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Denise Doyle, Director of Conference & Meeting Services for HSF Affiliates LLC, Prudential Real Estate and Relocation, will bring one of the first groups to use the new Omni Nashville Hotel (rendering shown) after it opens later this year.
Cover Story
To Book or Not to Book?
Hammering Out the Pros and Cons of Using New & Newly Renovated Properties
By Harvey Chipkin

A rendering of the Omni Nashville Hotel, which is slated to open in late 2013.

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The Siamese Twins formation at Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs.

Planners must heed the advice of the experts and take every precaution to prevent the hacking of sensitive information at meetings and events.
Trust, But Verify

During his presidency, Ronald Reagan popularized the “trust, but verify” phrase — an old Russian proverb that suggests one should check out information even if it comes from a trustworthy source. Reagan so liked the phrase, he repeated it often — much to the chagrin of the Russians. “Trust, but verify” also reminds me of an exercise that professional meeting planners engage in day in and day out: site selection. In this month’s cover story “To Book or Not to Book?" we learn how meeting planners who book events at their trusted brand’s new and renovated properties wind up winners. Some of that was finished.”

Building attendance is another plus when using new and renovated hotels. Given a choice, attendees often will opt for the newest properties because the lure when they do open a new hotel, they bring in managers from other hotels for the tour of the meeting space in the hotel and looked at how the space would be configured. That was finished.”

Doyle trusts Omni not only because of her history with the brand, but also because they addressed all her concerns. She commented, “I do know that Omni is set to open in late 2013 as the Music City Center in Nashville, the Omni Nashville Hotel is an excellent training program for new employees; they invest a lot in that. And when they do open a new hotel, they bring in managers from other hotels for the opening. So I’m comfortable with that.”

Doyle trusts Omni not only because of her history with the brand, but also because they addressed all her concerns. She commented, “I do know that Omni has an excellent training program for new employees; they invest a lot in that. And when they do open a new hotel, they bring in managers from other hotels for the opening. So I’m comfortable with that.”

Building attendance is another plus when using new and renovated hotels. Given a choice, attendees often will opt for the newest properties because the lure of the new and fresh is so great. However, what they do after it’s over can be just as important. That’s why you need a destination that has the best of both worlds. We’ve got that — and a hard-working staff that will be there every step of the way.

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Celebrates Opening

ANAHEIM, CA — The Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau (AOV&C) commemorated the grand opening of the Anaheim Convention Center’s Grand Plaza on January 24 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The Grand Plaza is a uniquely Southern California outdoor environment that can be utilized year-round for a wide variety of events, meetings and gatherings. The Grand Plaza enhances the open, park-like space surrounding the Anaheim Convention Center and flows between the Hilton Anaheim and Anaheim Marriott hotels. The area also features a special Transit Plaza for efficient transportation flow. “The long-awaited Grand Plaza is a welcome addition to our meeting campus,” stated Charles Ahlers, president, Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau. “This new outdoor environment offers our guests, and meeting and event planners a place to call their own while they are in Anaheim.”

A special microwave showcases the space and features detailed information about the Grand Plaza, aerial photographs and a time-lapse video of the construction process. www.anahiemoc.org
Borgata Launches In-Room Gaming

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — On February 18 Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, Atlantic City will launch Allin Interactive’s ITV in-room gaming platform, Digicash. Approved last year by The New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement, this is the first in-room gaming will be offered anywhere in the country. Borgata E-Casino will enable adult hotel guests who are My Borgata Rewards members the opportunity to wager on slots and video poker games brought to them via Allin’s interactive high-definition television service featured in each of Borgata’s 2,200 rooms and suites. Customers will be allowed a maximum purchase of $2,500 in gaming credits for in-room gaming per 24 hours. The extensive controls to prevent access by minors that is included in the technology will be evaluated during the field trial. Allin has been providing interactive services including movies, room messaging, property events, account information and customer offers at Borgata since November of 2011. www.theborgata.com

Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa Reveals Enhanced Meeting Space

DESTIN, FL — The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, the largest full-service beachfront resort on Northwest Florida’s Gulf Coast, recently completed a $5 million renovation of its meeting space, accommodations and fine-dining service beachfront resort on Northwest Florida’s Gulf Coast, recently completed a $5 million renovation of its meeting space, accommodations and fine-dining service beachfront resort on Northwest Florida’s Gulf Coast, recently completed a $5 million renovation of its meeting space, accommodations and fine-dining service.

