

Executive conferences are critical venues for building reputation and communicating a company's message to its most influential audiences. Top-level conferences provide prime opportunities for CEOs and C-suite executives to network with industry peers, spend time with customers and showcase thought leadership. However, identifying which conferences are most valuable for top management poses many challenges. No authoritative source on best executive conferences has been available — until now.

“I’m sure there are more opportunities.”

—Corporate Communications Executive

As part of Burson-Marsteller's award-winning corporate and CEO reputation thought-leadership initiatives, we conducted the Most Valued Podiums (MVP) Survey, the first survey among senior communications officers on CEO and C-suite conferences. The research reveals the most sought-after conference information: participant profiles, participation criteria, best conference types for CEOs and C-suite executives, best conference types by selective industries, and podiums that are in most demand by corporate leadership.

This executive summary features select findings from the survey, which was mailed to respondents in the first quarter of 2005. The majority of respondents (73 percent) report having global responsibilities.

CEOs Flooded with Invites

When asked how many invitations CEOs receive in an average week to speak at conferences, senior corporate communications officers report an average of 3.4 CEO invitations per week or a sizeable 175 per year.

Conferences that Make the Most Sense

The survey also found that while most corporate communicators (70 percent) are responsible for selecting CEO and C-suite conferences, few (12 percent) are “very” satisfied with available resources for evaluating which

conferences make the most sense for their executives and why. The conference criteria corporate communicators now use to make their selection are:

For CEOs

Influential audience	87%
“Will it help forward the business?”	86
Strategic fit	82
Keynote versus panel speaking opportunities	68
Thought leadership potential	61
Forum prestige	61
Executive interest	56
Timing/scheduling	56
Opportunity to leverage with media	50
Customer attendance	48
Compelling agenda	43
Competitor participation	28
Networking	21
Venue	19
Geographic location	19
Opportunity to position less seasoned executives	4
Other (e.g., breakthrough ideas)	14

For C-suite Executives

Influential audience	82%
“Will it help forward the business?”	81
Strategic fit	79
Customer attendance	51
Forum prestige	51
Executive interest	48
Thought leadership potential	48
Opportunity to leverage with media	46
Compelling agenda	45
Timing/scheduling	44
Networking	38
Keynote versus panel speaking opportunities	33
Competitor participation	23
Opportunity to position less seasoned executives	20
Venue	10
Geographic location	4
Other (e.g., breakthrough ideas)	17

Identifying the Most Valued Podiums

Recent research by *PRWeek* and Burson-Marsteller (2004) found that other than media interviews, CEOs rate conferences as the best channel for communicating

“I need a disciplined process for selecting best venues and opportunities.”

—Corporate Communications Executive

company messages to key stakeholders. The MVP Survey confirms the importance of CEO and C-suite conference positioning — nearly three-quarters or more of communicators report that conferences for CEOs and C-suite executives are more important now than they were two years ago (72 and 85 percent, respectively).

The survey also asked respondents to name the conferences they regarded as most influential by their CEOs and C-suite executives. The top five MVPs are:

MVPs for CEOs	MVPs for C-suite Executives
1 World Economic Forum	1 = World Economic Forum
2 Business Roundtable*	1 = Forbes
3 Detroit Economic Club	3 Economist
4 Fortune	4 BusinessWeek
5 BusinessWeek	5 = CERA Week
	5 = CIO Magazine
	5 = Fortune

(= indicates a tie)

* Business Roundtable is a CEO-only membership organization.

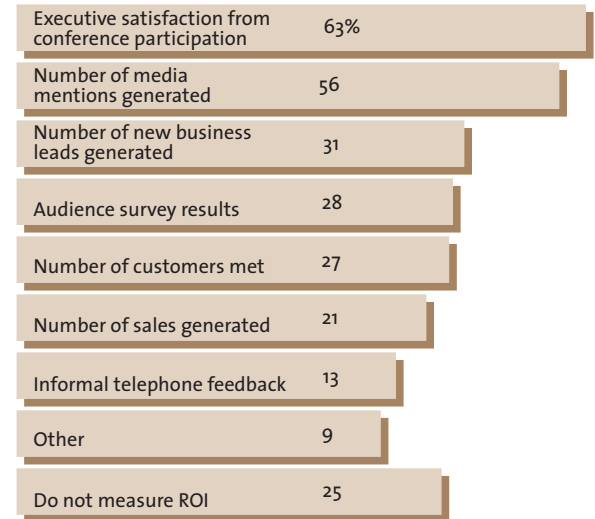
Note: From five open-ended questions on best conferences for CEOs/C-suite executives, more than 600 responses were submitted.

Return on Investment Falls Short

While the majority (75 percent) of corporate communicators reports that they evaluate their return on investment (ROI) from conference participation, softer qualitative measures more often outweigh harder quantitative measures of return. One-quarter (25 percent) do not measure ROI at all.

A lack of quantitative conference-participation measures is surprising given that “forwarding the business” surfaced as one of the leading criteria for determining successful participation.

Measuring Return on Investment from Executive Conference Participation



“Companies are searching for answers on which conferences provide the most value in return for their time and effort,” says Carol Ballock, managing director of Burson-Marsteller’s Executive Positioning Specialty Group and co-architect of the Most Valued Podiums Survey with Burson-Marsteller’s Chief Knowledge & Research Officer Worldwide Dr. Leslie Gaines-Ross.

“Given the tightness of schedules for most CEOs and C-suite executives, it’s vital to know where they will deliver the most value for their company, the brand and key stakeholders when devoting their time to a conference,” says Ballock. “Most companies do not have the internal capacity to proactively position their executives across a range of conference types.”

If you would like to learn more about Burson-Marsteller’s Most Valued Podiums Survey, please contact:

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