

The KID and the PRO

AN INDUSTRY VETERAN looks back on her career, while a NEWBIE looks ahead.

SUSAN FLEMING, CMP, CMM

Vice President, Corporate Meeting Management, Piper Jaffray

Age: 41

Education: B.A. in Communications, University of Minnesota, Duluth

Work History: 10 years with current employer; five years with Carlson Marketing Group



I started my career planning health fairs, community education programs and annual meetings. I then worked as a communications consultant for several large corporations. I found that I didn't enjoy spending the majority of the day writing, so I wanted to find something new to do with my degree. One of the companies I was consulting for acquired another company and I became involved with the coordination of national training sessions. I immediately gravitated toward the project-planning side of the work. Not long after, I discovered Carlson Marketing Group and my career in meeting planning officially began. At the time, there was no official education required (other than a preferred college degree) and the CMP certification was not widely recognized. Most experience was gained through co-workers and on-the-job training.

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—Susan Fleming

Since I began my career, this industry has evolved and changed considerably, with technology having the greatest impact. In the past, our group of meeting planners shared a single computer and submitted templates to the word processing department. Today, there's hardly a meeting planner out there who doesn't have their own computer, laptop, BlackBerry, cell phone, etc. The Internet has obviously changed the world, but in terms of research, destination knowledge, online RFPs, Web registration and videoconferencing, the industry is light years ahead of where it was. Aside from technology, I believe the airline industry has seen the most dramatic change with the reduction in carriers, the emergence of low-cost carriers, the increases in technology such as e-tickets and online booking tools, the near

elimination of travel agents and the overhauling of pricing. I have also seen the advancement of the meetings industry as a profession in terms of career opportunities and formal training programs. And it will be very interesting to see the impact of the recent trend toward meetings consolidation; this is moving at such a pace that I believe it will change the face of the industry once again and redefine the role of the meeting planner.

SARAH VANDERLINDE

Intern, Edina Art Fair

Age: 21

Education: Certificate in Meeting and Event Planning, Dakota County Technical College (DCTC); pursuing a degree in marketing

Work History: Currently an intern with the Edina Art Fair; volunteered for the DCTC Showcase and the Walk of Women



I first got started in the meeting and event planning industry with every intention of becoming a wedding planner. But I've quickly learned that there is a huge difference between planning for 200 guests and planning for a three-day event with about 60,000 attendees. I don't have a big past list of meetings or events that I have helped organize; this is my first. In the past two months that I've been working on the art fair, I have gained so much knowledge of what meeting and event planning really is. It's fun and exciting to be behind the scenes planning the little details that not many people think about. Right now, I'm taking every opportunity I get to learn, grow and network in order to stay on top of the game. In the future, I see this industry growing at a rapid pace. There are so many careers out there that are connected to meeting and event planning and—with the growing trend of conferences and events—I think the demand for planners will also grow. I don't think I could ever go on to planning weddings after a taste of how fun and exciting this industry can be. ■

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—Sarah Vanderlinde