Dan Meister, CMP, president of Meister Meetings & Travel Corporation, Boca Raton, FL, recently held two successful meetings at Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando Resort (pictured).
"It’s a tremendous resort across the board. The only thing missing is the Leinie’s, so we bring our own."

Jake Leinenkugel rewards his “all-Leinie team” – 130 of the top Leinenkugel distributors – with a trip to The Scottsdale Plaza Resort every year. And after 8 years, he couldn’t imagine going anywhere else. As he says, “They’re the friendliest and most accommodating group of folks I’ve met in my 50+ years. They know us so well, they can almost read our minds. It feels like your own little oasis – homey and relaxing. We used to plan off-site activities, but our people would rather just hang at The Plaza. Everything’s right here. The setting, the food, the service – it’s just a delight to be here.”

800-306-0059 · www.meetatplaza.com · Scottsdale, Arizona
Welcome 2012

As we turn the page on another year, I pause a moment to reflect on our company’s history. 2012 marks the beginning of our 37th year publishing business-to-business magazines. Yet, it feels like it was only yesterday that we began this journey. As many things have changed, so have many things stayed the same. I cherish the many solid business relationships I have fostered over these three decades. Nowadays, we may communicate by text or email but the friendships endure. This year, as in all the years before, I continued my tradition of sending holiday greeting cards via the U.S.P.S. And, of course, we continue to mail our magazines to our 40,000+ loyal subscribers every month, most of whom surprisingly tell me that they value the printed, hard copy of our magazines rather than a digital version. Sometimes, only the real thing will do.

As much as I recognize that we have certainly entered the digital age, I will always appreciate more a personal card or telephone greeting from a business associate, than a holiday jingle via email. Be that as it may, the digital age is here to stay, and professional meeting planners are the beneficiaries of extraordinary technological advances, especially in the area of social media and mobile technology: Smart phones get smarter every year.

Another thing that has stayed the same over the last several years is the prominence of two premier meeting destinations — Florida and Nevada. No doubt, most planners have staged meetings and events in Florida and Nevada more than any other destination. After all, Orlando is the first U.S. destination to receive more than 50 million visitors in a year, and Las Vegas’ occupancy is up to 85.2 percent to date, more than 20 points ahead of the national average, according to the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority. Both locales offer much to entice planners and engage attendees including easy accessibility, a variety of venues and attractions, built-in entertainment and much more. Dan Meister, CMP, president of FL-based Meister Meetings & Travel Corp., is a fan of meeting in Florida because he always finds something new to share with his clients. Meister, who graces our cover in this issue, says, “There is a lot to do, see and experience at these resorts...that one cannot do in just one visit.”

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher
Four Seasons Hotel Breaks Ground at Walt Disney World

ORLANDO, FL — Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts recently broke ground on its new 444-room resort at Walt Disney World, Lake Buena Vista, FL. The Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World, slated to open in 2014, will include a rooftop restaurant with views of the Magic Kingdom, a 14,000-sf spa, three pools and a lazy river; and meeting and event space. The development will encompass the existing Tom Fazio-designed Osprey Ridge 18-hole championship golf course, which will be renovated and subsequently managed by Four Seasons. The project in the exclusive Golden Oak at Walt Disney World Resort also will include up to 40 Four Seasons Residence Club units and up to 90 Four Seasons Private Residences. www.fourseasons.com

Baum Named President & CEO of Reno-Sparks CVA

RENO, NV — The Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority (RSCVA) board of directors appointed Chris Baum as the organization’s president and CEO. Previously, Baum served as the senior vice president of sales and marketing at the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau. At the time of his appointment, Baum said, “I’m thankful to the board for this opportunity, and I’m eager to start promoting the countless attributes of Reno-Tahoe. My family and I are already in love with the area.” Dwight Dortch, chairman of the RSCVA board of directors, noted, “Chris is an exceptional communicator and has a 35-year record of success in the primary disciplines affecting this organization. His experience and vision will be beneficial to this destination for years to come.” www.visitrenotahoe.com

Cancun Hosts Best of the Best Event

CANCUN, MEXICO — Cancun hosted more than 450 travel industry professionals November 30–December 2 for Travel Impressions’ “Best of the Best” annual event. “Travel Impressions’ “Best of the Best” annual event. “Cancun takes great pride in being selected by Travel Impressions as the ideal destination to host Best of the Best. We give the warmest welcome to this group of industry experts who will have the opportunity to network while enjoying Cancun’s varied activities and world-class facilities,” said Jesús Almaguer, director of the Cancun Convention and Visitors Bureau. Best of the Best was held at Fiesta Americana Grand Coral Beach, a AAA Five Diamond Award property. “Cancun is such an important destination for Travel Impressions and the single largest destination in passengers from the United States. The warmth of the people and their wonderful properties made Cancun the perfect reward for this group of hard-working industry professionals,” says John Harratty, chief marketing officer and senior vice president of Travel Impressions, one of the largest leisure tour operators in the U.S. and a wholly owned subsidiary of American Express.

The St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort Debuts This Month

BAL HARBOUR, FL — St. Regis Hotels & Resorts, part of Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc., announced the opening of The St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort. The resort is located in the Village of Bal Harbour, on the northern tip of Miami Beach. “The opening of The St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort represents a significant moment for St. Regis, as the brand continues to grow globally in destinations designed for the new generation of affluent travelers,” says Paul James, global brand leader St. Regis and The Luxury Collection Hotels & Resorts. The St. Regis Bal Harbour will feature 214 elegant, oceanview rooms and suites and 307 residences in three all-glass 27-story towers. The resort will offer signature St. Regis Butler Service, a Remède Spa, a world-class dining experience at Jean-Georges’ restaurant J&G Grill and interior design by Yabu Pushelberg. The resort spans nine acres on a 1,000-foot stretch of beach. www.stregis.com/balharbour; www.starwoodhotels.com

SeaWorld Orlando Announces New Attractions

ORLANDO, FL — SeaWorld Orlando announced new experiences that are scheduled to open in 2012: Turtle Trek at SeaWorld Orlando and Freshwater Oasis at Discovery Cove — a limited-admission, all-inclusive tropical resort across the street from SeaWorld Orlando. Turtle Trek takes guests on a sea turtle’s amazing journey in a first-of-its-kind 3D/360-degree dome theater, which allows a hyper-realistic 3-D movie to be shown all around and above participants. Freshwater Oasis is an all-new attraction featuring swimming and wading adventures, and face-to-face encounters with playful otters and curious marmosets. Also announced was SeaWorld Orlando’s Antarctica — Empire of the Penguin, opening in spring 2013. It’s a voyage to the bottom of the world, to the coldest and windiest continent, to a place of ice more than 9,000 feet thick — a journey to Antarctica and to the empire of the penguin. More details will be released in the near future. www.seaworldorlando.com
Foster a People-Centric Environment for Success in the New Year

The late Steve Jobs once said, “Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.” The economic downturn led mainstream business practices into severe cost-cutting mode in an effort to survive. Unfortunately, now that organizations are as lean as possible — doing more with less — they’ve reached a breaking point. No one can cut their way towards prosperity long-term. So, what’s next?

Innovation Is the Game Changer

If an organization wants to succeed, it must revolutionize the way it achieves success. Innovation will be the game changer. Yet, innovation doesn’t originate from a company, but rather its network of people — employees, channel partners and customers. Fostering a people-centric environment provides for a setting that better engage their people and further understand what drives their behaviors and performance.

Meetings, events and incentives cannot be treated as one-off transactional activities. To evolve how stakeholders and attendees consider these strategies, planners need to help them better understand the essence of human nature. Paul Lawrence and Nitin Nohria, with Harvard Business School, fleshed out a theory on the drivers of human behavior. They theorized that nearly every individual on the planet is imbued with four biological “drives” — the drive to acquire, bond, create and defend. Taking it a step further, planners can apply the four-drive model to meeting design, allowing participants to:

• Acquire: Garner knowledge and information through meeting content.
• Defend: Reinforce what it is the organization stands for, its values and mission.
• Bond: Offer relationship-building and networking opportunities, in addition to celebrating performance achievements.
• Create: Participate and co-create through dialogues.

Be Open to New Meeting Designs

Radical thinking surfaced during the economic downturn in 2008. With that, the features and benefits of technologies such as virtual applications exploded onto the meeting and event scene. Meeting professionals were challenged and, at times, required to take their meetings virtual — mind you at the same time being held at equal, if not improved, performance expectations.

While we learned that virtual programs alone can’t serve as a replacement but rather an enhancement for face-to-face engagement, we also began to better understand the essentials of building a better strategy. Not all meeting or attendee types are created equal. We needed a more integrated approach, where technologies weren’t just focused on driving operational efficiencies but also offered opportunities for enhancing attendee engagement. In 2012, technology will become a tool for boosting engagement. The use of virtual, social and mobile technologies, for instance, by attendees and participants in their everyday lives has created significant shifts in how people manage, operate and interact with one another. To be successful, meeting planners need to keep in mind these three key points when using technology as an engagement tool: Be clear on your business objectives for the event; deploy technology solutions aligned to your business objectives and communication goals; and measure to ensure effectiveness and improvement.