Orlando World Center Marriott Completes Phase One of Renovation

ORLANDO, FL — Orlando World Center Marriott recently completed phase one of its multimillion-dollar transformation, which included enhancements to 14,000 sf of meeting space and 504 guest rooms and 10 suites in the North Tower, Hall of Cities meeting rooms, 110 guest suites, onsite Starbucks, as well as an expanded pool deck and lawn for poolside events and activities. The property will be fully operational throughout phase two of the renovation, currently underway, which includes enhancements to the Falls Pool inclusive of a poolside Bar and Grille, Splash Zone offering kids a zero entry pool and playground as well as a new Icon Slide Tower, and the Siro Italian restaurant.

Loews Hotels Buys The Back Bay Hotel in Boston

NEW YORK, NY — Loews Hotels & Resorts has agreed to purchase The Back Bay Hotel in Boston from The Doyle Collection. “Boston is one of the most vibrant markets in the U.S., and an excellent city for a Loews property,” said Jonathan Tisch, chairman of Loews Hotels & Resorts. “This one-of-a-kind, historic hotel is a unique addition to our growing portfolio.” Situated on the corner of Berkeley and Stuart Streets, the Back Bay Hotel was originally constructed in the 1820s as the Boston Police Department’s Headquarters and occupied as such until the late 1990s. The property, which was extensively redeveloped in 2004, features 225 spacious guest rooms, modern amenities, and meeting and event space.

Dittman Launches New Recognition and Rewards Platform

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — Dittman Incentive Marketing, a leading performance improvement and incentive program provider, recently debuted Celebrating Success — a points-based rewards platform, which is an affordable, quick-start incentive and recognition website for small and mid-size organizations. Companies that use Celebrating Success can engage, recognize and recognize their employees in a style that was previously available only to large corporations. Built on Dittman’s Web-based TotalPRO performance recognition platform, businesses of any size can reap the benefits of engaging their employees. The turnkey program has no upfront costs — organizations pay for the rewards when they are redeemed and requires minimal administrative resources to attain results. Celebrating Success offers two distinct modules: The Campaign Module provides the ability to post and communicate the rules for any client initiatives offering rewards to participants, which may include sales contests, wellness initiatives, referral, safety and other programs; and the Recognition Module that provides peer-to-peer and manager to participant recognition opportunities using themed eCards that can be personalized. www.dittmancentives.com

Renaissance Washington, DC Downtown Hotel Unveils Redesign

WASHINGTON, DC — The Renaissance Washington, DC Downtown Hotel announced completion of the redesign of its 807 guest rooms and suites. Each room has a soothing neutral color palate, and the leather lounge and desk chairs are inspired by 20th century modernism. LED reading pin lights are mounted on headboards with easy-to-navigate outlets. The luxury spa-like bathrooms have rain forest shower heads, backlit mirrors and accent wall coverings featuring a custom collage of historic events in Washington from 1940 to 1970. The rooms feature a large work surface, upgraded wireless Internet, 18-inch laptop safes, mini refrigerator, iPod docking station, Aveda spa products and 40-inch HDTV. With 64,000 sf of flexible function space and 30 breakout rooms, the lifestyle hotel is considered to be a premier meeting and convention destination. www.dcrenaissance.com

New Awards for Hilton Orlando

ORLANDO, FL — In the first few weeks of 2013 Hilton Orlando was recognized with three awards for achievement, most notably in the service category. Hilton Orlando worldwide executives presented Doug Gehret, general manager of Hilton Orlando with honors: (l to r) Senior Vice President, Operations Eastern North America, Ted Ratcliff; President, Americas Joe Berger; Hilton Orlando General Manager Doug Gehret; President and Chief Executive Officer Chris Nassetta and Area Vice President Orlando West Sandra Giron. The hotel was recognized as Hotel of the Year for 2012 by Hilton Worldwide and received the brand’s Highest Guest Satisfaction Award based on overall service scores for 2012 making the resort the best of the best in the category with 500 rooms or larger. Also, Hilton Orlando was once again a recipient of the AAA Four Diamond rating. www.hiltonorlando.com

