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Making a Comeback

After a few years of tough times, many popular meeting destinations are making a comeback: Planners are flocking back to Arizona (page 32) and Las Vegas (page 38) and adding purposeful event entertainment (page 18) and meaningful teambuilding experiences (page 22) back into the meeting mix. Moreover, executive retreats (page 12) have come out of hiding, albeit with greater regard for ROI and less opulence. Also, despite deep budget cuts, attention to attendee safety and security (page 28) is on the rise as well. “Things are good” says Chris Meyer, CEM, CMPE vice president of sales at the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCCA) who describes Las Vegas’s come-back as being in “full-blown recovery mode.” Meyer predicted that 2011 would be a good year, and he was correct. He notes, “corporate business is up significantly. Our trade shows have been seeing double-digit increases in attendance. Show floors are growing in size.”

Planners like Christine Rosa, NYC-based executive director of event marketing and talent relations for Sports Illustrated and Golf Digest magazines agree. She stages the global launch event of SI’s annual swimwear issue each February in Las Vegas because, among many other attributes, “There’s just so much opportunity in Las Vegas to do things. As a destination, it has the sun, the golf courses, the fine dining.”

Jake Leinenkugel, the president of the Jacob Leinenkugel Brewing Company, celebrates his company’s success in style in Scottsdale, AZ. Every March, the “Head Beer Dude” brings his top 100 salespeople and their spouses to The Scottsdale Plaza Resort for business meetings and fun in the sun. The No. 1 reason he brings the program back to The Scottsdale Plaza each year is the people: “Their service level is just exceptional. They’ve got to know what our needs are, and they overdeliver in almost all cases.”

As David Gabri, president and CEO of ALHI, succinctly reminds us in “The Big Think: Executive Retreats Are Making a Comeback,” “Business is back, and people are back to the business of business. That means they are over dealing with a crisis and need to look to what’s next on the horizon.”
Disney Cruise Line Unveils New Itineraries and Ports for 2012
CELEBRATION, FL — For the first time ever, Disney Cruise Line will sail from three new ports in 2012 — New York, Seattle and Galveston, TX. Here is a sampling of the 2012 schedules:

- **New York**, Beginning May 25, the Disney Magic will sail a total of 20 cruises from New York, including eight-night cruises to the Bahamas and seven-night cruises up the New England coast to Canada plus two eight-night cruises that will give a sampling of the Disney Cruise Line experience over a weekend.
- **Galveston**, Beginning September 22, the Disney Magic will sail 12 seven-night cruises from the Port of Galveston to the Western Caribbean. Ports of call include Grand Cayman and Mexico’s Costa Maya and Cozumel.
- **Seattle**, Beginning May 26, the Disney Wonder will sail a total of 14 seven-night cruises from the Port of Seattle to Tracy Arm, Skagway, Juneau and Ketchikan, Alaska, and Victoria, BC.
- **Los Angeles**, For the first time, the Disney Wonder will offer a special 15-night voyage to Hawaii from Los Angeles, calling on Hilo; Kahului, Maui; Honolulu, Oahu; Nawiliwili, Kauai and Ensenad de, Mexico. The Wonder will continue sailing seven-night Mexican Riviera cruises from the Port of Los Angeles for the majority of the year.
- **Port Canaveral**, The Disney Fantasy and Disney Dream will continue to sail a variety of Caribbean and Bahamian itineraries departing from Port Canaveral, FL. www.disneycruise.com

Bally’s Las Vegas Debuts Refreshed Meeting Spaces
LAS VEGAS, NV — Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment announced that the two primary meeting spaces at Bally’s Las Vegas were recently renovated to include new floor coverings, wall coverings, door finishes and lighting. “Keeping with the classic décor of the property, all original glass chandeliers were preserved and enhanced by modern complementary sconces along the walls. “We are extremely pleased with the way that the space turned out,” commented Michael Massari, vice president of meeting sales and operations. “The space was able to keep the classic Vegas style and charm of the rest of the property while still achieving a modern feel. The demand for this space has already increased. We have even had a few groups request to be moved because of the new look.” Bally’s Las Vegas is one of eight resorts in the Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment family. This center-Strip property offers more than 3,000 hotel rooms and suites and 175,000 sf of meeting and event space. Bally’s Las Vegas is also connected to Paris Las Vegas, offering additional flexibility for groups of all sizes. www.lvmeeetingsbycaesars.com

MEETING VALUES

**Barton Creek Resort & Spa, Austin, TX.**
The Business, Birdies and BBQ offer, with rates starting at $295/person/night, includes: resort guest room; complete day meeting package with buffet breakfast, meeting room, a.m./p.m. breaks, buffet lunch and standard AV; golf on a 7,281-yard championship course; and chef’s choice barbecue dinner. Offer is valid for groups of 15 or more rooms nights over select July and August 2011 dates. For details, visit http://www.bartoncreek.com/meeting-specials.aspx.

**Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas, NV.** Planners who book 15 or more room nights for meetings held anytime from June 1, 2011 through August 31, 2011 receive: 1/40 comp room; 1/25 upgrade to a one-bedroom suite at the group rate; up to four comp room nights for site/preplanning purposes; 20 percent discount on AV; 30 percent allowable attrition; and groups of 75 or more receive no F&B minimum and no attrition. 702-693-8507, davidsd@hsvholland.com, www.hsvholland.com

**The Phoenician, Scottsdale, AZ.** The Complete Meeting Package starts at $109/night/attendee and includes accommodations; custom banquet menus and pricing; 20 percent off AV; Triple Stanwood Preferred Planner points; and complimentary in-room Internet for all attendees, fitness center access, one-bedroom suite for VIP and deluxe guest room for the group planner. Offer valid for meetings of 50 room nights held July 1–September 11, 2011. 480-423-2520, www.thephoenician.com

Hoops Named New President and CEO of Indianapolis CVA
INDIANAPOLIS, IN — After a strategic three-month nationwide search, the Indianapolis Convention & Visitors Association (ICVA) named Leonard Hoops as its new president & CEO, effective May 31. “With $3 billion in new tourism-related developments now online, Indianapolis has arrived as a first-tier destination, truly competing in the national arena. Leonard’s proven sales results, extensive marketing expertise, and strong convention industry knowledge make him the ideal person to take Indianapolis to the next level and capitalize on the city’s new investments,” said Michael Browning, chairman of the board of the ICVA. A seasoned executive with 25 years of corporate and destination marketing experience, Hoops most recently served as executive vice president and chief customer officer for the San Francisco Travel Association. Previously, Hoops served as senior vice president and chief marketing officer for the Sacramento Convention & CVB and SVP of marketing for the San Jose CVB. Hoops replaces Don Welsh who was recruited to head the Chicago Convention & Tourism Bureau. www.visitindy.com

Events Calendar

**MAY 24–26, 2011**
**IMEX — THE WORLDWIDE EXHIBITION FOR INCENTIVE TRAVEL, MEETINGS AND EVENTS**
Mexico, Frankfurt, Germany
Contact: 0111 44 1273227313
www.imex-frankfurt.com

**JUNE 2, 2011**
**DMAI DESTINATIONS SHOWCASE CHICAGO**
Donald E. Stephens Convention Center
Rosemont, IL
Contact: 202-296-7888
www.destinationsshowcase.com

**JUNE 21–23, 2011**
**AIBTM — THE AMERICAS MEETINGS & EVENTS EXHIBITION**
Baltimore Convention Center
Baltimore, MD
Contact: 203-840-5975
www.aibtm.com

**JULY 23–26, 2011**
**MEETING PROFESSIONALS INTERNATIONAL WORLD EDUCATION CONGRESS**
Orange County Convention Center
Orlando, FL
Contact: 877-702-3053
www.mpweb.org

**AUGUST 9–10, 2011**
**ASA E ANNUAL MEETING & EXPOSITION**
America’s Center Convention Complex
St. Louis, MO
Contact: 888-950-2723
www.asaannualmeeting.org

**OCTOBER 11–13, 2011**
**IMEX AMERICA**
Sandos Expo at the Venetian/Palazzo Hotel
Las Vegas, NV
Contact: 44-1273-227313
www.imexamerica.com

**OCTOBER 13–15, 2011**
**SITE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**
Bellagio
Las Vegas, NV
Contact: 312-321-5148
www.sitegal.com
The Challenges of the New Health-Care Law

The Health-Care Reform Reporting Requirements You Need to Know About

The alarm clock is about to sound. The sun is up, and there is no time left to snooze. If you’re a meetings professional with a U.S. pharmaceutical or biotech company, or a medical device manufacturer, you should know about new federal legislation that will dramatically change the way you plan and manage events that involve health care providers (HCPs).

The Physician Payments Sunshine Provisions of new national health care reform legislation require your company to report to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) all payments made — including meetings expenses — to doctors and teaching hospitals. These provisions are the first nationally mandated regulations to address payments and gifts provided to physicians and other health care professionals.

Under the Sunshine regulations, starting January 2012, meetings professionals will be required to capture data annually in a report to DHHS on the following HCP meetings-related expenditures — whether cash or in-kind services: food (beverage, meeting break snacks and all meals); travel, such as air, hotel room and ground transportation costs; education or conference materials and funding; entertainment; gifts; honoraria.

Heading Off the Billion-Dollar Problem: Guidance for Meeting Pros

This could be a billion-dollar problem if companies don’t deal with it now. Complying with the Sunshine Provisions directly impacts your company’s bottom line and brand integrity. Fines are hefty for each failure to report data (up to $100,000 for each intentional incident). And, because the information will become public, failure to report will bring negative attention to your firm. States also may decide to restrict the rights of those companies and HCPs that have been fined and are operating within their state.

The Sunshine mandates may seem like a tall order, but you can implement strategies to eliminate confusion and streamline the data management process by considering these six steps:

1. Work with your organization’s compliance officer and other key departments to understand how your company, and the types of meetings you hold, are affected by the Sunshine Provisions. For example, under the legislation, while you must report on educational expenditures for HCPs, the provisions exempt educational material provided to HCPs for the benefits of patients. There is certainly room for interpretation in the provisions, so your chief compliance officer will have to define what exactly they mean for you. There will be HCP spend outside of the meetings department, and the compliance officer is typically the point person and executive sponsor responsible for bringing the pieces together.

2. Learn where information on meetings expenditures to HCPs resides. For example, you may need to check with Accounts Payable, as that department may have reimbursement records for doctors. Partner with any third-party planning companies you use to make
4. Educate planners and partners on how your company identifies and tracks HCP-related events. Build a comprehensive communications strategy that informs HCP attendees, hotels and other venues about your Sunshine Provisions data recording and reporting requirements, as well as any caps on spending.