Let Your Participants Steer ME&I Design

Companies must stop designing meeting, event and incentive programs in a vacuum. Meeting professionals must have a deeper understanding of the experiences their people want to have. What type of destination do they want? Do they want to bring a guest or the entire family? Are they interested in community involvement or free time? Content? Do they prefer small breakout sessions or keynotes from industry experts? These are the types of questions planners need to answer before they begin designing the program.

The answers lie in giving participants a voice in their experience. Pre- and post-event surveys and predictive modeling studies can help companies design the right meeting, event or incentive program that drives the most effective outcome for the business.

It’s an exciting time in the industry as people take a front row seat in driving performance and innovation. Companies who put their people first can achieve far better business performance outcomes as a result. In turn, these companies will become industry leaders.

“If an organization wants to succeed, it must revolutionize the way it achieves success.”

Jim Ruszala

is the director of marketing, Maritz Travel Company, St. Louis, MO. Ruszala leads the company’s development of new and innovative strategies to help organizations achieve better business value through their incentive travel efforts. A recognized thought leader, advocate and voice for the incentive industry, Ruszala has presented at many industry events, moderated cross-industry panels and supports incentive association groups. jim.ruszala@maritz.com
Europe

Good Values, Great Destinations
By Karen Brost

When planning meetings and incentive programs in Europe, it sure helps to know the territory. “About 90 percent of what we do is in Europe,” says Kevin Devanney, president and founder of Incentive Travel Solutions in Charlotte, NC, “so we’re pretty familiar with the market.”

Devanney explains how the current financial situation in Europe is impacting meetings and incentives. “The dollar has strengthened in 2011 just slightly, and it’s helped a little bit with business to Europe,” he says. “That’s certainly a positive for us and for Europeans in the incentive travel business. I think Europeans like a strong euro, however it really helps them when the dollar strengthens because they certainly see an uptick in business. The hotels and DMCs all survive primarily off the U.S. business.”

Spain, Italy, England and France are the big four incentive destinations in Europe,” he continues. “Meetings-wise, you can throw Germany into the mix, because there’s so much commerce and business taking place there. If you’re including meetings, Germany raises the bar a little bit. We do a little more in Germany for that fact.”

Devanney says that Barcelona was a popular destination for a lot of American companies in 2011. He explains why: “No 1, they have great restaurants over there. The influence of Gaudi on the city of Barcelona (also) has a big impact. You see that through the entire city.” Antoni Gaudi was a celebrated Spanish architect in the late 1800s and early 1900s whose innovative designs continue to capture the interest and imagination of visitors to the city today.

A few of Gaudi’s most famous works can be found near the 98-room Mandarin Oriental, Barcelona, which opened in late 2009. The hotel is located on the city’s prestigious Passeig de Gracia in an area filled with fashionable boutiques and restaurants. One of the Barcelona hotels Devanney likes is El Palace, a 125-room luxury property set in the heart of the city. “It’s a five-star property that has some meeting space and is in a fantastic location. It was recently renovated, and it’s a great location for incentives,” he says. The building was constructed in 1919 at the height of the city’s cultural renaissance, and the hotel continues to reflect an air of Old World elegance.

England

“London is very strong right now,” Devanney comments, citing Prince William and Kate Middleton’s wedding, the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee coming in June as well as the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. “In 2012 we’ve got some interest from our clients for all of those reasons,” he says. “It’s not necessarily for the Jubilee or for the Olympics, but because the city will be really decked out and highly decorated through the year in anticipation of these events. It’s really a great location.”

“They’re doing a lot of building,” he continues, “but some of the old hotels like the Grosvenor House and Claridge’s are still fantastic hotels. There’s a brand new InterContinental and Four Seasons. All of the hotels along Hyde Park have recently renovated, like the Hilton and the Sheraton. That location is great for both meetings and incentives.”

The 420-room Grosvenor House, A JW Marriott Hotel, has been hosting royalty, celebrities and business leaders since 1929. “It has a 19th century ice rink that was incorporated into the hotel,” Devanney says. The ice rink was converted into what is now known as the Great Room, billed by the hotel as the “largest hotel banqueting space in Europe” with nearly 20,000 sf of space. In total, the hotel offers more than 60,000 sf of meeting space including 31 meeting rooms.

Claridge’s, which has a heritage dating back to the 1850s, is one of London’s most iconic hotels. Of its 203 guest rooms, 67 are suites. Half of the hotel’s accommodations are decorated in an art deco style, and the rest are Victorian. As proof of just how chic this historic hotel is, it features a series of rooms and suites designed by Diane Von Furstenberg.

The Four Seasons Hotel London at Park Lane opened in early 2011. Located in the heart of the city’s prestigious Mayfair area, it features 147 guest rooms, 46 suites, and more than 8,500 sf of meeting space, including the innovative designs continue to capture the real nature of the town and its spirit when you’re just looking at the online pictures,” he continued. “Being that far north it feels like it’s off the beaten track, but Lufthansa flies in there as a connection with United, so it’s no problem at all.”

Kellie Jette, special events specialist for the craft supplies direct sales company Stampin’ Up!, planned a three-night, four-day sales incentive trip for 30 attendees at the Mandarin Oriental, Prague earlier this year. “Our group was from all over Europe, and Prague had something to offer for everyone,” she says. “Our group loved being able to wander around the streets and shops. We loved the quiet location of the hotel and the fact that it was a former monastery.”

Photography courtesy of Mandarin Oriental

The impressive view from the Mandarin Oriental, Prague, a former monastery, includes the historic Prague Castle.

“Europe is still the top request,” explains John Tichenor, president of World Heritage Travel Group based in Angels Camp, CA. His company is currently in the process of planning several European sales incentive trips, one of which will be held in St. Moritz. “Sometimes people play down Switzerland as being too predictable, and they’re usually mistaken,” he says. “This is going to be a fun mix of the summertime in the Alps and the heritage of the Olympic Games there.” One of the group’s stops will be to see the historic bobsled tracks that have been used for Olympic events.

Tichenor noted that Switzerland also has a heritage of group travel. “It began with Thomas Cook taking groups to St. Moritz,” he explains. “For incentive operators to take a group there has been very popular, because they solve all the problems that people think they’re going to have. As it turns out, it’s quite simple to go there. And it’s a good value.”

He described the city’s appeal. “In its time it was the capital of Bohemia. It was the art and music center that was equivalent to Vienna and Budapest, and it’s still that way. Toddler’s (there) learn to tie their shoes and brush their teeth and play the violin. Doesn’t everybody?”, he laughs.

“Europe is still the top request,” explains Kevin Devanney, founder and President of Incentive Travel Solutions, Charlotte, NC. \"For companies that really want to raise the bar and continue to raise the bar for their top performers, they understand that Europe is a destination that is worth the increasing cost.\"
The 99-room Mandarin Oriental, Prague is a five-star hotel located in the city's picturesque Mala Strana district. The former monastery in which the hotel is housed has been dating back to the 14th century. The hotel offers views of historic Prague Castle, which towers over the city. “The overall experience in Prague was charming,” Jettie continues. “A special moment for our group was our final night event where we were able to have dinner at the Archbishop’s Palace. ... The setting was gorgeous, and right outside the window was the view of the city and Prague Castle.”

The city’s panoramic views of the Mediterranean coast that are so prized by visitors today are what made it possible for the city to spot approaching private jets and defend the “friendly” ships in its harbors against them.

“Monte Carlo is again popular because it’s on the Mediterranean and it has a sense that it’s always going to be the most expensive place on earth, but actually, it’s a good value,” he continues. “At the peak (of the market), everything was high priced, but everybody is getting realistic about coming in and making it affordable now.”

The 280-room Hotel Hermitage in Monte Carlo completed a total hotel renovation earlier this year that was designed by award-winning interior designer Pierre-Yves Rochon. The hotel, which overlooks the Mediterranean, has one of the largest wine cellars in the world, and the hotel also features the Grimaldi Forum, which offers more than 376,000 sq ft of space, including more than 107,000 sq ft of exhibition space, three auditoriums and 22 meeting rooms.

Tischner reflected on Monte Carlo’s fairy-tale image. “It’s one of those places that has that reputation because it deserves the hype, who like it, like it because it’s fabulous. It’s still got that wild combination of the elegance of Princess Grace and the grit of the Grand Prix.”

Hotel Brand Expansions

Germany

The German National Tourist Board and the German Convention Bureau (GCB) will be working together through 2012 to promote Germany as a meeting destination. The overall goal of the initiative is to increase meeting and incentive business from the U.S., China, Brazil and Japan.

The GCB maintains a comprehensive website www.germany-meetings.com to assist planners with finding the right venues and other resources. The site also includes a list of certificates and best practices for hotels and convention centers that stage green meetings.

The 563-room Scandic Berlin Potsdamer Platz hotel, located in the German capital, only uses energy from renewable sources. It is the first hotel in Germany to be awarded the EU Ecolabel and silver medal for sustainable building.

