

Chattanooga Times Free Press (Tennessee) January 18, 2004 Sunday

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**SECTION:** LOCAL BUSINESS; Pg. G6

**LENGTH:** 269 words

**BODY:**

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The Boston Globe

Say the words, "office meeting," and some workers dive for cover.

A survey of 1,216 US employees commissioned by Interactive Meeting Solutions, a high-tech meeting firm in California, reveals that 29 percent of workers attend three or more meetings per week and 34 percent say most are a "complete waste of time." The random survey was conducted by Opinion Research Corp. of Princeton. The survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

The survey found that some workers bring their Palm Pilots and cellphones to meetings in order to liven up or escape a dull gathering.

In all, 8 percent of the workers polled said they played electronic games at meetings; 14 percent of those workers were 18 to 24 years-old, IMS said. To escape a boring meeting, 5 percent of workers have had a friend or coworker give them a bogus page or cellphone call.

Said IMS President Chuck McPherson: "Handled incorrectly, the modern meeting has to rank as one of America's most excruciating and masochistic workplace experiences around. And, a bad meeting only creates yet another bad meeting."

The survey does offer some good news: Meetings at small companies tend to be more effective than those at bigger firms.

Small firms also hold fewer meetings. Thirty-seven percent of the workers at large companies attend three or more work-related meetings each week, compared to just 21 percent of the workers at small companies.

Sixty-seven percent of workers at large companies, compared to 52 percent at small firms, said their meetings could benefit from more honesty.

**LOAD-DATE:** January 18, 2004