Windstar Cruises Adds Three Seabourn Ships

SEATTLE, WA — Xanterra Parks & Resorts, the owner of Windstar Cruises, has purchased three of Seabourn’s fleet of six luxury, all-suite ships: Seabound Pride, Seabound Legend and Seabound Spirit. The three ships each accommodate 208 passengers in 104 suites. The expansion doubled the size of Windstar’s recently renovated, three luxury sailing yacht fleet, making the company the market leader in the luxury sailing yacht category. The growing luxury sailing yacht fleet also will be fully operational throughout 2014.

Seabound Pride and Seabound Spirit are two of the three ships joining Windstar’s fleet.

www.windstar.com

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Top 10 Meeting Planning Pet Peeves

By Brooke Sommers, CMP, CMM

If hotels would take the time to bring local planners in for think tanks once a year, I’m certain that the valued information they get would grow their business. There is nothing a seasoned planner likes better than to talk about how to improve the hotel experience. There are so many great changes going on in our industry, let’s work together to make meetings the best that they can be. Here’s my top 10 list of pet peeves, David Letterman-style.

1. **Wow! to Whoops! Site Inspections.**
Site inspections with the entire staff clapping your arrival: AWKWARD! We know you are trying to show the value of our meeting to your hotel, but do you really want to make us feel uncomfortable the minute we step into the lobby? Instead, if possible, have the sales team set up the way we set forth in the RFP. Have your senior-level hotel staff there to show that you value the meeting. Give your Hyatt friends a call to learn how to do “wow” site inspections.

2. **FAM Trips.**
Do not have them, they aren’t really that ethical if you think about your audience. Wouldn’t it be better if you want to get a planner in your door that you offer some sort of educational enticement? Bring those 10 planners in for a round-table discussion with your senior management for a few hours. That will build a much more lasting relationship and get the A-list planner’s attention.

3. **Room Amenities.**
Yes, I admit that many planners love a glass of wine, but do hotel sales people really think we need an entire bottle in our room for a one-night site? Especially after you took us to dinner and poured Cakebread all night. And what about the cheese tray that sits in the room because we are not there to enjoy it? Do your job salespeople, vet out your visitors.

4. **Wall Plugs or Lack Thereof.**
It is time to put wall plugs by every bed so I don’t have to pull furniture away from the wall to find or unplug the clock to plug in my own charger or other device. And what about one on the blanket wall so that we can iron our clothes somewhere other than the bathroom?

5. **E-proposals.**
Why do hotels use e-proposals? As I sit on a plane writing this article, it just reminds me how irritated I get when I receive an e-proposal. First, you can’t open it on a plane, or if you aren’t in a wireless area, and, second, if you want to review it a few weeks later, many times the link has expired. If you are required by your management to send an e-proposal, do your homework and ask the planner first if they would like a PDF of the proposal to accompany the e-proposal.

6. **Website Wakeup.**
Hotels should have a quick fact sheet on the front page of their websites. Many times we have very basic questions we need to know right off the bat, i.e., number of sleeping rooms; number of meeting rooms; distance to the airport. Make it easy for the planner to find that information; it may even help your transient guests. Oh, and just a side note for the national hotel brands: Could you add a search button on your websites that allows planners to search by hotel size and number of rooms specifically? This would make our jobs so much easier if there were a way to get to those hotels that fit our needs without having to spend hours weeding through all the different brand types within the chain.

7. **Hotel Brochures.**
Why hotels produce brochures is beyond me. I do like the meeting space diagram printed on stock paper so that I can take notes and outline my specific space needs. Do not dare give me a glossy version that smears can put in my hotel site recap.

