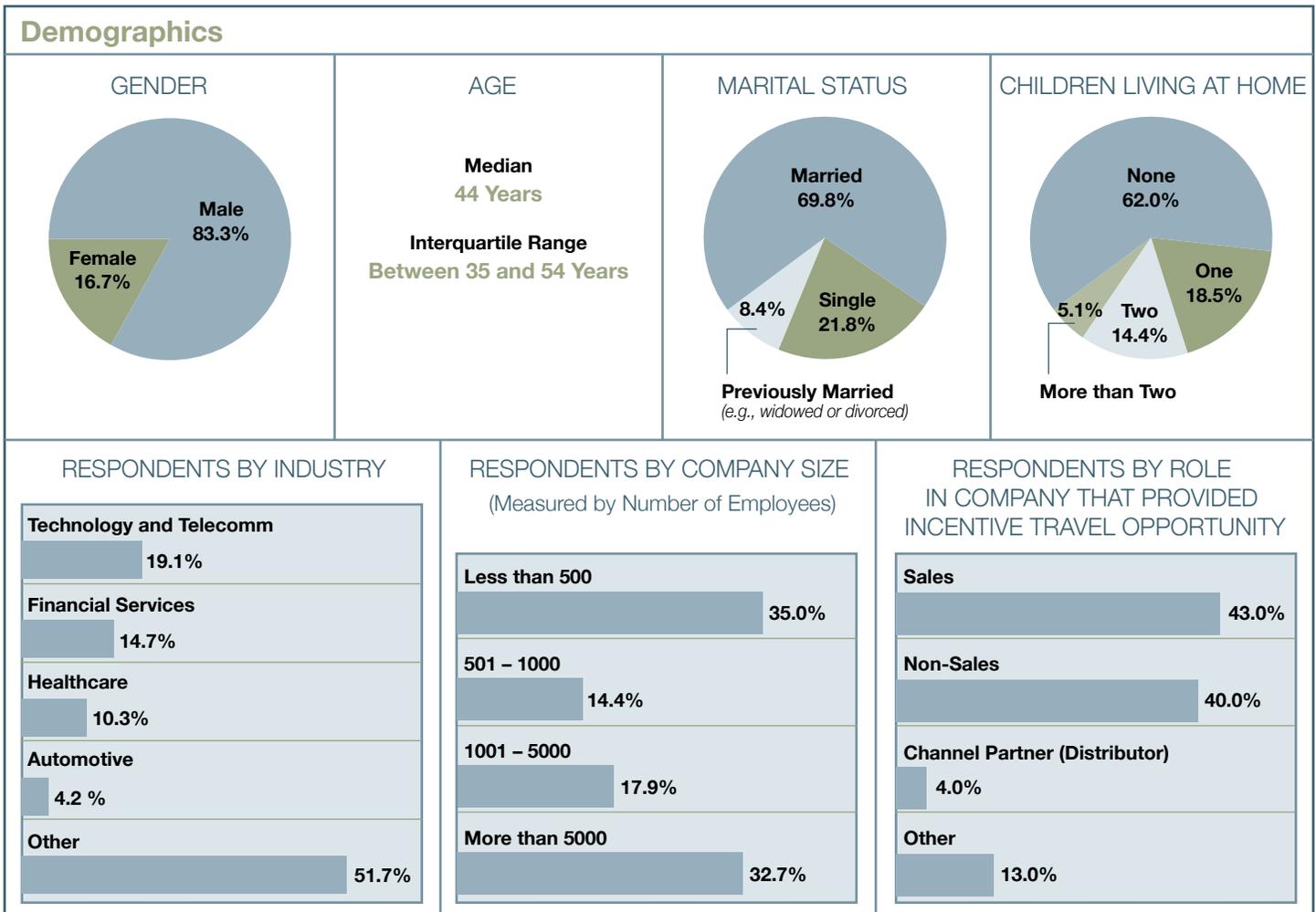
Similarly, only 9% of non-earner respondents said they felt bitterness toward their employer, and 11% felt unfairly treated.

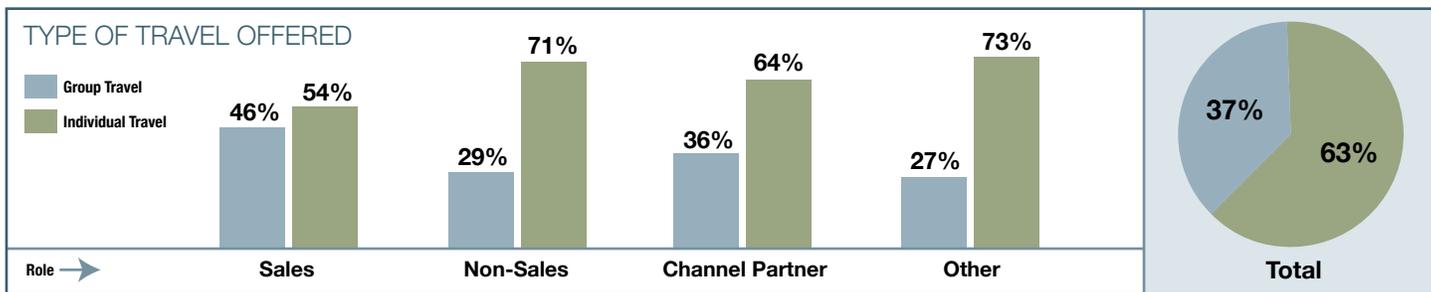
Fifteen percent of the non-earners said they believe the goal was unattainable but 66% felt that the award was attainable.