Deutsche Bahn, Germany’s national railway, has created the “Umwelt-Plus” event ticket, which offers attendees carbon-free transportation to large events for a fixed price. The railway’s green campaign, called the “DB Eco Program,” includes more than 20 activities that focus on climate protection.

An organization called the European Spatial Planning Observation Network has determined that Germany is the most accessible country in Europe due to its 40 airports and extensive network of roads and railways. The organization also determined that the metropolitan area around the financial hub of Frankfurt is the most accessible region in continental Europe.

Berlin just became the newest European member of the Best Cities Global Alliance, a group of 10 convention bureaus from cities around the world that participate in joint marketing campaigns in global markets. The group also focuses on developing new markets. Two other European cities Copenhagen and Edinburgh are already members of the group.

The first two hotels with the new design are scheduled to open in Aberdeen, Scotland and Cologne, Germany in 2013. InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) has also announced plans to expand its presence throughout Europe with the addition of 15 properties to be operated under franchise agreements. Four of the new hotels will be in the UK, and the others will be located in the Netherlands, Poland, Italy, Spain, Germany, Turkey and Russia. One of the new properties, the 172-room Hotel Indigo – Victoria Station, is scheduled to open in Manchester, England in spring 2012.

Europe Is a Top Choice

The German Convention Bureau reports that Europe is the most important foreign destination for U.S. planners, and that approximately 50 percent of all foreign events staged by U.S. planners take place in Europe. For Devaney’s company, the percentage is much higher. “We will probably record in 2012 that 75 percent of all foreign events going to Europe this year,” he notes. “I think it’s great. I think the dollar has strengthened and at the same time, people are recognizing that it’s not fluctuating that much. It’s just something that we live with now. For companies that really want to raise the bar and continue to raise the bar for their top performers, they understand that Europe is a destination that is worth the increasing cost to keep their top performers motivated and coming back for next year.”

**Endnotes**

Turn Jeers Into Cheers
How to Convert Costly Speakers Into Priceless Investments

With the reduced meeting budgets of recent years, speaker coaches may in some cases have seen more corporate business than professional speakers. Many companies focused on utilizing their own executives to deliver that motivating keynote, as well as other employees throughout the meeting in speaking roles. And when those employees aren’t entirely comfortable speaking to a group or need help preparing, a speaker coach is a sensible investment.

“They’re good at what they do, and we want our internal speakers to do well and to have those skills moving forward,” says Robin Reuben, CMP, senior meeting planner with San Francisco-based McKesson Corporation. While the bulk of the speakers at McKesson’s sales conferences remains internal, the company is starting to integrate outside motivational speakers again. After all, the recession’s impact on corporate America hasn’t been especially motivating, and teams and departments have in many cases been disrupted by layoffs. An outside speaker who can only address the cohesiveness of the entire team. So we’re trying to hire speakers that can speak to the importance and critical nature of teamwork in getting any job done, but also the importance of teamwork and group think as well as other employees throughout the meeting in speaking roles.

The Importance of Teamwork

“The size of teams has been reduced substantially for some companies that we work with,” says Kathryn Jurgensen, president/CEO of Premier Meetings, located in Raleigh, NC. “They lost some employees or had cutbacks, and those who remain have had to pick up the slack. One chink in the armor kind of demoralizes teams, but do so from a different perspective than office culture, can be just what’s needed to revitalize productivity.

Effective teamwork depends on effective leadership, and the latter topic is also in high demand, notes Charlotte Raybourn, account executive/public relations director with Overland Park, KS-based Five Star Speakers & Trainers. “Many companies are trying to instill more leadership within their department heads. They want to keep their employees engaged, and the department heads are primarily the ones who have to keep the employees engaged all the time.” Other popular speakers include futurists, economists, and experts in corporate concerns such as change management and social responsibility.

ROI is always a major focus, and speakers are often being asked to deliver a little more value for their fee. An enthralling speech is obviously the main thing, but those who are willing to be available beyond that are typically preferred. Some “big name” speakers can be expected to leave after their keynote, or at most to stay for Q&A, photos, handshakes and the like.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who stay in touch with the company throughout the year to provide advice informally, perhaps in the hope of being rehired. And there are those who are available to serve in various roles at the meeting. One option is to hire an emcee for this purpose. For example, Santa Clara, CA-based Align Technology, a client of SpotOn Events, partners with corporate entertainer Richard Laible, who has a background with Chicago’s famous Second City comedy troupe, to keep the speakers and the meeting on schedule, add humor and facilitate educational games for the company’s sales force.

Selecting Memorable, Motivational Speakers

While an emcee can become a fixture at any company’s meetings, new speakers must be regularly sought to keep attendees engaged with fresh approaches to motivation, teamwork and other key areas. “I think oftentimes clients get concerned about picking the right speaker or get a little nervous about it. They’re apprehensive when they find out they need to do that,” says Teri Abram, president of Dallas-based EventLink International Inc. “But it becomes an easy process when you identify the goals and what the executives are looking for.” Indeed, the best way to ensure that a speaker will work out is to determine if he or she can address the company’s challenges and fit the theme of the program. “Oftentimes it boils down to theme, whether their background syncs into the points we’re trying to get across to our people,” Reuben comments. For example, there is a natural tie-in with rising to the top of the sales chart and mountain climbing, and McKesson once hired Erik Weihenmayer, the blind climber who scaled Mount Everest, to do a motivational speech for a sales conference.

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Those who are perhaps under $50,000 view of the economic challenges faced by there are common strategies to obtain a speaker’s fee is slightly over, oftentimes they will come down a little on their fee for us because we have built a relationship with them,” says Franco. Predominately, the top-tier speakers — whose high fees reflect their high demand — will tend to be less given to negotiating. “Those whose fees are upward of $100,000, it’s pretty cut and dried,” Franco observed. “Those who are perhaps under $50,000 are going to be more flexible.”

One welcome trend some planners have noticed in recent years is that speakers are less demanding in their “riders” (special requests in travel, lodging and amenities) in view of the economic challenges faced by their corporate clients. “I’ve had speakers that are quite well known who deserve the same reasons. “We always have the CEO of our client talk with the speaker so he or she will have a very clear understanding of what’s expected and what’s needed,” Jurgenesen comments. It also helps that the speakers learn the names of key executives, along with (perhaps) something about their personality, golf skills and the like. Abram says, “You can bring some humor into that, anecdotes about things that have happened through the years with executives. That depends on the executive, some are more dynamic and willing to do that.”

“The speakers sometimes learn what not to include in their presentation, once they understand the audience demographics. “I have to be very careful with our international groups that we don’t want the speaker to toss out a comment about some political view that may not be appropriate,” says Jurgenesen. “For example, I don’t want them to talk about terrorism or make faith-based comments. We had one speaker who did really well and then at the end discussed why we should move forward on stem-cell research. And the audience was mostly Catholic.”

Many professional speakers will send their clients questionnaires to get a sense of the audience demographics and current corporate issues. After all, they clearly want to deliver a tailored speech as much as the client does. But one thing a speaker can’t be expected to customize to the extent of changing his or her style of delivery and tone. Some are experts in particular fields though not necessarily that charismatic or entertaining. Some base their talks on moving and instructive personal experiences, while others are live-wire, more humorous and get interactive. “I have to be very careful with our executive career/life coach Connie Podesta. “She came highly recommended, and we were able to get her to do a presentation about her experience.”

“Those fees are upward of $100,000, it’s pretty cut and dried. Those who are perhaps under $50,000 are going to be more flexible (in negotiating).”

STEFANIE FRANCO, CMP Principal SpotOn Events, San Francisco, CA

“best and who will insist on traveling coach,” says Jurgenesen. “They feel like it’s their responsibility to understand what clients are going through. I had one CEO who spoke to all 400 employees of the company, and he drove eight hours to get there.”

Negotiation Strategies

While one can’t always count on a speaker’s flexibility with fees or riders, there are common strategies to obtain leverage in negotiation. One is to try to contact information,” Abram explains. “We might also give them access to the contract for multiple engagements at a slightly reduced fee. Another is to offer more opportunity for the speaker to promote his or her products. “What can we do to add value for them and really make it a win-win situation? Without actually selling their products on the stage, perhaps we make the products accessible between sessions or include them in our agenda booklet — sort of an ad but not really an ad, more of a feature along with how exactly they expect the speech to be customized. The speaker may just be putting the company name at the top of the presentation.” Abram works with clients to make these communications fairly specific. “We might tell them we’ve had layoffs across the board or within certain departments, or changes in teams without layoffs. And some of that has been through acquisition: Previously competing teams now become one team, so we have had speakers customize to that.”