8. **Know Your Planner.**
Take the time to research the planner who is coming to your hotel. If you know a little about them and the meeting they are potentially bringing, it will make a fantastic impression. Chain hoteliers, please don’t waste your time on cold calls to every planner in your Rolodex — we all go to the national sales rep, and they will send the lead that fits your hotel. Maybe you should get to know your national sales office.

9. **Why hotels produce brochures is beyond me. I do like the meeting space diagram printed on stock paper so that I can take notes and outline my specific space needs. Do not dare give me a glossy version that smears can put in my hotel site recap.**

10. **Mentor, Mentor, Mentor.**
We all have something that we can give back to the up-and-comers. Take the opportunity to put yourself out there as a resource. Each hotel sales program should have a mentor program for new salespeople coming in to represent their properties. The same goes for planning companies and in-house meeting planners. Those of you who have been in the business for 10 years or more, shame on you if you are not mentoring.

“Site inspections with the entire staff clapping your arrival: AWKWARD!”
By Stella Johnson

Sit e selection used to be easy. There were a few simple ways to approach the task. Nowadays, however, con ducting business according to the “new normal” creates new opportunities (and obstacles) for meeting professionals. To discover the best way to perfect the site selection process, we asked the experts.

We’ll start with Mike May, CMP, president of Spear One — a Dallas-based full-service meetings and events planning company, which in January merged with Sunbelt Motivation & Travel, a group in centive travel company founded in 1980 by Bill Boyd, CMP, CMM, CTE.

May, a board member of the In centive Research Foundation and the Performance Improvement Council of the In centive Marketing Association, says it’s difficult to ascertain which are the most important criteria to consider during the site-selection process. Goals? Cost? Location? Senior management preference? Amenities? May says one has to take everything into consideration. “Site selection is simple ly not based on any one variable deci sion, not anymore,” he says.

For May, shorter lead times are mud dying the waters at the present. In fact, May observes that the combination of last-minute scheduling and lack of inven tory create a recipe for disaster. “Clients are overwhelmed doing the job of two or three people while on conference calls all day, and trying to stay ahead of 200 emails per day,” he says. “Then, senior management withholding the final budget and delays pertinent decisions that need to be made in a timely manner. Often, at the last moment and with minimal lead time, we are then asked to recommend destinations and venues. The challenge is then compounded further by shrink ing hotel availability due to an increase in the number of meetings, and limited new hotel development as we have seen dur ing the last five years,” May says.

For instance, a new Spear One client wants to schedule a sales training confer ence with only three months’ notice. Normally, the client would contract nine months in advance. But now, May notes that he is scrambling around to find suit able venues.

May explains, “This is all due to the fact that their internal staff is now stretched thin by a sudden growth in corporate sales, team turnover and corporate sourcing re strictions.” He notes that general session space for 250 sales reps and engineers is manageable, but space requirements for a large equipment exhibit eliminate many hotels from the playing field.

“Las Vegas is not an option because the client wants a new destination. So, we’re solving their needs with some flexible space planning at a New Orleans hotel yet to be announced,” May says. “A few large exhibits will be located in the hotel foyer and corridors. This will require extra security measures at night due to the size and value of the assets. Meals will overflow from two smaller ballrooms into a courtyard. And, the French Quarter location delivers good evening activities within walking distance, which was another requirement.”

However, this is how Spear One usually operates. Instead, the company utilizes a proprietary process for site se lection named DDX — Discovery, Design and E x ecution. “This discovery method is first and fore most in our methodology,” May says. “We discover the meeting type, audience demo graphics, pattern preference, target dates, desired locations, past meeting history, meeting room and AV requirements, and so on. Taking a little extra discovery time always saves our clients time and money in the long run, and it works just as well for corporate meeting planners,” he states. “Even though I would say the company’s goals are always most important, value or budget probably have tied for the No. 1 cri teria over the last five years. Then, I would say location and venue quality.”

May successfully used his DDX pro cess for Regus, an international real estate client headquartered in the U.K. Spear One recommended several global venues, but ultimately selected Aria Resort & Casino in Las Vegas as the most convenient and cost-effective destination for the 100-attendee event.

