Convene Magazine Interviews Dr. Canton

CONVENE

An interview with Convene Magazine

CONVENE . . .As a futurist, what underlying elements do you believe are driving the broad changes all of us are feeling and experiencing?

CANTON . . .In a word, CONVERGENCE, which includes the coming together of technology, business, service, information and products. Information technology as a whole is such a strong architect of change that much of what we know and believe is often out of step with the today's realities. While that certainty is causing a displacement for many, it's presenting a tremendous opportunity for others. Unfortunately we still have a cultural mind-set tied to the industrial, not the information age. If you're locked into the former you'll just have new tools to help you work longer and harder. On the other hand, a shift in awareness can assist you in redesigning your job, working environment and in the broadest sense, redesigning your life. It is in that realm that we can achieve a real balance between work, productivity and leisure. Let me give you a couple of examples. Companies like Northrop and Compaq, among others, are enabling individuals to fashion their own work. They don't even need physical offices. Still others are out in "the field" getting closer to customers. The President of a large unit of AT&T works from his home outside Chicago and it's all made possible by letting go of the past and warmly receiving the present. So the trend is clear, it's just a question of how long it will take to become mainstream. Information technology is changing the game of business.

CONVENE . . .Given those sample scenarios, how do you see the meeting industry being affected?

CANTON . . . Well you're already seeing it with the continued growth of LCD (liquid crystal display) technology. Power point presentations are replacing traditional slides, small projection systems that display professional images with astounding clarity are also helping to alter the meeting landscape. They in turn are creating new hybrid events with the Internet and desktop video conferencing leading the way. Most off us will be able to experience that with the introduction of a new computer video board that should be available in about a year. The word "TELEPRESENCE" may well become a familiar part of industry jargon. Our ability to blend a physical environment with virtual access through our computer, is clearly where we are headed, applied virtual reality. Tomorrow we'll have a pre-conference application on-line, then the physical meeting and finally an on-line post event activity. Every meeting planner should see the Internet as a value-added delivery system intended to enhance the impact of the live presentations. Not only will more people participate, but the value of the learning experience will be strengthened.