“Our company has gone through many transitions, so we’ve had layoffs or cuts or difficulty in a certain area, we’ll make the speaker aware of that so they can focus on it and make their speech a little more meaningful,” says Terry Connor, who retired in September from his position as project/quality manager with Dallas-based Tenet Healthcare Corporation, and who now acts as a consultant for the company. Connor and Tenet’s planning committee regularly selected outside speakers for the company’s training sessions. “Or if there’s a national program that we haven’t been able to participate in, we would want them to know that in case they were going to spend a lot of time on that subject matter. It’s just making the information as useful as possible. Because one of the worst comments is: ‘That idea was great but we can’t afford to do that’ or ‘I have no way of taking that information back and using it.’“

Having senior management meet or conference call with the speaker beforehand is also a good measure, for the same reasons. “We always have the CEO of our client talk with the speaker so he or she will have a very clear understanding of what’s expected and what’s needed,” Jurgenesen comments. It also helps that the speakers learn the names of key executives, along with (perhaps) something about their personality, golf skills and the like. Abram says, “You can bring some humor into that, anecdotes about things that have happened through the years with executives. That depends on the executive, some are more dynamic and willing to do that.”

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TERRY CONNOR, Consultant Tenet Healthcare Corporation, Dallas, TX

“I think it’s very important to get in writing just what the company is trying to accomplish and how exactly they expect the speech to be customized.”

TERI ABRAM, President EventLink International Inc., Dallas, TX

“We encourage them to do a lot of local events first and really get their feet wet for a good five years before we’ll put them out there in the circuit.”

CHARLOTTE RAYBURN, Account Executive Five Star Speakers & Trainers, Overland Park, KS

©IT
Put Your Finger on the Pulse of the Web

How to Get the Most Out of Social Media

By Derek Reveron

The feedback from attendees was positive as was the meeting’s ROI. “We had a conversation with the company a few weeks after the event. They said it was absolutely worth it and are planning to do the same thing again this year,” says Diniz.

The “Big Three” of social media — Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn — are gradually becoming indispensable tools for meeting planners. Planners use Facebook and LinkedIn to communicate information and meeting content such as videos, photos, blogs, apps, updates, event schedules and attendee surveys. Furthermore, many planners also use Twitter to encourage attendees to provide feedback via their mobile devices during meetings, seminars, training sessions and presentations.

Fred Diniz, managing director of Nanuet, NY-based Global Events Consultants (GEC), routinely uses social media for meetings. For example, Diniz used social media to communicate with approximately 250 executives, managers and clients of a large company prior to their four-day meeting in Chicago. The event included education, strategy and training sessions as well as speakers from major technology companies. “About five weeks out, we created a Facebook page that provided information about everything that would happen and updated the agenda. An important speaker couldn’t attend due to a conflict, and we explained it on Facebook. We also used LinkedIn because not everybody uses Facebook,” says Diniz.

He also used Twitter to solicit questions and comments from attendees during speaker presentations. Attendees used mobile devices to send tweets that appeared on large onstage screens during speaker presentations. Offline attendees, who participated through webcasts, could also tweet.

“Because social media is so new…we never know who is using what, and it’s constantly changing. We can’t afford to not do one and do the other, and we don’t yet know the impact of that, so we go broad spectrum,” he says.

Create Buzz and Foster Engagement

Social media can add more value and enhance attendee experiences for all kinds of corporate meetings. According to Cameron Toth, a Valhalla, NY-based social media consultant and owner of Toth Communications, social media is a great tool to create buzz for contests and scavenger hunts and to foster engagement for educational events. Disseminating information in advance for training sessions “so that people are more prepared and have more knowledge” is vital, Toth says. “Sometimes companies spend money on training and don’t get anywhere because people aren’t engaged. You can change that if you create a buzz through social media.

“It can also be used to get people comfortable with new product information, and for motivation and incentives to push people toward a goal.”

Social media experts advise planners to determine which social media — and which functions of each media — best fit a meeting’s goals and content. Because social media is an emerging technology that people use in different ways, experts advise planners to use more than one form of social media if possible. That’s the approach Diniz takes. “Because social media is so new to everybody, we never know who is using what, and it’s constantly changing. We can’t afford to not do one and do the other, and we don’t yet know the impact of that, so we go broad spectrum,” he says.

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“If that a targeted approach tends to work best, according to Marla Watson-Werst, president, the Peapod Group, LLC, a Colleyville, TX, firm that plans corporate events, meetings and incentives. “You can take a broad approach. I also think you don’t look like you’re experienced if you take that to your clients. I like to sit down with clients and figure out how much they use social media, which ones they use, is it a part of their corporate culture, and how we can use it for meetings,” she relates.

Often, Watson-Werst uses social media such as Facebook and Twitter for corporate meetings and events, especially those that include teambuilding. For instance, her company staged a three-day, 100-attendee meeting for a watersports company at a Dallas hotel that included a general session, educational seminars and a teambuilding event — assembling 30 kids bikes. Watson-Werst explains, “When we set the teams up, we made one person in each group in charge of tweet- ing what the team is doing. It went up on a screen along with tweets in real time of what participants think of the team-building exercise along with pictures of the attendees with captions.” Watson-Werst also posted meeting content and updates to a watersports company Facebook page accessible only to employees. Prior to the meeting, she
Corporate travel professionals, who often work hand-in-hand with meeting planners, increasingly use social media to manage business travel, according to a research report by American Express Travel’s expert insights research practice. The report “Social Media in Business Travel Management” reveals that 50 percent of all business travel programs use at least some social media to help manage travel while 50 percent of mid-size firms use the technology.

“Corporate meeting planners can certainly learn from their travel management peers in terms of how the medium is being used to support their programs.”

Although the survey didn’t specifically target meeting planners, they may find the conclusions useful, according to Christa Degnan Manning, director, expert insights, American Express Business Travel. “Corporate meeting planners can certainly learn from their travel management peers in terms of how the medium is being used to support their programs. Overall, travel management is a more mature discipline than meetings management so it’s a place that meeting managers who are trying to become more strategic in how they oversee the meetings category can learn from,” says Manning. Manning says some travel professionals are increasingly using social media for meeting planning purposes as well. “We are seeing a major trend in that travel professionals are increasingly asked to oversee meetings as well. The most popular uses of social media among corporate travel professionals include:

- 44 percent use social media to obtain the latest travel information.
- 43 percent use it to reduce business travel costs as well as learn and share best practices.
- 42 percent search for preferred vendors and services.
- 34 percent analyze travel patterns to help improve vendor rates and services.
- 26 percent use social media to encourage networking among travelers.

The research reveals that 63 percent of companies use internal social media sites for travel management—an approach that provides a level of privacy and information protection for businesses that want candid feedback but do not want to broadcast in a totally open forum. This finding is significant for planners because they must consider a corporation’s overall social media policy before using the medium to help plan a meeting.

On the other hand, some companies don’t want to use open-forum social media for any purpose, including planning meetings and incentives. For instance, 46 percent of those surveyed cite their main reason as concern with privacy and who can see the information they post. Not seeing direct benefits, a lack of time and uncertainty about how to measure the medium are also on the list of primary reasons for not using social media.

Some companies are hesitant to use social media for these reasons: Twenty percent of respondents say that their business is quite small, social media in travel management is unclear: 15 percent cite a lack of social media strategy; understanding of the medium and insufficient support from upper management. Just 5 percent of corporate travel professionals say there are no organizational barriers to social media adoption, which could be an indication that companies have a long way to go before there is widespread acceptance of social media, according to the report. — DR

“Know When to Ask for Help”

While in-house corporate planners often have the advantage of using their company’s tech support, some independent meeting planners either don’t know how to use social media in conjunction with meetings or don’t have the time and resources to learn, implement and stay abreast of the technology. Social media is used appropriately and comprehensively can be time-consuming. That’s why, depending on the meeting and budget, some planners hire social media consultants.

How do meeting planners know when it’s time to hire a social media consultant? “If the limit on what you’re doing is creating a social media site and posting billboard material on it, then you may not need an expert,” says Toth. “Once you get beyond just wanting to make people aware of a meeting, and want to do things like create buzz, have a scavenger hunt, and provide Android and iPhone compatible apps, you may need technical expertise.”

Depending on the type of project, Diniz either performs social media in-house or hires an independent contractor. “This site serves 5,000 people, and we don’t have the time and resources to do it ourselves. Depending on the meeting and our budget, we will bring somebody in from the outside.”

Dreyer advises planners to follow Diniz’s approach. “Sometimes it’s good to hire someone. If it’s a skill set you don’t have in your organization, and you know it’s a priority, there are options either to hire a contractor to set things up or hire somebody onto your team who brings social media expertise,” he says.

Measure the Impact

Whether meeting planners take a do-it-yourself or a consultant approach, it’s important to gauge the impact of social media, according to Dreyer. “ROI is about proving that social media has helped you make more money or saved you money. To do that, you have to know your objectives and what you spent in the past to work toward similar goals,” says Dreyer. “Then you have to figure out how to measure it. Measuring social media is easy, but the problem is that some people spit the part about goals. Very few people sit down and say they will use it as a tool for specific goals and figure out how to measure it,” he adds.

There are several ways to measure the results of social media. These run the gamut from tracking the number of tweets on Twitter as well as hits on Facebook photo albums. “The best is when the company’s tech support, some independent meeting planners may hire social media consultants.”