Recently, Spear One arranged an event for a medical technology client, which generally holds an annual user group training conference of approximately 850 doctors and staff at a major Texas resort. “For 2013, a much smaller, doctors-only conference was held for 160 physicians rather than the hundreds of attendees. With that decision, we were able to upgrade the venue to the Ritz-Carlton, Dallas instead,” says May, named as the No. 1 large hotel by Zagat Hotels, Resorts & Spas.

The A-to-Z RFP

Al Wynant, CEO of EventInterface, a Scottsdale, AZ-based company that provides innovative Web-based and mobile app software for meeting and event planners, initiates the site-selec tion process with an extremely detailed RFP of the event.

Wynant, whose background in cludes managing events from 50 to 125,000 attendees in six countries, says, “In the RFP, we include everything from de sired rates to the food and beverage budget, and whatever we think is so important that it can make or break a deal.” Wynant says he also includes: qual ity of audiovisual/availability of venues with the appro priate meeting room space/ sleeping rooms under one roof; and union or non-union; availability and quality of local vendors; local transportation; and area attractions.

Detail is important. “We also instruct on how information is to be presented back to us,” Wynant adds, “and can even reject proposals that do not meet our stringent RFP response requirements.” Although we clearly outline in our RFP what we expect, a very large percentage of venues send back boilerplate proposals.” Wynant works very closely with the local CVB and makes site visits as needed. “We prefer personal relationships with local reps or onsite sales reps rather than national or regional sales reps based in call centers that support hotel sales,” he says.

“Overall, if we look at the big picture,” Wynant explains, “the three key factors that can make or break a deal for us are: Ability to meet the requirements set in the RFP; the ease of communications with the sales and catering team; and the excellence of service from all levels of staff at the venue.”

One of EventInterface’s most recent meetings was for a software company at the Ritz-Carlton, Dallas instead,” says May, named as the No. 1 large hotel by Zagat Hotels, Resorts & Spas.

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Mike May
President
Spear One
Dallas, TX

“Even though I would say the company’s goals are always most important, value or budget probably have tied for the No. 1 criteria over the last five years. Then, I would say location and venue quality.”

10 Considerations for Selecting the Perfect Destination

Recognizing the need to identify and address the growing concerns that planners are finding in the marketplace, Destination Marketing Association International’s recommendations are:

1. What matters to your group in terms of cuisine, walkability, off-time pursuits, etc.? 2. Will you fit into the destination? Is there enough space? Small fish in a big pond and vice versa? 3. How will you get there? Assess air access and airlift as well as transportation in the destination. 4. Does the destination’s meetings and hotel infrastructure in terms of overall layout fit your group? 5. Are there enough things to do in terms of fun and unique amenities. Is it safe? 6. What is the lay of the land in terms of the meeting/convention package? Construction? 7. What is the ROI of your meeting in that destination? Affordable? 8. Are they green? Is it important that the city and hotels be environmentally friendly? 9. Does the city have destination appeal? Does it make people want to visit? 10. Is the CVB easy to work with in terms of its sales team, and are they relationship-minded?
the eco-friendly, downtown Scottsdale Firesky Resort & Spa, for 100 attendees. “The meeting was structured as a work -

Firesky’s setup encouraged networking in

Wynant notes. Firesky Resort & Spa, for 100 attendees.

Inc., a San Diego-based certified meet -

ing company, reminds us that the improving

Supply and Demand

Michael Patton, CMM, CEO of Pothos Inc., a San Diego-based certified meet -

ing conference and event management company, reminds us that the improving economy is a positive fact that can have a negative effect on site selection.

As we’ve witnessed in the past several years, the meetings industry was suffering so much, that hotels were very ag -
gressive in doing what they had to do in order to bring in the amount of busi -

ness they needed to fill quotas. They were willing to work with meeting plan -

ners, acquiesce to con -

cessions, be flexible and consider the dollar amount

the booking was bringing in at

the time of the scheduled meeting, as

well as the future business it might bring in later,” Patton observes. “Now that has changed with some top-name hoteliers flatly saying, ‘We have this amount of

rooms at this price, this amount of meet -

ings that will create an experience for

our teammates and will be easy to travel

driven on a very localized level, therefore we look for hotels in that geographic area. For our larger gatherings, we look for lo -

cations that will create an experience for

our teammates and will be easy to travel to,” says Kelley.