For example, include in every event communication a clear description of the expenses that your company can reimburse versus those that must be paid for by the attendee. In contracts, hotels should be informed of any existing company spending rules for HCPs to ensure they don’t breach limits on food and beverage costs.

5. Align the meetings budget and spend categories spelled out in the Sunshine Provisions. For example, the language for meetings-related spend in the legislation includes: “consulting fees, compensation for services other than consulting, honoraria, gifts, entertainment, food, travel (including the specified destinations), education, research, charitable contributions.” Matching fields on your meeting request forms and budgets to the language that’s actually in the legislation will make it easier when it comes time to provide meetings-related spending data to your company’s compliance or legal departments.

6. Implement an SMMMP powered by a meetings technology platform that consolidates all event-related data to capture the entire HCP-related meeting spend. Make sure that the technology can be configured with custom meeting request forms, approval processes and budgets to ensure all HCP-related data is captured accurately and consistently. Relying on numerous spreadsheet reports for each individual meeting is inefficient and subject to error. Technology can facilitate HCP-specific reporting and comprehensive data capture, ensuring your company is in compliance.

The Benefits of Getting It Right

The good news is the Physician Payments Sunshine Provisions add a new level of nonsense accountability on spending for HCPs. While it may seem like a lot of extra work, the bright side is that meetings managers can take this opportunity to gain important new visibility and recognition for their SMMMPs among other business units and senior executives.

Betty McNulty, Senior Vice President, Global Account Management & Customer Operations, StarCite, 800-628-1058, info@starcite.com, www.starcite.com

This could be a billion-dollar problem if companies don’t deal with it now.
Executive retreats — small, high level, purposeful meetings — were in retreat themselves during the last couple of years. But they are coming back, though sometimes in a modified form.

David Gabri, president and CEO of Associated Luxury Hotels International, a national sales network, says, “Business is back and people are back to the business of business. That means they are over dealing with a crisis and need to look to what’s next on the horizon.”

Jody Kelly, managing partner of Global Image, San Antonio, TX says, “They never really stopped getting together, we had to look at places where the perception was a positive one.”

Jody Kelly, managing partner of Global Image, San Antonio, TX

“Luxury is coming back, though it might have to be called something else. For these meetings, they might use a term like ‘quality environment.’ You need to enable people to be in their comfort zone at this level. These people are reconnecting — and they need to do so in an intimate manner where there is less noise, and you can allow leaders to be leaders.”

“We were going to have the group go to South Africa when the recession hit. We looked at domestic alternatives, hoping to get the closest feeling we could to an exotic location like South Africa — and it came out Paws Up.”

Jody Kelly, Managing Partner, Global Image, San Antonio, TX

Finding a ‘Quality Environment’ for The Big Think

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that placing an executive retreat in a truly out-of-the-way place makes for productive events and happy clients. Kelly says that her first meeting at The Resort at Paws Up, a 37,000-acre luxury property outside of Missoula, MT, "was probably the biggest surprise I ever encountered. We were going to have the group go to South Africa when the recession hit. We looked at domestic alternatives, hoping to get the closest feeling to the gateway for Paws Up — Africa — and it came out Paws Up. We were looking forward to Montana," says Kelly. "You’re looking at the mountains, down the valley. You kind of forget about everything and just enjoy being with the people you’re with." And as far as the luxury perception issue, says Kelly, "You can say I’m going to Montana” instead of “I’m going to Pebble Beach.”

Kelly is looking forward to the opening of Paws Up’s Bull Barn, which is literally the conversion of a bull barn into a conference facility. Scheduled to open later this year or early next year, says John Romfo, director of sales and marketing, “The downsputs will be a meeting room for about 60; the upstairs will accommodate 200.”

Paws Up is among a number of emerging resorts that seem specifically tailored for executive retreats. Romfo says that most of the groups welcomed by Paws Up are in the 20- to 50-person range and that “the only reason we might go to 100 is if spouses are invited.”

He adds, “It’s easy to put these guests on our club level, which is our hotel within a hotel. They frequently have informal meetings there; it becomes like the first-class section of an airplane, complete with the fine food presentation.”

Romfo also likes the boutique-like ambiance of Paws Up, a private tropical enclave for executive retreats. Romfo says that three events a year are formal meetings for top company executives and owners of beer distributorships. Working with Associated Luxury Hotels of America, Romfo has recently introduced these meetings at properties such as The Peninsula Hotel in downtown Chicago or in a resort in Florida. A lot has to do with the time allowed. And sometimes, says Gabbi, “These events are a lead-up to a larger event. Here is where they might determine the theme or goal of the next big meeting, like the annual conference.”

Gabbi says that sometimes smaller groups are called for where the retreat might be the only meeting on property. When meetings have a serious intent, says Wiest, “They require the high level of service that we can deliver. We tend to do my job more efficiently.”

Katie Koch, Senior Project Manager, Encore Planning, Arvada, CO company. They feel it’s important that everybody is moving in the right — and the same — direction.”

Spinetta and her colleagues will interview people in the company at all levels — and will then do focus-type interviews with top executives and access required for these executives.”

"It’s important from the planner’s standpoint to have a high-level hotel because of the services, attention and access required for these executives."

But Gabbi agrees, “You could be in The Peninsula Hotel in downtown Chicago or in a resort in Florida. A lot has to do with the time allowed.”

Koch also likes the boutique-like size of The Peninsula, which gives smaller VIP groups like this the attention they deserve.

Retreat Customization

Spinetta says her company works for months in advance to get speakers from outside and from within the company. And, she says, “We create a tight flow of what each day will be like. They might spend some time at a table brainstorming about the future of the company. And, she says, “We create a tight flow of what each day will be like. They might spend some time at a table brainstorming about the future of the company. They feel it’s important that everybody is moving in the right — and the same — direction.”

As for activities, says Spinetta, “We look at what activity best brings people together. Golf does tend to bring people together, but so do cooking classes and other interactive experiences.”

The challenge, according to Valenti, is “to have the big thinkers have a time and place where they can gather and have the ideas flow freely. We accomplish this by providing a luxurious setting, far enough away from their day-to-day reality, while still feeling connected to the tools needed and the task at hand.”

At Paws Up, says Romfo, most groups meet for half the day for “a really down and dirty focused four hour meeting. Then it’s lunch and then an
activity or a variety of activities that might include horseback riding, river rafting or fishing."

**Retreat to Recreation**

With the move of many retreats toward expansive venues, recreation takes a larger role.

Says Romfo at Paws Up, "One minute, you’re in a meeting room tackling nuts and bolts issues; the next minute you’re on horseback with a few colleagues, going down river and talking through things. A planner has to think of the entire experience — the food, the activities, the attention to detail. It’s the Montana experience that they’re most attracted to."

Her retreats at Paws Up, says Kelly, "usually feature meetings in the mornings. In the past at these types of meetings golf was involved. One of my groups did ask about golf, and there are courses nearby. But then I tell them they can do white-water rafting, ATVing, rappelling and more. Bottom line, we have never had one Paws Up group play golf."

Different environments fit different agendas, and perhaps an executive retreat focusing on risk/reward or out-of-the-box thinking might find just the right fit at Tulalip Resort Casino, with its games of chance inside and its thought-provoking scenery outside. Located 30 minutes north of Seattle and situated on 80 acres, the resort is surrounded by some of the Pacific Northwest’s most spectacular scenery. Tulalip offers spacious 500-sf guest rooms featuring local Tulalip tribal art. Included in the resort’s 30,000 sf of meeting space are special suites adaptable for executive functions. The 2,000-sf Player’s Suite comes equipped with a professional-size pool table, dart board, arcade-style games and professional sports memorabilia — fostering the spirit of competition and creativity. Nearby are the resort’s casino, cabaret, six restaurants/lounges and full-service spa.

**Rethinking Retreats**

Executive retreats continue to evolve as the economy recovers. As with other conferences, food and beverage are constantly being upgraded.

“People are really looking to healthy, farm-to-table food,” says Spinetta. “Whatever we do with food, we try to do something different. We had an event a few months ago when San Francisco hotels were packed. We finally found a 50,000 sf space for 250 people. We had seven real food trucks that usually work the streets of San Francisco come in. It was healthy, it supported local business, and it looked appealing. It was a huge hit, though it was an interesting challenge because we had to do seven different contracts.”

Since it was a meeting for directors who wanted to think outside the box, says Spinetta, “It was a fun way to show that times are changing and people are changing.” And the best thing, says Spinetta, is that it was cheaper than going to a hotel.

Executing a successful executive meeting does more than impress the C-suite with exotic activities and luxury accommodations: As a recent Carlson Wagonlit Travel Management Institute survey affirmed, small meetings (fewer than 25 attendees) account for nearly two-thirds of all meetings. For strategic-thinking planners, that’s a golden opportunity to make a real meeting-spend impact — thereby quite possibly creating a place for themselves at the table for the next executive retreat.
And it always will be. The question of the AR-based Murphy USA, which operates Media (UBM) in Downers Grove, IL, 18 April • 2011 • the chill of perception issues could deter that neither the economic downturn nor tensions and services at United Business inferences markets in 23 states. Staggs plans all three of the company’s major annual meetings — and entertainment is a cru- cial part of each. “One of the reasons we use entertain- ment,” Staggs says, “is that one of our core values is to celebrate. So, through- out the year, we are continually celebrat- ing our people and our business success. So any time we have a meeting, there is always a sense of entertainment and cele- bration around that meeting.”

Crystal Lucas, director, event opera- tions and services at United Business Media (UBM) in Downers Grove, IL, shares Staggs’ enthusiasm for event enter- tainment. But she views its practical value through a different prism. “For us, entertainment helps provide one of the key pieces of any meeting...face-to-face marketing. It’s about getting to know people and building relationships.”

By John Buchanan

Through the recession, with every as- pect of her budgets under increased scrutiny, Lucas found that with a little creativity, she could resolve fiscal challenges as a win for all involved.

For a 2009 UBM meeting that drew more than 5,000 attendees to Gaylord Palms, Lucas approached the hotel with a budget challenge and a unique sell- ing proposition. She asked the hotel to become her partner in the creation of a consolidated party, a big event paid for by multiple sponsors, each of whom got the benefit of a major event at a less expen- sive cost than if they had single-handedly sponsored the event. The result: thrifty attendees, happy sponsors and a hotel that got the added benefit of keeping a large crowd on prop- erty for discretionary F&B expenditures before and after the party. “Every area of our budgets was up for cuts or at least the consideration of cuts,” says Lucas. “And entertainment was one that got particularly looked at.” As a re- sult, she says, she had to find new ways to fund entertainment rather than slash her budget.