• Request a copy of a corporation’s social media policy. Some companies, including many in industries such as pharmaceuticals and finance, have policies that may limit how meeting planners can use social media. Toth says, “Some corporate social media policies don’t allow the open use of social media for meetings, but some have closed social media for employees that planners can use. Find out what the company’s social media policy is and how you can use social media with meetings.”

• Post content that encourages people to create conversations before, during and after the meeting. In this manner, buzz created by the content may reach people who don’t use social media.

• Conduct research. “Talk to other planners who use social media. Talk to your client to make sure it’s a fit for the meeting. You can use it as little or as much as you like. Have fun because social media is supposed to be fun as well as educational,” says Watson-Werst.

• Use staff expertise. Some independent meeting planners may have employees who routinely use Facebook and are quite knowledgeable about it. Seek their input.

• Be patient. “Don’t expect impressive results right away. It will take some time, work and experimentation to make social media yield measurable results.”
Along with the size comes a considerable variety of attractions. An island pool event at Innisbrook, a Salamander Golf Resort & Spa, which is just 25 minutes from Tampa International Airport. Rosen Hotels & Resorts provides approximately 6,300 rooms at top-notch hotels and resorts, including the properties owned by independent hotelier Harris Rosen. That’s one reason Orlando is the first U.S. destination in the Sunshine State.

Ever drive through Florida? Vacationing families, kids on spring break, meeting-goers all say the same thing: Florida is a huge state. Sometimes, you think you will never get there. Along with the size comes a considerable variety of attractions, cultures, topography and climate. Some refer to Florida as many states in one because of the fascinating regional differences. Thus, planners can stage meeting after meeting, time after time in Florida and never worry about the same old thing. In short, corporate meeting planners can have it all in the Sunshine State.

Looking to improve the guest experience even more, the Rosen Plaza has been renovating its 800 guest rooms, hospitality suites and ballrooms. Looking to improve the guest experience even more, the Rosen Plaza has been renovating its 800 guest rooms, hospitality suites and ballrooms. Guest rooms have new furnishings, carpeting and crown molding, 32-inch flat-screen TVs and safes. Conveniently located along International Drive, Rosen Plaza is next to the 2.1-million-sf Orange County Convention Center (OCCC) and minutes away from the Shingle Creek Golf Club. The Rosen Plaza offers more than 60,000 sf of meeting space, including the 26,000-sf Grand Ballroom. The property also features 22 meeting rooms and 16 hospitality suites. Catering is available for events of up to 2,740 people.

Meister appreciates the numerous hotel options in Orlando, many of which his company uses for group clients; and says, “The onsite hotels at Universal Orlando stand out as they are all uniquely themed hotels within a resort complex featuring two theme parks and an entertainment complex. Groups and attendees have many attractive options for entertainment on their own or group functions at the various hotels, theme parks, restaurants and night clubs.” Meister also appreciates the “seamless integrated service, transportation and billing.”

Dan Meister, CMP, president of Meister Meetings & Travel Corporation, is a true fan of Florida for meetings and events. In December, his company arranged highly successful back-to-back meetings at Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando, one of three Universal Orlando Resort conference hotels.

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Corporate groups seeking a classy and professional meeting environment will find it at the award-winning Rosen Centre Hotel, located minutes from Walt Disney World and other premiere attractions. The Rosen Centre Hotel recently renovated its 1,354 guest rooms, Grande Lobby, hospitality suites and one of three Presidential Suites. The covered 316-foot Rosen Centre Skywalk allows corporate meeting-goers to walk rain- and traffic-free from the hotel to the OCCC West Building within a few minutes. Corporate groups of 10 to 4,000 attendees can be accommodated in the hotel’s 106,000 sf of meeting space, which includes 33 meeting rooms and two ballrooms — a 35,000-sf main ballroom and a 14,375-sf junior ballroom.

One of Central Florida’s largest full-service convention hotels, Rosen Shingle Creek is a AAA Four Diamond premier meeting destination hotel located about one mile from the OCCC. The 1,500-room property offers 445,000 sf of upscale meeting and event space and 99 meeting rooms. More than 100,000 sf of prefunction space is available along with 55,000 sf of breakout meeting rooms. There are also three ballrooms, the largest of which is the 95,000-sf Gatlin Grand Ballroom. Guests tee off at the on-property Shingle Creek Golf Club, which offers an 18-hole, championship course designed by David Harman. The club is also home to the Brad Brewer Golf Academy.

Rosen properties also include the recently renovated and rebranded Rosen Inn at Pointe Orlando. The property offers 1,020 renovated guest rooms, providing much-needed additional rooms for Orlando. “After investing $10 million into renovations, the hotel is primed and ready for business. This versatile property can fill the needs of all our guests, whether they are visiting Orlando for business or pleasure,” says Harris Rosen, president and COO of Rosen Hotels & Resorts.

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A loyal repeat customer, Meister has held previous successful meetings at the onsite hotels at Universal Orlando Resort “because the resorts, theme parks and entertainment districts are all self-contained and very accessible to each other, making for a convenient and fantastic attendee experience.” Meister also values his excellent relationship with Universal Orlando Resort’s sales team as well as the conference management team at Loews Portofino Bay Hotel. He says, “I trust that our groups will get the attention, care and service they deserve.”

Meister appreciates the numerous hotel options in Orlando, many of which his company uses for group clients; and says, “The onsite hotels at Universal Orlando stand out as they are all uniquely themed hotels within a resort complex featuring two theme parks and an entertainment complex. Groups and attendees have many attractive options for entertainment on their own or group functions at the various hotels, theme parks, restaurants and night clubs.” Meister also appreciates the “seamless integrated service, transportation and billing.”

Other benefits for groups staying at a Universal Resort property, according to Meister, include the early admission to The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, the free Universal Express, which allows guests to skip the regular lines in the Universal theme parks, and complimentary transportation via water taxi or shuttle bus.

Meister staged a reception for one group at the hotel and also hosted a pastry party at Universal Studios for the other group. However, he says the nightly opera performance on the balcony overlooking the Harbor Piazza at Loews Portofino Bay Hotel was the top crowd-pleaser. His groups
also enjoyed the Mary’s Universal Parade and Mannheim Steamroller concert at Universal Studios.

Always on the lookout for unique environments and experiences, Meister was impressed with the hotel’s Italian theme that is carried out throughout the resort and includes a small bay and boats — an exact replica of Portofino, Italy. “The resort was also beautifully decorated for the holidays along with a strolling Santa and Mrs. Claus and Universal Orlando characters,” notes Meister. “I learn, see and experience something new every time as there are many unique venues, themes, rides, attractions, entertainment and promotions to tie in with your events.” He advises fellow planners to “spend a little extra time on your site inspection to try to see as much as possible.” Also, he suggests working closely with resort management and sharing meeting objectives so “they can help you meet them with all the creative resources at their disposal.”

Meister, who will return again soon to Universal Orlando Resort, says, “As long as your meeting physically fits within one or more of their hotels, the service, facilities and food and beverage are excellent and on par with the best hotels in the country, so no worries about performance. I have also found them to be very flexible over the years, which is very important. There are some excellent resorts in the Orlando market but just a few that can tie in to two theme parks and an entertainment complex all within walking distance of your hotel.”

In other Orlando news, a new Four Seasons resort is scheduled to open at Walt Disney World Resort in 2014. The luxury property will offer 444 rooms and more than 37,000 sf of meeting space.

The Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek has expanded inside of Walt Disney World Resort. The Mediterranean-style property includes 400 guest rooms and suites and 25,000 sf of meeting space. After a $450 million expansion, The Peabody Orlando offers 1,641 guest rooms and 300,000 sf of modern, flexible meeting space. The 75,000-sf Peabody Grand Ballroom is the largest of the hotel’s three ballrooms and two junior ballrooms. There is also a 22,000-sf spa. The Omni Orlando at ChampionsGate plans to open a new exhibition center by January 2013, which will include a 30,000-sf exhibit hall and eight meeting rooms. In addition, the resort recently named Robert Ash as the new executive chef. A 17-year hospitality veteran, Ash’s diverse background includes training at L’Ecole Du Grand Chocolat in France and the International School of Confectionary Art in Maryland. After a $35 million makeover, the new DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld (formerly the Doubletree Resort Orlando - International Drive, has transformed into the premier Orlando meetings destination. We now offer 1,094 renovated guest rooms, 60,000 square feet of renovated meeting space, the new Bamboo Grille and superior location. Experience our oasis situated in the middle of Orlando’s world famous attractions and close to the Orange County Convention Center.

For more information, contact our sales department at 407-345-0056 or groups@doubletreeorlandoseaworld.com.

The refreshed DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld is conveniently located adjacent to SeaWorld and Aquatica.

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The Center's PURE Technology removes allergens from the 10,000 sf of meeting space.

Miami Beach has completed several upgrades. Improvements include reupholstered lobby furniture, new wallpaper and decor and a newly tiled shark tank. The hotel’s mezzanine level also received new paint, carpentry and art decorations. The 41-floor JW Marriott Marquis reopened following a multimillion-dollar renovation. The property provides 1,071 guest rooms and suites, 25,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, was a perfect fit for the education and training sessions as well as business meetings.