When Green Is a Requirement

DaVita University Manager Jeannie Kelley has other parameters she utilizes in the site selection process.

Kelley says that DaVita University, the

dialysis division of Denver-based DaVita HealthCare Partners Inc., selects destinations based on their

specific business needs.

“Our own initiative...strives to reduce our carbon footprint. So recycling, energy efficiency and even healthy eating options are important to us and so is selecting a hotel that embraces those values.”

Jeanie Kelley

DaVita University Manager

DaVita HealthCare Partners Inc.

Denver, CO

There’s still value to be found. Patton advises planners that clients must be flexible. “If they come to me and say we can only meet on this date, in this city, and at this hotel, and they’re going to get hit between the eyes on the cost and have little room for negotiation in terms of concessions. But, if they have some flexibility, and come to my company, let us do our research and our homework, and come up with a selection of possi -

bilities at a good value, they can still get a good deal.”

When the Golden Rule…Rules

After all is said and done, don’t forget the golden rule: Know your group. Indeed, it can be worth its weight in gold espe -
cially for smaller corporate meetings such as the upscale outings that David Weaver of The Rawls Group in Orlando, FL, gen -

erally arranges. As a certified succession planner and certified executive coach, his

mission is often to advise owners, man -

agement and family members of closely held entities on how to ensure they are fully prepared for the succession of their business to future generations of the famil -

ily or to external buyers. Weaver avoids large meeting style hotels, to insure that his group doesn’t play second-fiddle to larger groups. Thus, he seeks intimate, award-winning resorts such as Barnsley Gardens Resort in Adairsville, located 60 miles outside of Atlanta, GA. The historic

hotel, set on 3,300 acres with 160-year -

old gardens and luxurious cottages, has

been named Condé Nast Traveler’s “Gold List” for the past three years and was ranked No. 2 out of 25 Southern U.S. Golf Resorts.

“When holding meetings in the cottages where we were staying, we felt we were in more of a lodge-type setting, much more appropriate for our group of men,” explains Weaver. “High-level executives expect to be pampered, and they are at resorts like this,” says Weaver.

All in all, these relevant suggestions from the experts will help guide planners as they plan these big pot changing landscape of the “new normal” and lead to simplifying the site-selection process in the months ahead.

An Inspired Event Experience

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Hammering Out The Pros and Cons of Using New & Newly Renovated Properties

A few years ago, after months of negotiation, Anne Albright, executive vice president of Wyndham Jade, a meeting services company in Plano, TX, booked a large event at the Fontainebleau in Las Vegas. The hotel was not open yet. “It was a massive piece of business,” says Albright. “The biggest risk of booking a hotel that’s not open is that it will not open in time. We tracked the news as problems began to emerge and as we got to six months before the event we cancelled. “It was very hard to find a replacement,” says Albright, “and in fact we had to go to another city.”

Experiences like that do make planners wary of booking new hotels before they are ready. According to a recent survey by PhotoBanx, a stock photography company, 86% of event planners are concerned about the reliability of booking new hotels. This is particularly true, though to a lesser extent, of major renovations when meeting spaces and guest rooms bear little resemblance to their previous configurations.

A lot depends on a planner’s history with a hotel brand. Denise Doyle, director of conference and meeting services for HSFF Affiliates LLC, Prudential Real Estate and Relocation, in New York, has certainly seen plenty of hotels come and go. “Omni has an excellent track record,” she says. “They have put all sorts of penalties into the contracts that range from 3,000 to 10,000 people. We also built out a fully service-disabled veteran-owned business, a spa, and five cultural and entertainment venues.