Meanwhile, Staggs and Murphy USA have pushed the entertainment envelope — and also hired the renowned Disney Event Group to take event entertainment to a new level.

“We have a real passion for our meet- ings,” says Staggs. “But we also always try to get the biggest bang for our buck. That said, over the past couple of years, we’ve probably shifted more money into enter- tainment than into any other aspect of our budget. Unfortunately, it’s not a choice is appropriate.”

Gauging interest in entertainment before the opening general session. That can set the tone for the en- tire meeting.”

Mendelson and his team at Gaylord Palms were practicing what Palmer preaches long before the recession. Integrating key messaging into the en- tertainment is something the hotel has

Celebrate Your Success Story

Use the WOW Factor to Make the Message Stick

Entertainment has always been an es- sential ingredient in successful meetings. And it always will be. The question of the day, of course, is whether the recent re- cession and particularly the media back- lash against the notion of opulent events will have any enduring effect on how enter- tainment is used.

For some enterprises, entertainment is so critical to the corporate mission that neither the economic downturn nor the chill of perception issues could deter them over the last couple of years. “For our culture, it’s very important that we use entertainment,” says Jay Mendelson, direc- tor of communications at El Dorado, AR-based Murphy USA, which operates more than 1,100 gas station/conve- nience markets in 23 states. Staggs plans all three of the company’s major annual meetings — and entertainment is a cru- cial part of each.

“One of the reasons we use entertain- ment,” Staggs says, “is that one of our core values is to celebrate. So, through- out the year, we are continually celebrat- ing our people and our business success. So any time we have a meeting, there is always a sense of entertainment and cele- bration around that meeting.” Crystal Lucas, director, event opera- tions and services at United Business Media (UBM) in Downers Grove, IL, shares Staggs’ enthusiasm for event enter- tainment. But she views its practical value through a different prism. “For us, entertainment helps provide one of the key pieces of any meeting — and that is face-to-face marketing,” says Lucas, who will plan a half-dozen meetings this year and use entertainment at all of them. “At our events, it’s about getting to know people and building relationships.” Effective use of entertainment fosters an environment in which such networking can flourish.

Recovery Mode

Despite its proven role in the creation of memorable meetings, entertainment as a budget line item came under intense scrutiny, beginning in 2008. “We defi- nitely saw a downturn in the use of en- tertainment after that,” says Erik Palmer, director of event management at sister properties the Ritz-Carlton Los Angeles and JW Marriott Los Angeles, both of which opened early last year. “That was because there were fewer meetings to be- gin with, and the ones that were annual events got cut back even though the com- pany went through with them. But enter- tainment budgets got cut along with the budgets for everything else.” Now, he says, the pendulum has started to swing back, “and we’re seeing more being spent on entertainment.”

Even during the worst of the recession, entertainment never vanished from meet- ing agendas, says Aaron Mendelson, direc- tor of special events and entertainment at the Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center near Orlando. “But what I’ve seen is that the company that used to get a full orchestra ended up with a jazz trio,” Mendelson says. “And the company that used to use a jazz trio ended up with a solo pianist. But there was still entertainment. So, it has been the scale of the entertain- ment that has changed. But everybody knows entertainment is important to the success of a meeting.”

The Sea Change

Despite the enthusiasm of planners such as Staggs and Lucas, the reces- sion and meeting industry downturn have brought a new focus to enter- tainment, its cost and perhaps most important, its perception inside and outside the governing board. “There is definitely a different lens that entertainmentsm is being viewed through since the recession, says Kurt Paben, senior vice president at Minneapolis- based Carlson Marketing. “There was a time when always using big-name en- tertainment was quite in vogue. Part of the competitive equation was who could have the splashiest names. That definitive- ly has been dialled back. But companies still realize that they need entertain- ment at their meetings.”

Today as never before, however, op- tics is not only an issue, it’s a major concern to many companies, especially publicly traded ones. “One of the things we talk to clients a lot about now,” says Chris Gaia, vice president of Marketing at Fenton, MO-based Maritz Travel Co., “is that entertainment is one of those attributes of a meeting that everybody knows about, so you can create a lot of buzz around it. But the question is, is that kind of buzz appropriate for where your organization is in terms of its route back from the recession?”

Somewhat surprisingly, Gaia and oth- er experts stress that in general, internal perception among management, meet- ing attendees and rank-and-file staff are more important than external percep- tions. “The one important question you have to ask now when it comes to your internal audience is whether the enter- tainment choice is appropriate,” says Gaia. “Or whether it’s too opulent. That’s the key issue planners are dealing with now, and not being forward.”

But, Gaia adds, a key component of major meetings and incentive programs will continue to be the wow factor. And nothing, he says, creates wow factor bet- ter than blockbuster entertainment.

A New Sense of Purpose

Although many planners have applied such requisite wisdom and discipline for years, many more in the future will learn to connect a core message or the underly- ing purpose of the meeting to the deploy- ment of entertainment that can effective- ly deliver such messaging. Increasingly, no longer is a comedian just a comedian, a magician just a magi- cian, or an improv troupe simply funny entertainment. Instead, each is a delivery platform for a message or content that can be customized to the needs of a spe- cific meeting.

“The planners who really get it are the ones that can connect the message to the entertainment,” says Palmer. “And you should target the entertainment at the right points in the meeting. For example, use some high-energy en- tertainment before the opening general session. That can set the tone for the en- tire meeting.”

Mendelson and his team at Gaylord Palms were practicing what Palmer preaches long before the recession. Integrating key messaging into the en-
always done for corporate clients, he says. "For example, we’ve used improv actors who appear to be interrupting the meeting," he says. "They go up on stage and interrupt in a funny way with the important message the meeting needs to convey. But it’s done very creatively, and it’s a lot of fun. Attendees love that sort of thing, because they get the message, but they also get to have fun with it.”

No one understands that better than Disney Event Group (DEG), the Orlando-based event entertainment arm of the global entertainment behemoth. And they, too, have focused for a long time on making the entertainment an important element in entertainment.

“Our goal is not really about creating an entertaining moment,” says Mark Huffman, a creative director at DEG. “Yes, we want that to be part of the outcome. But it’s really about sitting down with a client and going through an in-depth discussion about the goal of their meeting.”

As a result of its creative corporate culture, DEG has always focused on the idea of story. Huffman says, “What is the story that needs to be told here and how can we best tell it?” he asks rhetorically. “And it’s a matter of pinpointing the exact messages that must be gotten across to attendees.”

Ideally, he notes, the messaging will be experiential. For example, when a corporate client wanted entertainment built around their slogan "Scaling the heights," DEG created an opening reception event akin to a base camp on the way to the summit of Mt. Everest. “The CEO then talked about the journey that lay ahead for attendees over the next few days,” Huffman says. “It was a very dramatic way to kick off the meeting and get the CEO’s message across in a way that was truly engaging and memorable.”

Before he started doing business with DEG two years ago, Murphy USA did a lot of fun things. “We’ve had comedians and bands and dancers,” Stagg says. “We’ve done all kinds of different things. But it wasn’t until we started working with DEG that we figured out how we could really use that entertainment to support our message. And to use that entertainment in a much more impactful way than just throwing a dance troupe onstage or bringing out a comedian. Now, our entertainment is so integrated into the meeting. For an upcoming Orlando meeting at Gaylord Palms, she has booked a magician for a sponsored party. “The sponsor will work with the magician to come up with a script that incorporates information about their company into the magician’s act.”

Over the years, Lucas has performed such magic with a variety of kinds of interactive entertainment, from comedians to stilt walkers. She has also used disc jockeys to get the point across. But she also sees a distinct and important role for entertainment simply as a facilitator of attendee relaxation and enjoyment after the rigors of the meeting day. “At our meetings, we like to create networking opportunities that help sponsor and attendees get togeth- er. And entertainment is a good way to make that happen.”

Fresh Ideas

Given its role historically and the new considerations it’s facing today, event entertainment will always be driven by a need to create excitement. As a result, Pallen says, “It’s really helpful to think about the opportunity where they can have an opportunity to talk to our leaders, but not in a stuffy or high-pressure environ- ment. We find that it’s about allowing people to have meaningful conversations without feeling pressured. Entertainment helps us accomplish that.”

At the same time, Roy says, and Genentech are under a strict kind of scrutiny that pre-dated the recession and is specific to their industry and corporate mission.

“Because of the nature of the business we’re in — the fact that we make life- saving drugs and cancer medications — companies have to be concerned about being low key, whether the economy is booming or we’re in a recession,” Roy says. “So it’s always very important to me when I’m working with an enter- tainment company that we don’t do any- thing that could have the appearance of being over the top. We don’t throw wild parties where we’re spending money that could be put back into R&D for new drugs that could save lives.”

Separate From the Pack

Regardless of whether entertainment is used for the big bang at an opening night reception or closing night banquet, or simply used as the background for an- tente commingling and networking at an evening social event, every company needs to think in terms of setting itself apart, the experts agree. “It doesn’t matter what business you’re in, but you need to separate yourself from your competitors — from the pack,” Mendelson says. “And you have to learn to do that in innovative and creative ways. And part of that is to be innovative and creative in terms of how you use entertainment at your meetings.”

Final Thoughts

Even more important is a fundamental reality that companies and meeting plan-ners understand very well, based on long experience: Using meetings to motivate, facilitate bottom-line results and reward performance will forever be a founda-tional component of our industry.

In turn, that means that if truth really be told, traditional big-name entertain- ment will continue to play a critical role in some major meetings, such as annual customer events or at product launches.

“Going forward, companies will still throw big parties, with big-name enter-tainment,” Pallen says. “But what you’ll need to back up that decision is measure- ment that you achieved the goal of the meeting. That you achieved the business result you wanted. And if throwing a party in the Super Dome with Jimmy Buffet can help you increase your sales and profits, it’s a good investment. But to make those kinds of investments now, you have to show the ROI and have a plan for the return on that investment.”
How to Achieve Esprit de Corps

Nearly 40 years ago, George O. Charrier, a Procter & Gamble employee, wrote "COG's Ladder: A Model of Group Growth." The teambuilding treatise outlined the five steps necessary for groups to work together more efficiently. Cog’s Ladder is still used today by many companies and organizations such as the U.S. Naval Academy and U.S. Air Force Academy.

Starting in the polite stage, groups move to the why-we’re-here stage and then go through the struggle-for-power stage. Next, they learn how to cooperate and finally settle into acceptance—the esprit de corps stage. We’ve come a long way since Charrier penned COG’s Ladder in 1972. Nowadays teambuilding programs feature extraordinary activities and events that often reflect the most innovative ideas trending in popular culture and contemporary society, from giving back to the community to getting back to nature.