As a matter of fact, Kirchhofer has held the meeting for over three years at the Sandpearl because of the location and size of the property. “The hotel is centrally located, and we can entertain without hiring transportation to take them anywhere. We don’t do anything offsite. I’ve taken this group to larger destinations, and we couldn’t keep up with them. Also, there is shopping within walking distance, and the hotel goes out of its way to do little things for us,” says Kirchhofer.

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Abby Kirchhofer, Senior Administrative Assistant, PharMerica, Louisville, KY

The group also enjoyed a themed dinner based on the Sandpearl Resort in Clearwater. The resort, which features 253 rooms and 40,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, was a perfect fit for the education and training sessions as well as business meetings.

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The hotel's audio-visual service department was a key to the meeting's success, according to Kirchofer. "We had to do a video conference between attendees and a doctor in Las Vegas about an anemia treatment using pharmacy protocol. The hotel's director of audio-visual services helped us pull it off without a hitch. He coordinated with the information management person in Las Vegas to make sure there wouldn’t be any issues. He did test runs of the presentations on his own," says Kirchofer.

The meeting was a big success. Kirchofer does post-meeting surveys that rank various components of the meeting, including hotel service, meals and themed events. Surveys routinely show that attendees connect the most with the themed events, which frequently received high scores.

Following an extensive renovation, Innisbrook, a Salamander Golf Resort & Spa, is once again a favorite among conference, event and incentive planners. Situated on 900 acres just 25 minutes from Tampa International Airport, the 608-room Innisbrook features 72 holes of championship golf, 11 tennis courts and six heated swimming pools. The resort also features a new full-service Indaba Spa with 12 treatment rooms and state-of-the-art Fitness Center.

The property features 100,000 sf of meeting space — 65,000 sf of indoor space including two mid-sized ballrooms with breakout rooms. Innisbrook is now part of Salamander’s Grand Golf Resorts of Florida, which also includes Reunion Resort in Orlando and Hammock Beach Resort in Palm Coast. The Salamander Collection offers 162 holes of golf designed by Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Tom Watson and Larry Packard. Grand Golf Resorts of Florida also features the world’s only resort-based Annika Academy, an innovative teaching facility designed and developed by famed women’s professional golfer Annika Sorenstam.

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A Harry Potter-themed night, one of the highlights of the PharMerica meeting held recently at the Sandpearl Resort in Clearwater, included prizes for the costumed attendees. the Innisbrook Golf Institute, 11 tennis courts and six heated swimming pools. The resort also features a new full-service Indaba Spa with 12 treatment rooms and state-of-the-art Fitness Center. The property features 100,000 sf of meeting space — 65,000 sf of indoor space including two mid-sized ballrooms with breakout rooms. Innisbrook is now part of Salamander’s Grand Golf Resorts of Florida, which also includes Reunion Resort in Orlando and Hammock Beach Resort in Palm Coast. The Salamander Collection offers 162 holes of golf designed by Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Tom Watson and Larry Packard. Grand Golf Resorts of Florida also features the world’s only resort-based Annika Academy, an innovative teaching facility designed and developed by famed women’s professional golfer Annika Sorenstam.

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Jacksonville

Jacksonville is one of Florida’s most historical destinations and serves up a bit of Southern flavor. Meeting planners will find much to like about Jacksonville, including more than 16,000 hotel rooms. Properties include the 354-room Omni Jacksonville Hotel, which offers more than 14,000 sf of meeting space. The Omni is located near the Prime F. Osborn III Convention Center, which provides more than 22 meeting rooms and 265,000 sf of meeting space. More than 26,000 sf of meeting space is available at the nearby Moranco Shrine Center & Auditorium.

Located along the St. Johns River, the Florida Theatre showcases nearly 200 entertainment and cultural events annually. The facility accommodates 1,900 guests for receptions. The prestigious River Club, also located along the St. Johns River, hosts groups of up to 500 people for private dining, meetings and receptions. The Queen’s Harbour Yacht & Country Club, located next to the Intracoastal Waterway, offers four elegant meeting rooms.

Meeting attendees will find plenty of entertainment and activities in Jacksonville. Golfers can choose from more than 70 courses and venues in the area, including the Tournament Players Club with its impressive 77,000 sf clubhouse.

Ponte Vedra Beach

Ponte Vedra Beach, located 20 miles southeast of Jacksonville, is the site of two superlatite meeting and incentive properties. The 250-suite, AAA Five Diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club has been a Florida landmark since 1928. It offers more than 25,000 sf of flexible meeting space, a full-service spa, 36 holes of golf, 35 tennis courts and four heated pools in a beachfront setting. Groups seeking a more intimate experience may want to check out the Lodge & Club at Ponte Vedra Beach, just 1/4 miles away. It offers 66 oceanfront rooms and 13,000 sf of meeting space.

Palm Beach County

More than 30 professional meeting planners gathered at the PGA National Resort and Spa in Palm Beach Gardens, FL, in December for three days of intensive education sessions intertwined with entertaining diversions such as the “Amazing Iron Chef Race” at the Palm Beach Marriott Singer Island Resort & Spa — a sampling of what the Sunshine State delivers for group meeting attendees.

The balmy, mostly sunny weather cooperated, and a good time was had by all. The meeting planner training camp agenda, facilitated by the Palm Beach County Convention and Visitors Bureau and Tom Pasha, president of Orlando-based Contact Planning and a 25-year veteran of the hotel and meeting planning industries, prepared attendees with powerful information and negotiation tactics to help them create win-win contracts and offered helpful, behind-the-scenes knowledge. Special attention was given to golf tournament planning, which can be a great income stream, teambuilding event and crowd-pleaser. The planners, many of whom had staged meetings in Florida previously, were impressed by the area’s meeting facilities and venues.

Palm Beach is widely known for its golf, glamour, sophisticated nightlife, and ritzy resorts and hotels. Planners have a choice of more than 200 hotels with a few more under construction: a long-awaited 400-room Hilton next to the Palm Beach County Convention Center (PBCC) is on the drawing board for 2015. Palm Beach County’s second Hyatt Place hotel, which is under construction in Delray Beach, is scheduled to open in 2012.

The PBCC, Palm Beach County’s primary meeting and convention facility, offers more than 1 million sf of meeting space. The PBCC is located near CityPlace, a popular shopping, dining and entertainment complex. The PBCC offers 23,000 sf of flexible meeting space, 100,000 sf of exhibit space and a 25,000 sf ballroom.

Come Back Soon

Dan Meister, a very enthusiastic fan of meeting in Florida — especially in Orlando — says his groups “are looking forward to returning as soon as they can, as there is a lot to do, see and experience at these resorts and Universal Orlando that one cannot do in just one visit.” His parting advice: “As PT Barnum said: ‘Always leave them wanting more.’”
by George Selig

It was apparent this past fall that 2012 was going to be an even more remarkable "comeback year" for Las Vegas meetings. Suffice it to say that for a number of the city’s hotels, “if you tried to get space, you wouldn’t be able to find it in the first quarter,” Chris Meyer, CEM, CMP, vice president of sales for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, reported in November. “It was already starting to pick up for us in ’10, ’11 has been wonderful, and ’12 is looking even better.” Occupancy is up 4 points to 85.2 percent, more than 20 points ahead of the national average, according to the LVCVA.

Demand in Las Vegas Is Up

Indeed, when it comes to planning a corporate meeting in Sin City these days, it appears that one “sin” is waiting too long to book. Another is not being aware of the schedule for major conventions, because citywides are drawing more delegates and thus reducing the space available for corporate groups. “We have many shows that have been coming here year after year, their numbers are increasing,” says Meyer. “In fact, we just finished with the gigantic Automotive Aftermarket Industry Week, and that was up about 20 percent in attendance,” he adds.

Overall, the LVCVA reports a 9.9 percent rise in convention attendance, up through the third quarter of 2011. A barometer of corporate meeting activity in particular is DMC business, which again shows a very promising 2012. At least that’s the perspective of Molly Vincent, vice president of A Vegas Expression: “We are completely

The Meetings Boom Is Back

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Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority’s (LVCVA) Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Vincent M. Scuderi, says that the city’s average daily room rate is up 10.7 percent through the third quarter of 2011, following 19 consecutive months of growth. The organization is capitalizing on that momentum with a three-year business plan, introduced in November, that seeks to bolster international business travel (particularly from Brazil and China), which represents “the largest potential growth market for Las Vegas,” according to the LVCVA. Apart from marketing initiatives, the strategy also includes short-term renovations to the Las Vegas Convention Center totaling $5 million. In addition, the planned $890 million expansion for the Las Vegas Convention Center that was put on hold in 2008 during the recession may soon be back on track.

Taking Care of Business

Nor do attendees necessarily want to miss business sessions for extra time at the casinos. “In this day and age when professionals’ travel is being scrutinized, most are pretty smart about showing up to the events their boss sent them to,” remarks Karen Zankowski, director of corporate events for Mountain View, CA-based Symantec. The company hosted a conference in July, bringing about 4,300 representatives to Caesars Palace for about 2,200 end-users. “We try to emphasize the reason they’re there and provide content that hopefully is relevant to them and an event they want to participate in,” Zankowski adds. Additionally, Symantec transferred over to the meetings, because at the end of the day we don’t close. Attendees don’t have to worry about running out to a theme park because it closes.”