“Omni has a reputation and history of successful openings as is evident from The Omni Dallas, Omni San Diego and the Omni Fort Worth,” says Tod Roadarmel, director of sales and marketing for Omni Fort Worth. “And Leslie Graham, global event planner, says, “I’m always interested in exploring new properties in the north county area; it’s great to have new options for our events.”

Perhaps the most dramatic opening in the near future will be the athenaeum Omni Nashville Hotel, which will open in late 2013. “Clients are always asking about new hotels,” says Albright. “And I’ve been amazed that so many new properties are opening after the hull in recent years. It is definitely an attention-getting and attendance-driver. “A new hotel does drive attendance,” agrees Doyle. “Our attendees have to pay to attend the events, and it helps with the attendance to be able to promote a new hotel. If there is a choice of hotels in our bloc, they would tend to opt for the new one.”

Hoteliers Trumpet Newness

For their part, not surprisingly, hotel operators are very positive about the benefits of a fresh or refurbished venue. Perhaps the most dramatic opening in the near future will be the athenaeum Omni Nashville Hotel, which will open in late 2013. “Clients are always asking about new hotels,” says Albright. “And I’ve been amazed that so many new properties are opening after the hull in recent years. It is definitely an attention-getting and attendance-driver. “A new hotel does drive attendance,” agrees Doyle. “Our attendees have to pay to attend the events, and it helps with the attendance to be able to promote a new hotel. If there is a choice of hotels in our bloc, they would tend to opt for the new one.”

Doyle says, “I raised those questions with Omni and they answered well. I do know that Omni has an excellent training program for new employees; they invest a lot in that. And when they do open a new hotel, they bring in managers from other hotels for the opening. So I’m comfortable with that.”

In fact, says Doyle, “We’ve been very fortunate to have our meetings in quite a few new hotels.” But Doyle agrees with many of her counterparts in saying, “Typically, I do like to give it at least six months.”

Similarly, says Albright, “We normally do not like to put clients in a hotel until it’s been open for six months — and that’s based on experience. There are exceptions to that, and they usually involve clients who insist on a location. We will go through the pros and cons of that but sometimes a rate is so attractive they decide to take the pros outweigh the cons.”

“After six months,” says Albright, “your client gets all the benefits of a new hotel without the negatives. That is especially ideal for an incentive where you want things to be perfect.”

And Leslie Graham, global event planner for Callaway Golf Company, says, “I would avoid any hotel opening on time if I had a program very close to a hotel opening date. I wait to make sure a hotel is open prior to booking a program.”

Communication and Contracts

It’s important, according to planners, to lay out the facts for superior about any possible issues that might arise in a new or renovated space — even if the novelty of a new venue or an attractive rate is particularly appealing. Says Albright, “We will make clients aware of all the risks involved and put penalties into the contract. Many things become negotiable with a new or renovated property. Not all hotels will agree to all of those penalties so then you have to let your clients decide how much they want to gamble on their event.”

Doyle agrees: “We do build performance clauses into all of our contracts and there may be additional issues with a new or upgraded hotel.” Companies are frequently persuaded by post-opening deals to get into a hotel “with a technological ‘glitch’,” says Albright. “The people attracted to those first critical months are those who will not be able to afford it later. Even so we will put all sorts of penalties into the contract, so as to say that any kind of rate deal ‘depends on availability.’”

Service Issues

While physical completion is an over- riding issue, the adeptness of staff in a new or altered space, is a priority. Says Albright. “When you have a new property and people who have not worked together, service can really be affected. ... Although we will probably be able to overcome any service issues before the client notices them, that makes our job tougher.”

Last fall, says Albright, she managed a 2,000-person convention at a new hotel and while the on-site experience was fine, “the billing was a nightmare. The account didn’t have its act together, and we took a lot of time cleaning it up. Who would expect that?”

One corporate planner says she had a strategy session for 23 executives at the recently expanded Hanover Inn at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and while there was a technological “glitch” in one meeting room, the overall experience was very positive. The conference center hotel faces the Dartmouth College green. It has, said the planner, “high ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows and a lot of light, which really lent itself to the nature of the meeting, which was strategic planning. At the same time, it was easy to get a secure and confidential feel because of the safeguards they have in place. We would be happy to go back despite that glitch.”
An executive vice president of Hilton Worldwide, Wyndham Jade Plavno, says, “Clients are always attention-getters and ‘Clients are always attendance-driver.’