As Christina Wilde, director of events and experiences at Switch: Liberate Your Brand, a St. Louis, MO-based independent experiential marketing agency, says, "Today, the purpose of any form of teambuilding activity is to level the playing field so that position within the company has no relevance in the overall exercise or experience at hand. The value of teambuilding is that it partners people with others that may not interact with each other on a daily basis, leading to stronger relationships, as well as a boost in morale."

Shared Experiences

What are the important issues at hand? Joshua Baruch, owner of Boulder, CO-based Colorado Wilderness Rides and Guides, a one-stop shop for customized tours and teambuilding events, cites group interaction, relationship building and developing trust as top teambuilding concerns. Baruch says that one of the most popular teambuilding programs on the current scene is orienteering, a group event that encompasses a myriad of obstacles and goals, including how to work one’s way out of a tough situation.

Orienteering teaches individuals and groups how to develop new skills and test communication efficiency, learn about fundamental geographic principles, understand how to find one’s direction and take action, race to specific points, all the while overcoming obstacles and working together as a team to improve productivity.

Gloria DeCoste, head of brand management at Purina, worked with Baruch for an orienteering program to help the company’s marketing team discover new avenues of inspiration for the purpose of rebranding the company.

"Orienteering is the sport of finding your way in the outdoors with little more than a map and compass," Baruch explains. "For the Purina group of 16 marketing specialists, we constructed a one-day, four-hour event with the goal of helping participants find new directions, literally and figuratively. This physical activity allowed team members to explore a more creative approach to finding new directions."

According to Baruch, the first part of this shared experience focuses on exploring the fundamentals of orienteering. He teaches the basics such as how to use a compass, a map, and how the two relate, as well as the difference between true north and magnetic north and how the two norths are related to each other.

The next activity focuses on translating that knowledge into skills. "That’s when the team participants learned how to take a bearing, how to plot a course and how to orient oneself to other objects found outdoors," explains Baruch. "Then, they are asked to work through a small obstacle course within an area that’s roughly the size of a football field. Completion of the course awarded participants letters that spelled out a goal in our current planning for the upcoming year," says DeCoste.

By Stella Johnson
Orienteering is the sport of finding your way in the outdoors with little more than a map and compass. ...a more creative approach to finding new directions.

Joshua Barruch, Owner, Manager, Senior Guide, Colorado Wilderness Rides and Guides, Boulder, CO

Giving Back
“Corporate teambuilding activities are a natural spin-off for those companies that engage in CSR-friendly incentive trips to faraway places,” claims Christopher Hill, CEO of Hands Up Holidays, a London-based luxury travel company, which specializes in corporate travel, voluntourism and more. “They take a portion of a sales staff that has already demonstrated themselves as top producers and bring them together to bond with each other and the company.”

Hands Up Holidays arranged a 10-day incentive trip to Cambodia and Vietnam for the top 37 performers for Softcat, a UK-based software reseller with 270 employees. Two of those days were spent renovating classrooms and building a library at a local junior high school in a Cambodian village. Previously, Hands Up Holidays arranged a similar incentive trip to Fiji, which also included a voluntourism component.

Hill explains that the group was divided into smaller teams in order to maximize their effectiveness to achieve the tasks in a limited time frame — an exercise that required identifying who was best suited for each role. Then, each unit had to work out their own timing, order of activities and division of labor to achieve their assigned goal. Furthermore, the teams had to be cohesive and rely on each other in order to get the library built on time, and there needed to be coordination to ensure that the limited supply of paint was wisely allocated to complete all the classrooms.

Hill adds, “It was also important that the group as a whole bonded, and this took place in the evening’s social activities and also in the interaction with the children at the school, where football and ad hoc games were played with the kids.”

Tried-and-True
Aveksa, a Waltham, MA-based corporation that provides access governance automation software solutions, employs a very simple and highly effective teambuilding exercise that involves the showcasing of the 1949 film classic “12 O’Clock High” starring Gregory Peck. The award-winning movie tells the tale of a tough general who takes over a bomber unit suffering from low morale and whips them into shape.

At Aveksa, the showing of “12 O’Clock High” is a stop-and-start process whereby attendees discuss different aspects of the film such as the challenges, strategies, decision-making and leadership skills.

Aveksa President and CEO Vaishnavi claims, “In business, so often we get lost in the day-to-day aspect of running the business that we forget the more subtle elements that help a company to be successful, such as building a strong leadership team that will not only optimize business operations, but also empower and inspire the entire organization. The “12 O’Clock High” movie exercise is great because for four to six hours we shut down our laptops and Blackberrys, and watch a movie. The interactive discussion we have around the film does not include direct conversation about what is currently going on in our company. It is strictly about what it means to be a leader. And at the end of the sessions we, as a group, have arrived over-identifies with them, which makes it hard for him to make the hard, impartial decisions needed to effectively carry out operations.

“While the troops like the leader, the unit has no real structure and, as a result, morale is low and they are not getting the job done. The other leader, played by Peck, takes over after the previous leader is transferred to another assignment. Peck knows that he needs to implement a completely different leadership style in order to get the unit operating again. He immediately puts a strict structure in place that means for our company, which is a very unifying experience.” Vaishnavi recognizes that effective leaders, as portrayed in the film by the two central characters, can have very different leadership styles — an important lesson for his team members: “One is well-liked by his troops,” he says, “but he

The 24-Hour Human Wall

Katharine Greis, a senior account executive at Event Architects (EA), a Chicago-based experiential marketing agency, shares her story of the Human Experience Wall — a unique art project they created for client Starcom USA, one of the largest media communications agencies in the U.S. According to Chris Boothe, president and COO of Starcom, Event Architects’ photographers took and collected photos of Starcom employees, creatively manipulated them in a design studio and built a colorful patchwork in the agency’s Chicago headquarters in less than 24 hours to create something simple and meaningful in real time.

A Creation Comes to Life
The one-day art project showed 1,200 Starcom employees across four cities how an artistic idea can be executed from start to finish in a single day. “To do this, a large 8-by-8 canvas board (right) was set up in the lobby of the client’s building. A photographer was sent around throughout the office and took candid photos of employees on the job, catching most by surprise. The idea was actually the brainchild of Starcom’s marketing communications team and was coordinated by our team at EA,” says Greis. “People would ask what the photos were for, and the photographer would say ‘an art project.’”

By noon, the photographer had hundreds of photos of employees, office memorabilia and more. A team of designers then began ‘photoshopping’ the pictures with colors, effects and overlays. Photos were then printed and sent down to the creation site in the building’s lobby where they were artistically affixed by an artist to what was by now a blossoming collage. Employees taking lunch breaks or returning from meetings were able to see the creation come to life.

By 5 p.m., the extraordinary collage was completed, and employees learned the next morning the message behind the project. “You can create something truly amazing in one day. All employees were able to interact in some way, either watching the piece being created or being photographed during the day. All employees saw the finished piece at the end of the work day as they left the building. The results were that employees realized that within less than 24 hours, an idea can be developed to fruition —

and everyone can be a part of it,” says Greis. “The art piece was replicated for the other three Starcom offices and still sits in the main lobby of the agency’s Chicago headquarters as a reminder for employees everyday on what can be accomplished in a brief amount of time when everyone cooperates and works together.”

A Visual Reminder
Commenting on this simple yet highly effective teambuilding event, Boothe says, “The Human Experience Wall showcases all of the wonderful, creative and inspiring people, ideas and cultural behaviors that make up the company. It is strictly about what it means to be a leader.”

Vaishnavi recognizes that effective leaders, as portrayed in the film by the two central characters, can have very different leadership styles — an important lesson for his team members: “One is well-liked by his troops,” he says, “but he

Often we get lost in the day-to-day aspect that we forget the more subtle elements that help a company to be successful, such as building a strong leadership team.”

Vick Vaishnavi, President and CEO, Aveksa, Waltham, MA

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Photos courtesy of Event Architects
Teambuilding Can Be Fun, Too

There’s a fun side to teambuilding as well, reminds Christina Wilde, “Teambuilding requires problem-solving and creative thinking that equate to learning through play, and we all get to walk away having learned something about fellow employees and, in some cases, management officials that we didn’t know before. But, perhaps the biggest payoff, if done correctly, is that teambuilding activities are fun. And, in the current economy, fun goes a long way with many companies operating with dimmed-down staffs, heavy workloads and low morale.” Indeed, Wilde’s company Switch: Liberate Your Brand held its 4th Annual Field Day last fall. The company shut down for a day, and all 110 fulltime employees attended the event. “We reserve an exclusive area in a local park and have a full day of activities, including food and ‘adult’ beverages. We had 11 teams of 10 people. Eight primary games were a combination of cerebral and physical activities — kind of a ‘silly olympics’ in a way,” says Wilde.

“For example, ‘human bowling.’ This is an activity where one brave individual climbs inside a 6-foot diameter, cylinder-shaped ball cage and is ‘rolled’ by fellow employees towards 4-foot-tall pins. Or, something simpler, like a ‘facial fusion’ game where the object of the game is to identify a composite image of three different employees.”

Final Thoughts

More than anything else, observes Wilde, “There is no single prescription for effective teambuilding. It has to fit the specific corporate culture and interpersonal dynamics of the group, while challenging comfort zones, fostering camaraderie and enabling fun.”

Whatever the game, Wilde says Switch’s goals for Field Day are:

- **To Walk the Talk.** As an experiential marketing company that engages audiences to explore fun brands by immersing them in sensory experiences, it’s imperative for the company to create fun, excitement and engagement that is consistent with its positioning and corporate culture and style.
- **To Connect** through planned interaction between people who normally don’t interact back at the office. “We accomplish this through a lottery drawing by department that places a member of each department on a team. While there is not a lot of skill required for these interaction programs, team members still have to work together in order to be successful,” Wilde adds. “It is always interesting to see who rises to a leadership position, who surprises you with a brilliant answer, and who is ultra-competitive.”
- **To Show Our Love.** Top management feels very strongly that Field Day is an opportunity to say thank you to the employees for their hard work and talents. Switch finds the benefits of doing this result in more meaningful relationships built between cross-functional departments and fun for everyone — as well as substantial cash and prize awards. We also award the Best Team Campaign, which aligns with our business purpose. Since we are in the marketing communications business, we want to create a brand essence for each team. There is an award for Best Team Spirit and even attendance awards to ensure that everyone has a shot at a prize.

Teambuilding fun at its best: Switch: Liberate Your Brand closed for a day last fall for their annual field day so that all 110 employees could participate in “silly olympics.”

