

Below is the transcript of some questions that the Helms Briscoe associates answered about working with their clients (aka Meeting Planners.) These ladies left nothing out!

**Q: How are the market place changes, a shift to seller's market, impacting your business and your client's program?**

HB Panelist #1: It is huge, I started with HB in 2009 and how the market has changed is dramatically, as we all know, and what I am trying to do is educate my clients and we laughed about this in the car. **We are trying to educate our clients and let them know how it's changing.** They may do maybe one meeting a year for some associations. They might do only 20 meetings a year, so they are not seeing the volume that we see and the changes that we see so rapidly. And so we are trying to educate our clients on the fact that, "Hey, you've got only two hotels to choose from that have your preferred dates, whereas may be the last time we sourced this meeting they had 10 hotels to work from." And we are laughing, the rate has changed \$30 and that's not bad. Take it, please take it, because they are charging you \$50 more so it's become harder - I don't know if harder is the right word, but it's more work to book one meeting than it was back in 2009/2010. And so that is our job lately, is to educate the client on what's going on in the market place. New York is an anomaly. There are some cities still that don't feel the pressure that we do here in New York City.

HB Panelist #3: Availability. We are having to use and look at way more hotels than we would normally search,. We are searching everything, everybody, everything. So everybody has fair game at the same program, a lot of times my client can be flexible so I will put in there any Sunday, Tuesday program from May to July. So that's what we are trying to teach the clients, they have to be flexible.

HB Panelist #4: **I feel like the clients don't want to hear that it's changing and I know it's very hard what we're speaking to all of you and what we are trying to negotiate, they just don't want to hear that they are not getting the concessions, the upgrades, the complimentary meeting space.** It's such a hard transition and we are trying and I think that's something that we are trying to do to make them understand that the rates are higher, they are not going to get zero attrition and they are having a hard time flipping over from what it was like in 2008/2009. It is a whole transition and they are not listening. They are closing us out no matter how many times we have this conversation.

HB Panelist #1: So if we push [negotiations with the venue]... We are doing it on behalf of our clients because that's what we do. Our value is what we bring to our clients. So if we are not there for them, they are not going to use us next time. So that's why we push you. Not because we're trying to be mean, we're just doing the best we can.

HB Panelist #2: That's a great point because we're really in that seat today where we're really having to best articulate the position you are now in, having to educate them on why a \$50 higher rate is a really good deal compared to last year or the year before. So

I just think it's good that they are able to share just so you understand that that's what's going on in our world and any suggestions you have or any information or data that you can provide to us that helps us do that education and support obviously would be something of value as well.

HB Panelist #3: I think they also want us to search multiple cities. They just can't believe that really this is happening in New York. **Go check out Dallas and Washington D.C. and then they find out that your rates are comparable to Washington D.C. and they finally get it and they revert back to "Okay, let's stick with New York."** So they really, as you say, they're making us work harder for one program because they are having a hard time with this transition.

HB Moderator: Sometimes it's just not possible for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the client doesn't even know, is the reality. Sometimes that exercise of getting the RFP up is to find out what the market... especially with the market changes, the way they are, sometimes it's an exercise to find out what the market is dictating during that time. One thing we didn't share with you we do have a lot of data in Cvent, so if we want to do... we have the ability when we need to or where it makes sense to look up a property in May 2018 in New York City and see what you have been quoting for the last few years to every piece of HB business that has ever come into your system. So we do use that as a guide to help us not waste your time.

**Q: What do you each believe is the most significant value that you deliver to your clients?**

HB Panelist # 2: What I bring to my clients is a lot of time. What I am doing is I gather information for them within a 48-hour period and getting it back to them.

HB Panelist # 3: Value is really looking at it from different perspectives and giving them something they may not see and giving another outlook on it. I am a different voice for them but they don't pay me, so I am pretty unbiased. I think it's getting to know the properties as well. I am from South Jersey, I may not know a specific property but people would ask me "Have you been there lately? What's it like?" I am pretty transparent. I will tell them exactly my thoughts and give it straight up. And I think that's really important, they appreciate my honesty and getting to know venue partners is really important to me and it comes back to the client.

HB Panelist #4: The value I add to my clients is probably giving them more options. They may want to go to a different type of property in New York, it may be a property they have not heard of, a boutique type of property. I can do a search, I know we don't like to search 50 properties, we like to keep it contained but if they have an executive that just doesn't know where they want to go in Manhattan, I could just offer them a lot of different types of properties that they can make a final decision on based on rates, space, location, type of property and typically they will turn around and say "I have never heard of that hotel. I'm going to take a look at it."

**Q: In instances when you do have to tell [a client] you don't have any space, you guys have touched upon flexibility and trying to teach your clients how to be flexible. What is the flexibility of your clients in booking a hotel and a meeting room separately and not under one roof?**

HB Panelist #3: I actually have a client that likes to do it that way.

HB Panelist #4: Especially if it is space intensive and they want something different and they don't want to pay a higher rate at the hotel. They understand going to a Convene and then using a neighboring hotel. Especially like a financial, when they have a lot of one-on-ones.

HB Panelist #1: I think it would be interesting to see, I would expect moving into the market we are moving into that we will see more opportunities where space just isn't available but we can find some rooms and that we can do a better job of matching the two.

**Q: Concessions. What are some of the big concessions that your clients really like and then does it vary based on the markets? Do you see a few main concessions that you really like to see and also again, on the market level?**

HB Panelist #2: I would love to start taking this one. One thing I hate to see is one per 50, one per 40, one per 30. But that's personal just because it takes away from what we make. **I would rather see upgrades, a comp reception**, but specifically my clients all have very specific concessions that they want, so in every RFP I put out I have a very detailed list of concessions that they have to have and I put down mark up the sleeping room rate, although you are going to have a rate parity clause in the contract too, so be careful, but always mark up the rates to cover the concessions.

HB Panelist #3: There is one item that I am curious about the associates here. I am hearing a lot about that and I guess would be a bigger issue, and I'm sure it is big for all of you, is really **internet in the guest room and in the meeting space**.

HB Panelist #1: **It is so hard to make a client understand that they are going to New York City, they are spending \$400 or \$500 a night and they are paying for internet. And then they are going to the Hampton Garden Inn or whatever and getting it for free.**

HB Panelist #3: And they are spending \$400 and they are getting nickel and dimes, so that's huge.

HB Panelist #4: I was going to say another concession that has come up, I think recently is, for especially the associations, they are doing their budgets, so they might want to have a guarantee the menu pricing from the year before because they are putting their budgets in and to get it approved to go to that property, that is a huge

concession for them because they are doing their budgets now and getting it approved. Their pricing, their registration, based on that.

**Q: What do you prefer to see in your RFPs, a CMP package or a breakdown of every single item?**

**HB Panelist #1:** I think that depends on the client, I really do.

**HB Panelist #4:** A lot of the times they want so many concessions and then you need a total of 20 to 25% off the entire meeting space, so **I think it makes it easier for both parties if venues have that CMP package and then they can shave off where they need to so it's tailored more towards the client.** But I just don't want the perception to be that we are not putting effort in to every detail.

**HB Panelist #2:** Well I think if you are looking at the RFP, it always says breakfast and then you offer a CMP package and they want lunch and the breaks, they don't want that. [My client] wants lunch. It could be a la carte. So if there's a CMP package, that's great and I'm going to get a deal on that versus the - especially in New York, the per person price.