Medical Meetings

Meyer points to another potential growth market that is already being fulfilled: medical meetings. “We have been doing very well in the medical sector, moving up to No. 4 in the number of medical meetings held among U.S. cities,” he says. “The medical groups have discovered — and ‘12 is looking even better.”

In October, the “Las Vegas Health and Wellness Destination Guide” is one sign of the city’s rising prominence in the medical sector, which was supported by developments such as the opening of the Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health in 2009. Pharmaceutical meetings are serious, content-intensive affairs, and no city that is a major draw for those events can be considered a mere “playground.” Las Vegas’ outstanding meeting facilities and convention services are in fact only complemented by its entertainment offerings, which needn’t create a temptation during attendees’ meeting hours. “We do an annual survey on buyer behavior, especially on our show floors, and people actually stay longer on the exhibit floors in Las Vegas than in any other destination,” Meyer claims. “And the same type of behavior is transferred over to the meetings, because at the end of the day we don’t close. Attendees don’t have to worry about running out to a theme park because it closes.”

The décor is built in at Caesars Palace where Symantec hosted this outdoor event for a users conference last May.

Planners can “still negotiate” with the city’s venues, Vincent says, “but corporations are spending money again on their group travel, and it is driving prices back up,” coupled with the general resurgence in tourism. According to the LVCVA, the city’s average daily room rate is up 10.7 percent through the third quarter of 2011, following 19 consecutive months of growth. The organization is capitalizing on that momentum with a three-year business plan, introduced in November, that seeks to bolster international business travel (particularly from Brazil and China), which represents “the largest potential growth market for Las Vegas,” according to the LVCVA. Apart from marketing initiatives, the strategy also includes short-term renovations to the Las Vegas Convention Center totaling $5 million. In addition, the planned $890 million expansion for the Las Vegas Convention Center that was put on hold in 2008 during the recession may soon be back on track.

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er appreciation party. Naturally, “we went with a very Roman theme,” Zunkowski related. An acrylic stage was built over one of the pools “and we brought in performers such as Roman gladiators and Le Cirque acrobats. We really didn’t have to do much décor because the ambience was already there at the pool, we just needed a little additional lighting.” And while the sales conference was basically “all business,” employees were treated to a performance by a “junk rock” group called Recycled Percussion at the Colosseum.

The 3,348-room Caesars Palace offers a total of more than 300,000 sf of meeting space. Caesars’ new 668-room Octavius Tower opened January 2, 2012. The opening of the Octavius Tower marks the completion of the $860 million Caesars Palace expansion.

**Now at Caesars**

But it’s not all about large groups like Symantec’s at Caesars Palace, which is debuting the 180-room Nobu Hotel in the summer of 2012. Las Vegas’ first-ever Nobu hotel will include the 11,200 sf Nobu restaurant and lounge. In addition, two primary meeting spaces at Bally’s Las Vegas have been remodeled. The center-Strip property offers more than 3,000 hotel rooms and suites and 175,000 sf of meeting and event space. Yet these developments are not all that Caesars Entertainment has in store for Las Vegas.

The Ling, a $550 million retail, dining, entertainment and hospitality district located at the heart of the Las Vegas Strip, is scheduled to open in 2013. Owned and operated by Caesars Entertainment Corporation, The Ling will span more than 200,000 sf directly facing Caesars Palace. The focal point will be The Las Vegas High Roller, which will be the tallest observation wheel in the world at 550 feet. Its 28 cabins will be designed as transparent spheres, each of which will accommodate up to 40 people and will be available for group experiences.

On The Ling’s north side, a walking path will lead from the Carnaval Court outdoor plaza at the 2,500-room Harrah’s Las Vegas resort (25,000 sf of meeting space) to The Ling. A pedestrian connection also will be built from The Ling into the 3,550-room Flamingo Las Vegas (73,000 sf of meeting space) on the south. In October, the Flamingo debuted Margaritaville Casino, and the hotel will transform 2,307 hotel rooms into stylish and contemporary accommodations throughout 2012.

**Las Vegas Meetings by Caesars Entertainment** allows planners to mix and match accommodations, amenities and food and beverage at any of the company’s eight Las Vegas properties.

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Some call it innovation. We just call it business.
with just one point of contact and one contract. The eight properties — Caesars Palace, Paris Las Vegas, Planet Hollywood, Bally’s, Imperial Palace, Harrah’s, Rio and Flamingo — provide a total of 1 million sf of meeting space and 25,000 guest rooms.

A Wynn-ing Conference

Wynn Las Vegas and Encore, which already offer more than 100,000 sf of luxury retail space, will add renowned fashion brands such as Chloé and Loro Piana in the spring. And in the fall of 2012, Wynn & Co will become a timepiece shopping destination including such high-end brands as Patek Phillipe, Omega and Breguet. In addition, the Encore Esplanade will undergo a fashionable renovation throughout 2012. The 2,064-room Encore Las Vegas offers 60,000 sf of meeting space.

A Grand Meeting

Matrix & Logics, Divisions of L’Oreal, are hair-care and color companies that have also held users’ conferences in Las Vegas, which is “the only true venue that can hold 6,000 people at one facility: the MGM Grand,” relates Lisa Shafer Workentine, business development manager, salon centric stores and formerly senior director of corporate events and shows with Matrix & Logics. “The hotel properties truly understand the revenue that can be generated through meetings and events, and as such they’ve completely developed their infrastructure to support that. So it’s not only the matter of capacity and building the structures, but putting in key depart-

MGM Grand is in the process of renovating all guest rooms and suites in the main tower. The first set of rooms was unveiled in November, with all rooms scheduled to be updated by September 2012.

Networking on the show floor at EFI’s Connect 2011, held last spring at Wynn Las Vegas.
ments that understand the business and make it flow without a hitch. They recognize that what they’re doing with us is not a one-and-done thing. They make an effort to build relationships, which I appreciate. And they know how to give you the extras that allow you to then sell (the venue partnership) to your executives.”

The 5,044-room MGM Grand offers 600,000 sf of meeting space, including the freestanding 92,000-sf Marquee Ballroom and the 16,800-seat Grand Garden Arena. The top two floors of MGM Grand offer 51 two-story Skylofts. The non-smoking, non-gaming Signature at MGM Grand is comprised of three towers, each with 576 suites.

In October MGM Grand began a $160 million renovation of all 3,570 guest rooms and 642 suites in the main tower. The first set of redesigned rooms opened in November. The redesign of all rooms should be completed by September 2012. The Mansion is an upscale, exclusive hotel within the MGM Grand, and located adjacent to the main resort is The Signature at MGM Grand, a luxury all-suite, non-gaming hotel.

More MGM News

MGM Resorts International is becoming even more group-friendly with the recent launch of Passkey’s GroupMAX booking technology across its 11 Las Vegas hotels. The system’s booking website allows guests to make their reservations from any Web browser or mobile device, while meeting planners can access critical event data from live dashboards. Reservations made via GroupMAX’s booking websites directly transfer to MGM Resorts’ internal reservation system. Properties in MGM Mirage’s collection include the 3,309-room Mandalay Bay (1.6 million sf of meeting space), the 3,044-room Mirage (90,000 sf Events Center), the 2,024-room New York-New York Hotel & Casino (21,000 sf), the 3,933-room Bellagio (200,000 sf), and the 2,900-room Monte Carlo Hotel and Casino (more than 30,000 sf).

On December 31, Bellagio debuted Hyde Bellagio, a new 12,000-sf indoor/outdoor space with floor-to-ceiling windows and an expansive terrace that showcases Las Vegas’ Fountains of Bellagio. Each space within the venue can be utilized as a place for discussion, brainstorming or socializing.

The 1,200-seat Monte Carlo Theater, will become home to the popular Blue Man Group show beginning in fall 2012. Monte Carlo also offers an exclusive boutique hotel-within-the-hotel experience at Hotel32 on the resort’s top floor, delivering the ultimate in privacy via a VIP entrance. Among the Monte Carlo’s numerous dining and lounge and bar options is Minus5 Ice Bar, the largest ice bar in North America.

At MGM Resorts International’s latest major offering, CityCenter, located on 67 acres between Bellagio and Monte Carlo, planners can avail themselves of the 61-story, 4,004-room Aria Resort & Casino, featuring approximately 40,000 sf of meeting space and 2,068 guest rooms. Aria Resort & Casino guests are greeted by the Lumia fountain in front of the hotel’s porte-cochère.

Experience MGM Grand’s new rooms.