Company have always been enthusiastic about the movie teambuilding exercise. “I think it is very exciting for them to see a clear cut example of what is the right way to lead, and what is the wrong way. I’m sure they see in themselves some traits from both sides of the fence and the examples in the movie help them to build on the positive traits and stop practicing the bad ones.”

The Meeting Magazines
Learn From Experience
To Safeguard Attendees

When it comes to meeting security and safety, planners must prepare for the unthinkable and hope that it doesn’t happen. That’s the approach planners should take to assess and mitigate risks, respond to emergencies and ensure the well-being of attendees. But even the best preparations will not prevent bad things from happening. Planners must still respond to incidents ranging from food poisoning and theft to protestors and fires — even the untimely death of an attendee.

Some incidents can shake the emotional security of attendees, threatening their ability to hold a successful meeting. That happened at a training meeting for 50 executives and managers of a company in the automotive industry. On the first day of the meeting, held at a hotel in a Midwestern city, an executive complained about feeling ill. “He didn’t show up for a session on the second day, and we tried to contact him. We got no response, so we had the hotel staff enter the room. They found him there, passed away,” says Carol Galle, CMP, president of Royal Oak, MI-based Special D Events, which provides meeting and event planning services for corporations.

Galle and her team put their emergency plan into action and contacted local law enforcement officials. “We sat down with the company and hotel staff, and decided exactly what would be said to attendees. It was important to develop a consistent message and put it out immediately so that everyone was on the same page. Even in the time it took us to do that, there were already rumors spreading. People were concerned about their own safety because they had no idea what caused him to pass away,” says Galle. She met with attendees to explain what happened, answered questions and the meeting continued.

Galle had never before faced such a meeting emergency, and learned something crucial about informing relatives in such situations. “We had an executive who was from the same town as the deceased and knew the family. Our immediate thought was that he would be the one to inform them. But we soon learned from police that wasn’t the way to go. They would make the call to the town’s law enforcement, which would then contact the family. Our executive would follow up with a personal call,” says Galle. She noted the procedure in her planning firm’s safety and security plans. “We adapt and change our crisis management plans based on experiences using them at meetings and events,” Galle adds.

Galle and her staff use their cumulative knowledge of safety and security to play a serious game of “what if” before each meeting. “A couple of weeks prior to the event, the team gathers in our conference room and tosses around possible crisis scenarios. No suggestion is too outrageous. We quiz each other on how we should handle any emergency. Then we agree on the appropriate response and again update our written document. These mental olympics keep us in shape for any crisis,” says Galle.

Meeting planners are responsible for protecting attendees and meeting property as well as a company’s reputation and exposure to financial loss. Every meeting planner should have a basic emergency response plan and adapt it to each meeting, incentive and event, advises Julia Rutherford Silvers, CSEP, consultant, speaker and author of Risk Management for Meetings and Events (Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007). “You start with a basic template and keep adding things to your checklist based on lessons learned from each event,” says Rutherford Silvers, who is based in Albuquerque, NM.

Rutherford Silvers says many planners have insufficient safety and security plans or lack them altogether. Another mistake planners often make is to use the same emergency plan for each meeting without performing a risk assessment for each event. “I don’t care how many times you’ve done that particular type of meeting or incentive, you must do an assessment for each program because each one is different,” she adds.

Meeting planners may also fail to assess security and safety from different points of view, especially when making site visits. “Most planners look only at
“As (planners) look at a site, they should imagine what they could steal or get at what time.”

Julia Rutherford Silvers, CSEP Consultant, Speaker, Author Albuquerque, NM

things like room space, menus, audiovisual and logistical aspects. But the second hat they must wear is that of a professional criminal. As they look at a site, they should imagine what they could steal or get access to, and at what time. They must also try to wear a personal injury lawyer’s hat and look at what can cause injuries or accidents,” says Bruce McIndoe.

Assessing security from these viewpoints is especially important for planners who don’t hire security consultants, she observes.

Outside Advice

While local event planners perform their own risk assessment, others hire a security consultant to perform the task. Based on results of the assessment, meeting planners must sometimes consider whether to hire on-site security personnel and decide which duties they should perform. Such decisions depend partly on meeting budgets, says Bruce McIndoe, president, IET Intelligent Risk Systems, a global intelligence firm based in Annapolis, MD. “When we work with planners, we help with the budgets,” he says. “Our security services if they are appropri-

ate. Having a professional make a recommenda-
tion puts it on record that a meet-
ing planner lets management know what is needed for protection and the cost,” says McIndoe.

No matter how tight security budgets are, it is hardly ever a good idea to use volunteer event staff instead of security professionals to guard entrances to rooms that contain equipment, products and other materials. “It’s a good idea un-
til something goes wrong, but you don’t want to be holding a meeting when it does. If budgeting is an issue, hire fewer security personnel and use volunteers for meeting stewarding functions,” says Rutherford Silvers.

Meeting planners who hire outside security should keep in mind that the quality and variety of services can vary widely. “Considering vendors was system-
tically trying to call the rooms of salespeople to take them to dinner and recruit them, so we arranged to have every phone call to members of the group go to my staff to vet the mes-
sages,” says Klein.

Such incidents illustrate that safety and security plans should define possible incidents as broadly as possible. According to experts, the plans should include the following basic elements:

• Outline potential responses to inci-
dents such as air travel disruption, bomb threats, natu-
ral disasters, theft or loss of equipment or information, contro-
versial companies or individuals and attendees.

• Detail meeting staff responsibilities. Who will handle the planning team’s emergency response? What will be the support roles of staff back in the meeting planner’s home of-

ce? Who will handle the assessment of damages and loss, and oversee post-

meeting follow-up?

• Determine who will communicate to the client, attendees, law enforcement and the public. Know which staff members will handle various duties.

• Include names and phone numbers for hotel security, planning staff, law enforcement agencies, ambulance services and the nearest hospital. Also include contact information for transportation, including airlines, car rental companies and taxis.

• List important documents to keep handy. These include floor plans, maps of the local area and employee room lists with mobile phone numbers and emergency contacts.

• Determine how to protect equipment, company records and proprietary items. Are locked rooms enough or are security guards needed?”

Business success is often based on a calculated risk/reward outcome. But in meeting planning, it’s the elimination of risk that assures a safe and successful coverage event.
Arizona’s perpetually sunny weather, unique desert landscape and abundance of outstanding meeting properties and activities go a long way toward attracting group business. But if you had to name the one element that keeps them coming back, it would have to be extraordinary service.

Success in Scottsdale

Jake Leinenkugel knows how to brew up a successful incentive program. As president (or “Head Beer Dude” as he laughingly says), of the Jacob Leinenkugel Brewing Company, he brings his top 100 salespeople and their spouses to Scottsdale at the end of March. The “All Leinie Team Event” is so popular that hundreds of salespeople compete to qualify for it each year.

For nearly 10 years, the five-day, four-night program has been held at the 404-room Scottsdale Plaza Resort. Set on 40 acres in the heart of Scottsdale, the resort offers 224 guest rooms and 180 suites. The property also includes five pools, lighted tennis courts, a spa and more than 30,000 sf of meeting space. It is conveniently located just 25 minutes from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport.

Leinenkugel said the No. 1 reason he brings the program back to The Scottsdale Plaza each year is the people. “Their service level is just exceptional,” he explains. “The second thing I really like is the lay of the grounds. You don’t feel like you’re in a resort. You feel like you’re in your own little community, and the grounds are gorgeous. Our people, particularly those from the Midwest, love to hang around the pool at that time of year.”

Most of the group’s planned meal functions are held at the resort. “We used to go offsite for quite a few of the meals,” Leinenkugel says, “but because of their service levels and their preparation of the food, we find it’s just as good as any top-notch restaurant. It also alleviates some of the travel that we have to do and get buses for.”

The event kicks off with a “Beer Tales” mixer where Leinie beer (naturally) is served. The program also includes an awards dinner. “We also have a morning sales meeting because it’s a smart thing to do when you have some of your top sales people around,” he adds. “We tell them what the expectations are and the new brand ideas that we have.”

After that, Leinenkugel explains, it’s all fun in the sun. “They can golf, they can spa or they can shop. We give them money and gift cards for all of those things. Then we have a general leisure day where you do what you want to do. You can do balloon rides, you can do desert tours, you can do the things that are available through The Scottsdale Plaza’s service desk and their tour guides.”

While Leinenkugel acknowledges that he has many other resort choices in the Scottsdale area, he likes the comfort level of knowing where they’re going every year. “They’ve gotten to know what our needs are, and they overdeliver in almost all cases,” he says. “We’ve never had a complaint or incident with any of our guests. It’s in a great location, too.”

Troon Golf, which manages golf courses throughout the U.S. and in 23 other countries, also chose Scottsdale as the site of its recent sales and training meeting for 300 attendees. The company met at the new Talking Stick Resort, which opened on the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community last year—featuring two Troon-managed golf courses.

The 497-room, 15-story resort, which achieved AAA Four Diamond status in its first year, features five restaurants, five lounges, an open air spa, showroom and 240,000 sf of casino. The resort’s fine dining restaurant, Orange Sky, is located on the 15th floor and delivers spectacular city, mountain and sunset views.

By Karen Brost
views. More than 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space is available at the resort, including the 25,000-sf Salt River Grand Ballroom. The resort is located adjacent to Talking Stick Golf Club, which is managed by Troon.

"It has awesome meeting facilities," says John Easterbrook, executive vice president of operations for Troon Golf. "There is plenty of room, plenty of foyr space, plenty of open space and many options." He also liked the fact that the meeting space is separate from the casino area.

Troon also used Degree 270, a lounge on the 14th floor, for a reception. "It has excellent service, and the views for an early evening function are remarkable," Easterbrook notes. "It was very impressive for our out-of-town guests. Attendees who used the other restaurants were also very impressed. It was very sold all the way around as it relates to their experience from the resort. It is the new spring training home of the Colorado Rockies and Arizona Diamondbacks baseball teams. The venue, which will be open year-round, contains multiple special event areas that can accommodate up to 400 guests.

Scenic views are often a feature planner looks for when searching for a luxury property in Scottsdale, and Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain Resort and Spa delivers on that requirement. Nestled on 53 acres on the north slope of Camelback Mountain, the resort offers panoramic views of Paradise Valley below. Included in the resort’s 9,500 square feet of indoor/outdoor meeting space is The Views, a 3,500-sf event venue that features floor-to-ceiling windows and a large wraparound terrace. Included in the resort’s 5,500 sf of outdoor space are two private lawns and a patio, all with inspiring views. Other group options include XIII, a new private dining room with views of a working kitchen; and Praying Monk, a new year-round patio with retractable glass walls on one side for inclement weather.