The motivational travel competition appears to have had a negative effect on 18% of non-earners who said their overall engagement/involvement with the company was lowered as a result of not qualifying.

Thirty-one percent said they were envious of those who earned the travel award—a reaction that might be viewed as positive if it drives them to greater effort in future programs. But 38% feel that the same people earn the reward every year—a somewhat defeatist view.

Sixty-seven and a half percent of non-earners agreed that they want to work harder in order to be an earner in the future. That degree of motivation in non-earners demonstrates the strength of incentive travel as a motivator.





Survey Results

COMPARISON OF INCENTIVE TRAVEL REWARDS TO OTHER MOTIVATIONAL TOOLS

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe that cash (or near cash like a prepaid debit card) would be a more effective motivational tool than travel.	6.4%	25.3%	30.2%	26.5%	10.1%
	31.7%			36.6%	
I believe that merchandise would be a more effective motivational tool than travel.	19.7%	41.9%	24.2%	10.9%	1.8%
	61.6%			12.7%	
I believe that paid vacation time would be a more effective motivational tool than travel.	7.7%	21.8%	28.3%	29.7%	11.2%
	29.5%			40.9%	

Note: Percentages do not add to 100% due to small amount of respondents (< 2%) saying no opinion.

ATTITUDE OF NON-EARNERS TOWARD THEIR COMPANY/PEERS

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (Neutral)	Agree	Strongly Agree
I didn't work toward the award because I wasn't interested in it.	27%	39%	23%	10%	1%
I feel bitter towards my employer.	38%	30%	23%	8%	1%
I feel unfairly treated by my employer.	33%	32%	24%	9%	2%
I believe the goal set was unattainable.	15%	41%	29%	12%	3%
My overall level of engagement/involvement with the company offering the incentive is lower.	19%	33%	30%	16%	2%
I am envious of the people who earned the travel award.	16%	28%	25%	27%	4%
It seems to be the same people earning the travel every year.	7%	24%	31%	33%	5%

DEGREE OF MOTIVATION TO EARN THE CURRENT TRAVEL AWARD

	Earners	Non-Earners
Not at All Motivated	0.6%	2.8%
Relatively Unmotivated	2.7%	3.8%
A Little Motivated	16.1%	20.8%
Motivated	46.2%	45.3%
Extremely Motivated	33.2%	24.6%
No Opinion	1.2%	2.7%

CHANGE IN LEVEL OF MOTIVATION TOWARD THE NEXT TRAVEL AWARD

	Same Destination		Different Destination	
	Earners	Non-Earners	Earners	Non-Earners
No Opinion	1.2%	2.5%	1.3%	1.8%
Decrease Significantly	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Decrease	2.4%	1.7%	0.4%	5.5%
No Change	42.3%	48.1%	31.5%	49.8%
Increase	40.1%	38.1%	47.5%	36.0%
Increase Significantly	14.0%	9.3%	19.3%	6.9%

NON-EARNERS WHO SAY THEY WANT TO WORK HARDER TO BECOME AN EARNER IN THE FUTURE

Strongly Disagree	1.0%
Disagree	1.7%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree (Neutral)	29.1%
Agree	52.2%
Strongly Agree	15.2%
No Opinion	0.8%



SUMMARY

When it comes to Motivational Travel strategy design, there is a simple yet important factor to consider—the participant’s choice for engagement. Participants not only make a conscious choice during the launch of an incentive travel program but throughout the entire experience: before, during and after. At any point, they can choose to engage or disengage. This is the reality of any promotional program, but it should never discourage adoption or support. Travel can significantly yield targeted values and benefits for which there are simply no substitutes or alternatives.

Meaningfulness, from the incentive travel participant’s viewpoint, creates the very first impression and is the mortar that holds it all together throughout the life of the program. Despite how motivating a program might be, if a strategy is not clearly communicated, seen as fair or attainable, effectively communicated and sufficiently provides on-going feedback to participants, the business value is at significant risk. These areas need to be carefully considered and aligned with each unique audience. The meaningfulness of a program is as equally important as the motivational elements, demanding an equal amount of time, attention and effort to ensure it is right for the organization and

the participants. When organizations connect participant insights along with past program experience and design team instincts, that is when the program’s effectively defined meaningfulness can make the difference between good and great outcomes.

The findings of this U.S. based national study involved over 1,000 survey participants. The insights shared are directional and can vary from one organization to another. The spirited intention of the Participant’s Viewpoint series is to provide challenging and constructive insights that will help Motivational Travel sponsors discover and apply approaches that lead toward more effective outcomes for both their organization and program participants.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCHERS

This survey was designed with assistance from practicing incentive managers and other incentive industry professionals. The survey was then assembled by the marketing research firm, **ResearchNow**. There were 1,003 valid responses from individuals who had been eligible to receive incentive travel. Their demographics can be found on page 2 of this report.

The survey was supervised by Scott A. Jeffrey, Ph.D., Monmouth University, and Marion Joppe, Ph.D., University of Guelph.

THE SITE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Site International Foundation has provided research and educational programs that assist business executives, practitioners, and professionals since 2006. The Foundation is the research arm of Site, a membership community that represents 90 countries and professionals who deliver best-in-class solutions and insights to maximize the business impact of motivational experiences regardless of industry, region or culture.

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THE INCENTIVE TRAVEL COUNCIL

The Incentive Travel Council, a strategic industry group within the Incentive Marketing Association (IMA) is dedicated to exploring, promoting and educating about how incentive travel strategies can best be designed and leveraged to help organizations achieve better business performance.

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