MGM Grand’s guest rooms are getting an exciting makeover with a vibrant color palette and sleek furnishings. Rooms invite relaxation with plush linens, saturated colors, and zebrawood veneer furnishings. Enjoy LCD televisions, a media hub, and complete mini-bar. Combine all that with MGM Grand’s impeccable meeting facilities, dedicated staff of Certified Meeting Professionals, and a wide variety of entertainment and dining options, and you have the best of Las Vegas under one roof.
Las Vegas Sands is catering to groups keen on sustainable events with its new Sands Eco 360° Meetings program, whose four pillars are green building and construction, environmentally responsible operational practices, sustainable purchasing policies and employee engagement in the program. The first pillar includes the largest LEED-certified building in the world, the combined Venetian, Sands Expo and Palazzo Las Vegas, offering a total of 2.25 million sf of function space, including the 85,000-sf Venetian Ballroom.

The Venetian Shines
For years Simon G. Jewelry has staged its annual customer appreciation event at The Venetian, in conjunction with one of the world’s biggest jewelry trade shows JCK Las Vegas, held most recently at the Mandalay Convention Center. “We started holding our customer appreciation event at The Venetian when the convention was also held there. And when it moved, we

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were extremely happy with the Venetian so we continue to partner with them,” explains Zaven “Zee” Ghanimian G.G., A.J.P, marketing director for Simon G. The event draws upwards of 600 attendees, including many of Simon G’s top retailers, who convene in the hotel’s pool area. Simon G. recently launched a new collection with fashion designer Mike Bauer that was on display at the most recent customer appreciation event. “We built a runway over the pool where all the models displayed his new collection, as well as ours,” Ghanimian relates. “We used a ballroom at the beginning, about four years ago, but then as our relationship grew with The Venetian, we realized that there were many more options. So we did a few scootings and decided that for us and our clients the best fit was the pool and the pool area. It has a great view of The Strip, and it is kind of secluded, giving our guests a very VIP feeling.” The Venetian is “just a great tie with our brand. We sell at very high-end stores across the nation and the world, and we want to make sure that our customers have the same experience that they have with our brand at the location we hold the party.”

New and Updated

Another property that may support a corporate group’s upscale brand is the 2,995-room Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas. Its 150,000 sf of event space, including seven ballrooms, are complemented by a staff of “expert meeting curators,” available to work with clients in advance to customize all aspects of each event based on the objective. There is even a direct room-to-conference elevator in the resort’s West Tower. The Cosmopolitan is a relative newcomer to the city, opening in December 2010.

Other properties are “old and improved,” such as the 1,375-room Tropicana Las Vegas, which has undergone a $180 million renovation that includes its 1,375 guest rooms, casino and conference center, which now offers more than 60,000 sf of meeting space. Larger groups may look to The Riviera Hotel Casino Las Vegas, which houses 2,047 guest rooms (also recently upgraded) and 160,000 sf of meeting space including 35 breakout rooms and two ballrooms of approximately 45,000 sf.

Off the Strip

On the south Las Vegas Strip the 390-room M Resort Spa and Casino is fast expanding its meeting space. Following the December opening of the 25,000-sf M Pavilion, the resort has announced that it is expanding its banquet and meeting space to include Veloce Cibo, the 16th floor fine dining restaurant atop the four-star resort. Due to the high demand for versatile function space, the restaurant will close immediately to allow for renovations to begin. With expansive views of the Las Vegas Strip and the mountains, the 16th floor function space will offer 7,200 sf for special events including an outdoor terrace with fireplace. The project

A few blocks off The Strip is the 826-room Westin Casuarina Las Vegas Hotel, Casino & Spa, which offers a relaxing haven for smaller meetings.
Peppermill Resort Spa Casino in Reno has 1,630 guest rooms and 106,000 sf of meeting space. In 1971, features 1,000 all new guest rooms housed in two towers, 25,000 sf of meeting space, an 80,000 sf casino, bar and restaurants, and entertainment venues. Much of the fixtures and furniture were purchased from the Fontainebleau, which ceased construction in 2009.

Another off-the-Strip property, The Las Vegas Hilton announced in December that it would lose its eight-year Hilton franchise effective January 3, 2012. The 2,950-room hotel, which is located next to the Las Vegas Convention Center, has been renamed LVR-Las Vegas Hotel & Casino.

Lake Las Vegas
Thirty minutes outside the city, situated on 21 acres of lakefront property, groups can convene at the 493-room Loews Lake Las Vegas, offering 45,000 sf of meeting space. Last February, Dolce Hotels unveiled 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 hotel offers 39,000 sf of meeting space. Meanwhile, Aston Hotels & Resorts has taken over the 347-room, all-suite Montelago Village at Lake Las Vegas, with 10,000 sf of meeting space.

Reno-Tahoe
Las Vegas and its environs are surely the centerpiece of Nevada, but planners shouldn’t discount the “Biggest Little City in the World,” Reno. The Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority operates numerous meeting facilities including the Reno-Sparks Convention Center (more than 500,000 sf of meeting space), the Reno Events Center (56,000 sf of exhibit space), the National Bowling Stadium, the Reno-Sparks Livestock Events Center and Wildcreek Golf Course. The Freight House District, adjacent to Aces Stadium, offers year-round dining and entertainment.

Additionally, the Reno-Tahoe area offers a variety of resorts that cater to meeting groups. Among the most outstanding is The Peppermill Resort Spa Casino, which has recently earned the AAA Four Diamond rating for hospitality industry excellence. The 1,630-room hotel includes the 600 Tuscany Tower, 106,000 sf of meeting space, 10 restaurants and the 43,000-sf Spa & Salon Toscana. Now at the Peppermill is online check-in for guests and a $9.7 million geothermal energy system that heats both space and domestic water throughout the resort.
The Atlantis Casino Resort Spa has completed a $100 million expansion adding new resort rooms that include custom furniture and a multimedia launch pad directly connecting electronic devices to a 42-inch HDTV. The 800-room Atlantis offers 50,000 sq ft of convention facilities, including a Grand Ballroom with the capacity to host more than 1,200 attendees, as well as the 30,000-sf Spa Atlantis.

Another major property in the area is John Ascuaga’s Nugget, with 1,500 rooms and 110,000 sq ft of meeting space. Attendees can dine at the Basque eatery Restaurante Orozko, which is now officially Restaurante Orozko and Tapas Bar.

Other options include:

- Eldorado Hotel Casino. With 815 rooms and more than 12,000 sq ft of meeting space, the Eldorado offers the newly renovated BuBinga Lounge and new high-speed Wi-Fi.

- Silver Legacy Casino. With 1,711 rooms and 50,000 sq ft of convention space, the Silver Legacy is connected by skywalks to the Eldorado Hotel Casino and Circus Circus Hotel and Casino. On property are six restaurants, boutique shopping, a health spa and the world’s largest composite dome and mining rig.

- Harrah’s Reno. With 928 rooms and 22,000 sq ft of meeting space, Harrah’s is just steps away from the city’s River Walk and offers skyline suites with Jacuzzis.

- The Grand Sierra Resort and Casino. With 1,993 rooms and 200,000 sq ft of meeting and convention space, The Grand Sierra offers fine dining, a cinema, a 50-lane championship bowling center, a driving range, casino and more.

While both Las Vegas and Reno are well-stocked with facilities, entertainment venues and convention services to please most any meeting group, there is always room for improvement. Says Meyer, “We are doing something very unique to us: business innovation labs. This specialized, research-based program allows our customers, those who are really big fans, but also those who are interested and have maybe never come to Las Vegas, to really kind of shape the future of our destination. It will allow us to communicate some trends we’re seeing in the convention space.”

And there are always new trends. “One of the things about us as a destination is that we are always reinventing ourselves, never allowing ourselves to get stale. Our Las Vegas BET (Business Education Travel) program is designed for people who haven’t been here in the last three to five years because it changes so quickly.”

One thing that remains constant, however, is Las Vegas’ appeal. “In our post-event surveys, we always ask our customers if they like Las Vegas as a convention destination, and usually over 80 percent of them say yes,” Zunkowski affirms. 

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The Puerto Rico Convention Bureau has named **Neil J. Mullanaphy**, CHME, as senior vice president of sales based out of the Washington, DC, office. Mullanaphy, who has more than 26 years of sales and marketing experience, most recently served as executive director of sales and marketing for the Hawaii Convention Center/SMG, Oahu, HI.

**Team San Jose** has named **Wendy Frank** as national sales manager, West Coast corporate and sales at the Metro North Chamber of Commerce in Syracuse, PA.

**Team San Jose** has named **Audrey E. Baker** as Dallas/Ft. Worth sales manager. Most recently, Baker has served as director of sales and marketing for the Hawaii Convention Center/SMG, Oahu, HI.

Wynn/Encore has named **Jeremy Gilley** as director of revenue at the Hotel Colorado in Glenwood Springs, CO, to open in the summer of 2012. She most recently served as director of sales and marketing at Hilton Carlsbad Resort & Spa in Carlsbad, CA.

**Turnberry Isle Miami** has named **Neil J. Mullanaphy**, CHME, as senior vice president of sales based out of the Washington, DC, office. Mullanaphy, who has more than 26 years of sales and marketing experience, most recently served as executive director of sales and marketing for the Hawaii Convention Center/SMG, Oahu, HI.
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