Guest accommodations include 105 luxury casitas, as well as seven private homes set on the mountainside above the resort. Sartori Wellness Retreats can be custom-designed as corporate teambuilding programs centered on adventure, wellness activities or stress management.

Giving Back
Since 1996, Arizona’s Desert Events has been taking groups on nature and historical tours of the desert in north Scottsdale. “It is an off-road tour,” explains Doreen O’Connell, the company’s owner. “Our tour is very educational, but it’s also very entertaining. The guides are very funny. People end up coming back learning a lot about the desert, but also come back laughing because they’ve had a great time.”

The company is now offering a Corporate Responsibility Program, which combines its traditional tour experience with an opportunity to help preserve the Sonoran Desert. Attendees are picked up at their hotel in custom off-road vehicles and transported to state trust land — or anywhere help is needed — where they spend up to two hours maintaining trails and completing other needed tasks. The projects are chosen based on the age range and capability of the group. Tools, equipment and work gloves are provided, and refreshments are included in the cost.

O’Connell is always gratified to see visitors’ reactions to the Arizona desert. “People think a desert is desolate and that people don’t live there. Our tour is very educational, but it’s also very entertaining. The guides are very funny.”

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O’Connell is always gratified to see visitors’ reactions to the Arizona desert. “People think a desert is desolate and that there’s nothing there, but when we take them out and see the amount of vegetation we have and how unique and beautiful it is, they’re really amazed.” She adds, “This program is very important to us because it gives us the opportunity to give back to the desert that gives so much to us. We have the pleasure of introducing people from all over the world to its amazing beauty.”

Phoenix Continues to Rise
Following on the heels of the $600 million expansion of the Phoenix Convention Center, downtown Phoenix continues to add more options for meeting and convention attendees.

In March, The Westin Phoenix Downtown opened for business. Located just a short walk from the Phoenix Convention Center, the hotel offers 242 oversized guest rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows. Other room amenities include wireless Internet, a relaxation and work area with sofa and desk, and a Jack Pack that allows guests to connect their laptops and other personal electronic devices to the room’s 40-inch flat-screen television. More than 15,000 sf of event space is available, including the 3,000 sf Copper Ballroom.

In recent years, downtown Phoenix has been short on dining and shopping venues, but CityScape, a mixed use development, has changed that situation by bringing more than 25 businesses to the area. Recent additions include the upscale Lucky Strike bowling lanes, Raspasun Vodka Bar, Oakville Grocery and an urban grill called The Arrogant Butcher, which offers private event space. Cityscape is also the home of Stand Up Live, a 600-seat comedy club.

The city’s light rail system, Metro Light Rail, makes it easy for visitors to travel to a number of downtown attractions including Chase Field, US Airways Center, the Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona Science Center and the Heard Museum. It also stops at the Phoenix Convention Center. An extension is now under construction that will connect Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport to the light rail system.

To help groups make the most of their visit to Phoenix, the AAA Four Diamond Pointe Hilton Tapatio Cliffs Resort has an in-house destination management company. Biltmore Destination Services can plan a wide range of group activities, from horseback rides and river floats to cultural tours and wine tastings. It also offers an extensive list of teambuilding activities, including a Chili Cook-off, Wild West Olympics, and City Slickers Cattle Drive. Another unique option is the Tomcar GPS Hunt. Tomcars are off road vehicles that look like oversized go carts. They were developed by the military to serve as a cross between ATVs and SIVs.

The newly renovated Spanish-Mediterranean style Pointe Hilton Tapatio Cliffs is located just 20 minutes from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. Resort amenities include a spa, championship golf course and Falls Water Village, a three-acre oasis containing two pools and a 138-foot waterslide. Six more pools are located throughout the property, which also offers more than 65,000 sf of meeting space and 584 suites.

One of the newest cultural venues in Phoenix is the $250 million Musical Instrument Museum (MIM), which opened last year. The 190,000 sf museum enables visitors to see and hear thousands of musical instruments from around the globe. It also contains an Art Gallery that features famous instruments such as the Steinway piano on which John Lennon composed “Imagine,” and Carlos Santana’s custom Yamaha guitar. MIM offers a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces for private events and can accommodate up to 1,000 guests for a reception or up to 200 guests for a sit-down dinner. The museum also has a 299-seat theater that has excellent acoustics.

Tales From Tucson
Heather Laible, events manager for Audigy Group LLC in Vancouver, WA, found her meeting success in Tucson. She
planned a 220-person training program for audiologists at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in January. "We do 12–14 events throughout the year across the country, and we wanted to go somewhere sunny. We were originally looking at Phoenix. By coincidence, I had called Loews for a different event, and they asked me what other events we were running, I told them about our Arizona event, and she had a deal that we just couldn't pass up."

Audigy's event draws attendees from throughout the country. "We do this particular event four to five times a year, and it was the highest attendance we've ever had," Laible says. "We were shocked, because the Tucson airport is a little more difficult to get to, but it ended up being that it wasn’t a problem." Tucson International Airport (TIA) is served by eight airlines that offer nonstop service to 15 destinations and connecting service worldwide.

“Our event is a two-day event on a Friday and Saturday,” she continues. "Typically, half the people leave on Saturday after training, but 95 percent of the people stayed that last night. It was great because that added more rooms to our master account for our cumulative (total). That was fantastic on the budget.”

The 398-room Loews Ventana Canyon offers scenic views of the Catalina Mountains along with two PGA golf courses, two pools, lighted tennis courts and a spa. The property has 37,000 sf of meeting space.

"Tucson is just really beautiful, and the property itself was just gorgeous," Laible says. "It was great for us because the meeting space that we used was set a little bit away from the hotel so it was kind of like we had our own private event going on. It was a four-minute walk to the meeting space, and it was really nice every day to be able to get outside.” She explained that there is additional meeting space in the main building of the resort.

"My favorite part about the property was the people,” Laible adds. "In the whole history of my career, I have never worked with a staff so enthusiastic about their jobs. Everywhere I went, they knew me by name, they knew my staff by name, and they knew who was with our group. The service was just phenomenal. It was a perfect pairing for us because the program that we teach is based on customer service. (The service) was really our favorite logistical part of it. I didn’t have to worry about any of it. I turned it over to them, and they took care of it.”

The 428-room Hilton Tucson El Conquistador Golf & Tennis Resort has received Green Certification from the Arizona Hotel & Lodging Association. The property has a long list of eco-friendly initiatives, including the use of low-voltage light fixtures, low-flow showerheads and composting. The resort, which has 31 lighted tennis courts, even recycles tennis ball cans and donates used tennis balls to schools and care facilities.

In addition to its extensive tennis facilities, the Hilton Tucson El Conquistador offers 36 holes of golf as well as hiking, biking and horseback riding. The property, which occupies 500 acres in the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains, offers more than 100,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space. One of the property’s event spaces, Last Chance, is a Western-style venue that gives groups the feel of going off property without having to incur the cost of bus transportation.

The Tucson Convention & Visitors Bureau is offering special savings based on peak room nights for meetings booked and actualized in 2011. The savings range from $1,000 for 25-50 rooms for a minimum of two nights to $10,000 for 201 rooms or more. The savings triple for meetings booked for three consecutive years starting in 2011. Complete details are available at www.tucsonconvention.com.
Las Vegas

Energizing, Engaging Meetings That Make a Big Splash

The same sentiment could be rightful-
ly proclaimed today by Las Vegas, almost
two years after a scathing report in Time
magazine dismissed it as a dying waste-
town of real estate foreclosures, massive
unemployment and a collapsing meeting-
and-convention industry.

Despite the unusually harsh setback
Las Vegas endured, it still suffered propor-
tionately, given its hefty size, right along-
side every other lesser meeting destination
in the U.S. during an unprecedented and
protracted market downturn. Today, how-
ever, given its unique infrastructure and
almost unparalleled range of resources, as
well as its solid reputation for bottom-line
value combined with exemplary service,
the city is reasserting its stature as one of
the most popular places in the country to
host a meeting.

“We’re in full-blown recovery mode,”
says Chris Meyer, CEM, CMP, vice presi-
dent of sales at the Las Vegas Convention
& Visitors Authority (LVCVA). “I had pre-
dicted two years ago, in the midst of the
crisis, that 2011 would be a pretty good
year for us. And so far, that prediction is
playing out quite nicely. Corporate busi-
ness is up significantly. Our trade shows
have been seeing double-digit increases
in attendance. Show floors are growing in
size. Things are good.”

That comes as no surprise to planners
who know and use the destination.

“There’s just so much opportunity in
Las Vegas to do things,” says Christine
Rosa, New York-based executive direc-
tor of event marketing and talent rela-
tions for Sports Illustrated and Golf Digest
magazines. As a result, Las Vegas has be-

come the annual home of the high-profile global launch event
of SI’s annual swimwear issue each February, a two-day media
soiree that draws 2,900 attendees and is planned by Rosa and
her longtime right-hand person, Kristen Leoco. “Las Vegas is
a melting pot of culture and events, as well as entertainment,”
says Rosa, who hosted this year’s swimsuit event at the Hard
Rock Hotel & Casino. “As a destination, it has the sun, the golf
courses, the fine dining. And what we do
there has nothing to do with gambling. It’s just about what’s going on in the city.
We go there and take advantage of those
unique opportunities, whether it’s a ho-
etel, a restaurant or a retail store.”

Easy Access, Bottom-Line Value

Kazhal Luther, head of events and
logistics at Costa Mesa, CA-based Paul
Mitchell Advanced Education, a national
beauty school franchise operation under
the banner of the global hair-care gi-
ant, uses Las Vegas two or three times a
year for a major meeting or event. “We
use Vegas because it’s such an easy place
to stage a convention,” says Luther, who
heads a four-person team that plans sev-
eral hundred meetings a year. In February,
she hosted a three-day, two-night “Fu-
ture professional” conference at Caesars
Palace for 2,800 beauty school students
and industry superstars from all over
the U.S. “It’s easy to fly into, no matter
where you’re coming from. And it’s great
in terms of cost, which is always a concern
of our franchisees.”

Laura Johnson, senior vice president
of product strategy in the Atlanta office
of Westin, FL-based Ultimate Software,
agrees that consistent value is an enduring
benefit of booking Las Vegas. She hosted
her meeting there a decade ago. She’s been
going back every year since. In March, for
the third consecutive year, she hosted the
company’s annual customer conference, a
three-day, two-night meeting for 1,000
attendees, at landmark MGM Resorts
International property Bellagio. Ultimate
Software has since agreed to go back for
the next five years.

“Las Vegas is a very economical destina-
tion,” Johnson says. “And not just for the
airfares, but also for the quality of the hotel rooms that you get
for the price. We chose and will continue to work with Bellagio
because of the high quality of the hotel rooms, the restaurants,
the shopping, spa and entertainment — all of the key amenities
that appeal to our attendees.”

At the same time, says George Thurman, founder and CEO
of 12-year-old PREMCD, an independent Atlanta-based meet-
in
**Experience innovation before the meeting begins.**

*When you book a meeting at ARIA Resort & Casino at CityCenter* “Las Vegas, you’re part of a bold new way of thinking. Come to a place where ingenuity extends from LEED® Gold certification to three levels of convention space illuminated by refreshing natural light. From the dynamic CityCenter location to individually tailored service, an eye-opening experience awaits you at this AAA Five Diamond winning resort.

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In February, Dolce Hotels debuted the 349-room Ravella at Lake Las Vegas, located 17 miles from The Strip on the site of the former Ritz-Carlton Lake Las Vegas. The new resort, which includes a pair of marinas and a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course, features 39,000 sf of meeting and event space, including Ponteverchic Pavilion, which overlooks scenic Lake Las Vegas.

Meanwhile, Aston Hotels & Resorts has taken over the 347-room, all-suite Montelago Village at Lake Las Vegas, with a combined 16,475 sf of meeting space. The third major meeting resort in the tony community is the 495-room Loews Lake Las Vegas, with 47,000 sf of meeting space. New owner K Hotels has completed a multimillion-dollar

**Convention Facilities**

*Every year, Las Vegas hosts some of the largest conventions and consumer shows in the country, whether it’s the annual convention of the National Association of Broadcasters or the Consumer Electronics Show. As a result, it has state-of-the-art infrastructure that can easily accommodate even the largest corporate trade shows, conferences and events. In fact, three of its facilities — the Las Vegas Convention Center, Mandalay Bay Convention Center, and Sands Expo and Convention Center — rank by size among the country’s top 10.*

The venerable Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC) is one of the largest and most modern facilities in the U.S., with 3.2 million total sf of exhibit and meeting space. LVCC features more than 1.9 million sf of exhibit space, in 16 exhibit halls that can be separated and configured with movable walls. A total of 241,536 sf of meeting space includes 144 meeting rooms ranging in capacity from 20 to 2,500 attendees. Another advantage is proximity — LVCC is located just about three miles from the airport and Strip hotels.

The Mandalay Bay Convention Center, located within the 3,220-room Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino, ranks high among the world’s premier meeting-and-convention complexes. It features 1.7 million sf of exhibit space, in eight individual exhibit halls ranging from 48,822 to 576,593 sf, with 250,942 sf of meeting space that can be configured from six ballrooms ranging in size from 10,234 to 100,014 sf.

With more than 1.8 combined million sf of exhibit and meeting space, the Sands Expo and Convention Center is another of the country’s largest private facilities. It adjoins The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino and The Palazzo Las Vegas.

**New and Noteworthy**

*Known for constantly reinventing itself, Las Vegas unveiled major new properties at the height of the recession. They included the much-heralded CityCenter, which features the 4,004-room Aria Resort & Casino, with 300,000 sf of meeting space, and 1,495-room, all-suite Vdara Hotel & Spa, as well as 390-room The M Resort Spa and Casino.*

Today, more than a year later, the city can point to the first wave of post-recession new hotel openings and major renovations.

**What we do there has nothing to do with gambling. ...We go there and take advantage of those unique opportunities, whether it’s a hotel, a restaurant or a retail store.**

Christine Rosa, Executive Director of Event Marketing and Talent Relations, Sports Illustrated, Golf Magazine, New York, NY
Vegas hotel product, along with its newer sister property, Encore Tower, featuring 665 rooms and 17 suites. In more recent Wynn Las Vegas recently received its fifth consecutive AAA Five Diamond Award. Together, the two hotels provide 4,750 rooms and 260,000 sf of meeting space. Wynn also offers an 18-hole golf course.

Palace last year completed its much-anticipated new Octavius floors of Mandalay Bay.

Caesars news, Nobu, the super-upscale sushi restaurant brand created by Nobu Matsuhisa and Robert De Niro, will develop its first Nobu boutique hotel in a tower at Caesars, just as Four Seasons pioneered the hotel-within-a-hotel concept with four floors of Mandalay Bay.

Hibiscus Spa, the outdoor heated pool and the WestinWorkout Las Vegas Hotel, Casino & Spa, offering a tranquil retreat from the trendy nightlife that started in South Beach Miami and then spread to places such as St. Tropez, Nikki Beach at

renovation of 2,885-room Treasure Island, with 18,000 sf of meeting space.

after halting completion during the recession, Caesars Palace last year completed its much-anticipated new Octavius Tower, featuring 665 rooms and 17 suites. In more recent Caesars news, Nobu, the super-upscale sushi restaurant brand created by Nobu Matsuhisa and Robert De Niro, will develop its first Nobu boutique hotel in a tower at Caesars, just as Four Seasons pioneered the hotel-within-a-hotel concept with four floors of Mandalay Bay.

The 2,444-room Stratosphere Las Vegas has completed a $20 million renovation that "reimagined" the eclectic property, with its famous observation tower.

The Tropicana, a Las Vegas icon for decades, is completing a massive $125 million South Beach-inspired renovation begun last year by its new owners, who are intent on restoring it to its past glory and market status. Changes include a fresh redesign of every hotel room and suite, the casino, the conference center and exhibition hall, several new restaurants, bars, a new poker room,

"It’s easy to fly into, no matter where you’re coming from. And it’s great in terms of cost, which is always a concern of our franchisees.”

Kazhal Luther, Head of Events and Logistics Paul Mitchell Advanced Education Costa Mesa, CA

a new race and sports book, and a new spa and fitness center. Wynn Las Vegas — cited by many as the gold standard of Las Vegas hotel product, along with its newer sister property, Encore — is in the final stages of a $59 million renovation. The property is scheduled to renovate all 2,716 rooms by the end of 2011. Rooms will feature new carpet, wallpaper, furniture and finishes. Wynn Las Vegas recently received its fifth consecutive AAA Five Diamond Award. Together, the two hotels provide 4,750 rooms and 260,000 sf of meeting space. Wynn also offers an 18-hole golf course.

Harral’s Las Vegas has completed a renovation of its 25,000 sf of meeting space and Bally’s Las Vegas has remodeled its Grand Ballroom and Event Center. Don’t forget the noteworthy venues off The Strip: One gem suited for small to mid-sized meetings is the Westin Casuarina Las Vegas Hotel, Casino & Spa, offering a tranquil retreat from the trendy nightlife that started in South Beach Miami and then spread to places such as St. Tropez, Nikki Beach at

Unique Venues

For meeting planners looking for something different when it comes to venues, Las Vegas offers a diverse and eclectic range of options, from the intimate fine art gallery at Bellagio — the only one on The Strip — to Stratosphere Tower, to the fabled Fantasy Suites at The Palms Hotel & Casino. The big news this year, however, is the new Meet Las Vegas, a three-story, state-of-the-art meeting and event venue that includes training/educational facilities. The first floor features 5,371 sf of event and exhibition space, a full-service kitchen and three street entrances. It can host 1,136 attendees reception-style. The 4,816 sf second floor features three individual meeting rooms totaling 2,782 sf and can host 417 attendees for a reception-style event. The third floor features a multimedia training and educational center with two computer-based classrooms with 26 and 22 work stations. The facility also includes a 1,076-sf boardroom-style space, as well as a 752-sf space with 65-inch plasma TV and projection for presentations or teleconferencing.

Another new option, pioneered by the LVCVA and touted by “Meyer, is Nellis Air Force Base, one of the largest and most important facilities of its kind in the world. “For years, we’ve partnered with them for the annual Las Vegas Air Show,” Meyers says. “But now we have the opportunity to leverage the facility for groups and show them the fascinating stuff that goes on there and things like the latest aircraft. It’s just another example of the unique opportunities that Las Vegas offers.”

Day in and night out, however, one of the top draws when it comes to unique venues is the city’s always evolving batch of exclusive nightclubs and lounges. “The newest nightclubs at the major casino hotels are always popular as offsite venues,” says Francine McKanna, DMCP, president of PRA Destination Management Las Vegas.

The newest is Chateau Nightclub & Gardens at Paris Las Vegas, a two-story, 40,000-sf complex featuring six bars, a rooftop dance floor and Parisian gardens that opened in March.

RiRa Las Vegas is a new and authentic Irish pub opened on St. Patrick’s Day inside The Shoppes at Mandalay Bay. In March, as a highlight of her customer conference, Johnson hosted an opening night reception at The Bank, a flagship club within Bellagio. “That was a really special night for our customers,” says Johnson, who arranged a boycott.

Although the city offers dozens of such plush, fun venues, one of the most spectacular is the Foundation Room at The House of Blues atop Mandalay Bay, says Meyer. “It looks straight up The Strip,” he says. “It’s one of the best views you’ll find in Las Vegas.”

Meanwhile, the innovation and new names never stop coming. At the newly renovated Tropicana, a Nikki Beach Club outpost will make its debut later this year. The latest location from the trendy nightlife brand that started in South Beach Miami and then spread to places such as St. Tropez, Nikki Beach at
“Although it may look like a transient hotel, it’s actually planned as a destination hotel for meeting attendees. They can get everything they need or want under one roof.”

George Thurman, CEO and Founder, PREMCO, Atlanta, GA

Tropicana will feature a restaurant, outdoor café and bar, swim-up blackjack, sand volleyball courts and a private island in the center of the tropical pool. The beach club will also include an outdoor concert space where Tropicana will provide world-class Las Vegas nightlife entertainment, including some of the biggest names in the world.

Meanwhile, an existing option favored by McKanna as a unique venue is the penthouse suites at Trump International Hotel Las Vegas. “For small groups up to about 50 attendees, we combine a limousine tour of The Strip with a helicopter tour from Maverick Helicopters, then a reception in a penthouse suite at Trump. That makes a very special, memorable evening,” she says.

Another venue McKanna likes is the NASCAR circuit facility, Las Vegas Motor Speedway. “A neat thing you can do there is stage an antique car race, in which attendees get to drive, then host a dinner in one of the garages,” McKanna says. “It’s a fun and fascinating experience.”

Dining and Entertainment

“The dining and entertainment scene in Las Vegas is a big draw for our attendees,” says Linden. “Our post-meeting surveys from the event this year show that the meals, the entertainment and the nightlife not only topped anything we’ve ever done here — but also at any company our people ever worked for before.”

Culinary highlights of this year’s sales meeting were Mom Ain’t Gah!i, the flagship French bistro at Paris Las Vegas, and Bally’s Steakhouse, at the nearby sister property from Las Vegas Motor Speedway. “A neat thing you can do there is to get a small plates menu, then host a dinner in one of the garages,” McKanna says. “It’s a fun and fascinating experience.”

“Another hot new restaurant is La Cave at Wynn, launched by restaurateur Michael Morton and featuring chef Bill DeMarco’s innovative “small plates” that are expertly paired with wines for a diverse, unique dining experience. “It’s mostly American cuisine, and the food is great,” says Meyer. “And they have an excellent wine bar and rotate selling 48 wines by the glass.”

While newcomers such as La Cave flourish, so do older favorites that represent the entire culinary spectrum. For this year’s swimsuit launch, for example, Rosa hosted a luncheon event at Mexican hotspot Diablo’s Cantina at Monte Carlo Las Vegas Resort and Casino.

Yet, despite the dominance of the hotel restaurants, popular new local eateries come along every year. Among McKanna’s current favorites is Mundo, located in the World Market Center complex north of The Strip and serving upscale Mexican cuisine. Another new option is a fun seafood house Monstah Lobstah, located in Henderson.

“Matching the dining scene for allure to both meeting planners, just minutes off The Strip, is Brio Tuscan Grille, located in Henderson. Another, more well-established local restaurant popular with planners, just minutes off The Strip, is Brio Tuscan Grille, located in the Towne Square complex and serving superb Italian cuisine in an upscale, energetic space.”

The Show Goes On

Matching the dining scene for allure to both meeting planners and attendees is an entertainment and nightlife scene almost unmatched anywhere else on earth. Whether it’s Celine Dion, Jay Leno, Blue Man Group or one of seven acclaimed presentations from Cirque du Soleil, Las Vegas offers something sensational for every taste.

Newest among the perennially celebrated Cirque productions are “Viva Elvis” at Aria and “Criss Angel Believe” at Luxor Hotel &

International and opened in late 2009. They are Todd English Pub; Beso, owned by actress Eva Longoria; and an upscale, eponymous tapas bar from Spanish superstar chef Julian Serrano.

A 30,000-sf Sugar Factory American Brasserie made its debut at Paris Las Vegas in March. The complex includes a restaurant, retail store and Chocolate Lounge.

Another hot new restaurant is La Cave at Wynn, launched by restaurateur Michael Morton and featuring chef Bill DeMarco’s innovative “small plates” that are expertly paired with wines for a diverse, unique dining experience. “It’s mostly American cuisine, and the food is great,” says Meyer. “And they have an excellent wine bar and rotate selling 48 wines by the glass.”
Casino. “And even the older Cirque shows, especially ‘The Beatles Love’ at The Mirage and ‘La’ at the MGM Grand, remain very popular with groups,” says McKanna.

But the big news for 2011 is Celine Dion’s March return to Caesars Palace, to reprise her earlier stint several years ago as one of the most critically acclaimed and wildly popular runs in Las Vegas history. Wynn has also debuted the new show “Dance with Me,” which features an 18-piece orchestra and a live dance interpretation of the classic songs of Frank Sinatra, featuring digitally remastered recordings and the latest theatrical technology. “It’s one of the most amazing theatrical experiences you could ever have,” says Meyer. “And the fact that we have something else new and innovative and highly entertaining like that demonstrates again that our entertainment scene is always evolving. And that’s important for the many corporate clients who bring more than one meeting here every year. We always have something fresh and new.”

“The Las Vegas Mob Experience,” which opened in March at the Tropicana, is a highly interactive, immersive experience — a journey through the history of organized crime that showcases more than 1,000 artifacts, memorabilia, photos and videos of organized crime ever assembled. When it comes to private entertainment for events, Las Vegas also offers many fun and creative options, from comedians and magicians to jugglers and ventriloquists, with just about everything else imaginable somewhere in between.

“One popular option pitched by McKanna is an evening with a helicopter tour from Maverick Helicopters, then a reception in a penthouse suite at Trump. That makes a very special, memorable evening.”

Francine McKanna, DMCP, President, PRA Destination Management Las Vegas

More Than gaming
Given its broad popularity for major conventions and corporate meetings of all sizes, it’s not at all surprising that Las Vegas has bounced back so quickly after the premature speculations about its demise. And its popularity grows daily.

“Until I really dug in deep as a planner, I was just one of those people who went to Las Vegas and had fun, just like everyone else,” says Rosa. “But you have to think about Las Vegas as more than a gaming destination. As a serious event planner who has done meetings and events globally for many years, I can tell planners who have never used it that there is so much more to Las Vegas than you can possibly imagine until you do your research and discover it. And there are also great partnerships to be formed there,” she adds.

In addition — and perhaps most important — Las Vegas continues to be a big draw for attendees. “Las Vegas definitely gets me and my people excited,” says Linden. “When we send out the initial invite for our sales meeting in the summer or early fall, people get really excited when they know we’re going to Las Vegas. Then when I throw out that our hotel is a great property like Paris, that elevates the excitement again. As a planner, you can’t beat that.”

Golf
Given its other high profile amenities, it’s no surprise that Las Vegas can claim some of the best golf courses in the world. It offers a total of 56, Meyer reports.

“Golf is very important to a lot of our corporate meeting customers,” he says. “That’s because more and more in today’s business world, companies are looking to get face time with key customers, important vendors or suppliers, or any other person who is important to their business. And golf provides an intimate experience that allows you to get that done.”

The globally acclaimed 18-hole, par-70 course at Wynn, designed by Tom Fazio and Steve Wynn and featuring dramatic elevations, waterfalls, streams and a forest, is the only course on The Strip. It is generally considered the best in town — and one of the best on the planet. It is only available to groups staying in the hotel.

Not far down Las Vegas Boulevard, and a contender for the title of best links in an informed conversation, is Bali Hai Golf Club, featuring an 18-hole, par-71 course designed by Lee Schmidt in 2000. Its includes a lush Indonesian-influenced landscape that features seven acres of water features, 4,000 trees, towering palms and 100,000 tropical plants. From its fairways, Bali Hai also features breathtaking views of The Strip.

Located 20 minutes from The Strip, in Summerlin, TPC Las Vegas features an 18-hole, par-71 course designed by acclaimed architect Bobby Weed and World Golf Hall of Fame member Raymond Floyd.

Bear’s Best Las Vegas, opened in 2001, is a one-of-a-kind, par-72 course that features 18 of Jack Nicklaus’ favorite holes from his 270 worldwide designs. “It’s very popular with corporate meeting groups,” says Meyer, “because it’s a unique golf experience you can’t find anywhere else in the world.”

The globally acclaimed 18-hole, par-70 course at Wynn, designed by Raymond Floyd.
How to Purge Workplace Behaviors That Drain Everyone’s Energy

Because you have been suffering through months of long, exhausting workdays due to the effects of the recent recession and downsizing, you’re tired, depleted and quite frankly just done with “business as usual.” You’re laying the blame for your fatigue at the feet of the increased responsibilities and long hours, but you might be wrong. Working hard — when done with a good attitude in the right environment — can actually be quite invigorating. In other words, what’s wearing you out at work might not be the work.

The real culprit is often the negativity of the people you work with and for, their constant complaining, and the pessimistic culture that is now the norm in a lot of workplaces.

The fact is, many of us work in a world of drainers. What exactly is a drainer? Anyone in the workplace — a boss, co-worker, employee or client — who sucks the life and energy right out of you.

No one sets out to be a drainer, of course. It’s just that some people regularly exhibit energy-draining behaviors. What’s worse, many bosses allow them to continue — or are themselves guilty of practicing behaviors that are big parts of working together and being successful.

If managers are able to identify the offending behaviors and fix them, they’ll be able to spend more time nourishing their companies’ cultures — which will, in turn, make employees happier and more productive, thus increasing the bottom line. Follow these tips to get the ball rolling in a positive direction:

• **DON’T** assume others have all the information they need, or that something you know isn’t really all that important.
• **DON’T** make a concerted and proactive effort to make sure that the right people are in the know. You’ll set your entire team up for failure. Also, make sure you copy the right people on e-mails, promptly return voice mails and are clear about directions and expectations.
• **DON’T** confuse activity with progress. You know the person. She’s always so busy but doesn’t ever seem to meet deadlines or get anything done. She’s living proof of the fact that just because your day is full of things to do doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re getting them done.
• **DO** set goals and hold yourself and your employees accountable for results. These results should be ones that matter and that are visible and valuable to your team.
• **DON’T** let sub-par work slide. Simply put, low performers drag the rest of the team down.
• **DO** institute a zero-tolerance policy for low performers. Hold your entire team accountable for meeting their goals and adhering to the same performance standards.
• **DON’T** allow disorganization to impede productivity. You’re busy, and that’s understandable. But constant disorganization can drain your employees and coworkers if they always have to cover your tracks.
• **DO** take the time you need to do the job right. Rather than clicking “send” just because it’s 5:00 p.m., get focused and do your best work the first time.

The real culprit is often the negativity of the people you work with.

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The real culprit is often the negativity of the people you work with.
On The Move

The Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center, National Harbor, MD, has named Michael Snapkoshi as its vice president of sales and marketing for the West Coast, Los Angeles, and the JW Marriott Los Angeles at L.A. LIVE, Los Angeles, CA. He formerly served as director of sales and marketing at the Westin Nashville. He recently named Stefania Walker as vice president of sales for the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center, National Harbor, MD, has named Michael Snapkoshi as its vice president of sales and marketing for the West Coast, Los Angeles, and the JW Marriott Los Angeles at L.A. LIVE, Los Angeles, CA. He formerly served as director of sales and marketing at the Westin Nashville. He recently named Stefania Walker as vice president of sales for the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center, National Harbor, MD, has named Michael Snapkoshi as its vice president of sales and marketing for the West Coast, Los Angeles, and the JW Marriott Los Angeles at L.A. LIVE, Los Angeles, CA. He formerly served as director of sales and marketing at the Westin Nashville. He recently named Stefania Walker as vice president of sales for the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center, National Harbor, MD, has named Michael Snapkoshi as its vice president of sales and marketing for the West Coast, Los Angeles, and the JW Marriott Los Angeles at L.A. LIVE, Los Angeles, CA. He formerly served as director of sales and marketing at the Westin Nashville. He recently named Stefania Walker as vice president of sales for the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center, National Harbor, MD, has named Michael Snapkoshi as its vice president of sales and marketing for the West Coast, Los Angeles, and the JW Marriott Los Angeles at L.A. LIVE, Los Angeles, CA. He formerly served as director of sales and marketing at the Westin Nashville. He recently named Stefania Walker as vice president of sales for

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