Also, Hilton is incorporating brand standards to accommodate more devices per user.”

Sherry Romello, senior director, Hilton Meetings and Product Management, Hilton Worldwide, notes, “New and renovated hotels provide a blank slate that can be custom-designed to meet the current needs of travelers and planners based on the location of the property and the type of travelers who commonly visit the hotel. Many team members at new or renovated hotels have experience working at other Hilton properties so they understand the accommodations and service that planners can expect. Meeting planners are looking to non-traditional venues to hold their meetings including restaurants, lobbies and lounges. These types of spaces with in-the-hotel complement traditional conference room and ballroom meeting space. Also, Hilton is incorporating brand standards for meetings wireless Internet, which will increase available bandwidth to accommodate more devices per user.”

A Changing Market

Frequently, hotels have to change to meet the demands of the meetings market. Matt Kovac, director of sales and marketing for the Grand Hyatt San Francisco, says, “We needed to do something to accommodate more devices per user. We keep meeting professionals updated on the progress.”

Michael Darst, executive director for catering and conference management at Loews Miami Beach, says, “We sold the cabanas to planners when they were under construction with constant communication, backup plans and lots of visual assets. The most alluring aspect of a new build or renovation to a property is the peer pressure to clear their calendars? Perhaps the 20,000 sf Stillwater Spa, or the private resort beach, or casino entertainment... Or being only five minutes from Lakeview skiing and championship golf.

Naturally, the Hyatt’s sensational transformation calls for a celebration. That’s the motto at one of Tahoe’s most luxurious group destinations. This lakefront resort offers 50,000 sf of indoor/outdoor function space, including the area’s only shoreline ballroom. The Lakeside Ballroom was also part of a just completed $20 million transformation.

Among other resort-wide improvements, the Spa Conference Center underwent a $500,000 makeover, creating a fresh style with upgraded audio-visual and technology capabilities. Two of four onsite eateries were also transformed. The award-winning Lone Eagle Grille now showcases a more open, richly appointed lakefront lounge with massive rock fireplace. The Sierra Café presents an entirely new, mountain contemporary look for all-day service in the expansive, lodge-like dining room and on the seasonal mountain-air deck.

These stylish surroundings echo the contemporary Grand Lodge feel of 398 all-suite, high-end rooms. High-speed Internet, multimedia hubs offer high-tech entertainment. New baths make a modern statement in granite and glass. Brushed steel, wood and dark leather create a striking ambiance.

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Situated in the heart of the Mashantucket Pequot Indian Reservation, Foxwoods Resort Casino is the largest resort casino in North America, providing more than 6 million sf of excitement through endless, exhilarating entertainment options — from six casinos, world-class dining and AAA Four Diamond accommodations, to vibrant nightlife, pampering spas, award-winning golf and luxury shopping.

Renovations Underway
Throughout 2013, Foxwoods will undergo renovations with the groundbreaking of a retail outlet mall, adding more than 75 stores to its current retail offerings and putting Foxwoods on the map as a shopping destination in addition to a meeting planner’s paradise.

Foxwoods is already remodeling parts of the concourse area throughout its main corridor, unveiling attractive new storefronts with a sleek, modern design and bringing a host of new shopping and dining options to entertain attendees.

Boasting more than 150,000 sf of meeting space, Foxwoods’ mission is to provide companies with the ultimate meeting destination, offering sound technological infrastructure, world-renowned chefs, gourmet catering services, certified meeting professionals and unmatched après meeting amenities and accommodations.

From the 50,000-sf, column-free Premier Ballroom to 15 flexible meeting rooms, Foxwoods delivers impeccable service for flawless execution of events. With limitless tailored meeting options, from towering ice sculptures and show-stopping dinners, to check-in services and personal butlers for VIPs, Foxwoods transforms events into dynamic successes.

With 2,200 rooms spanning four very different hotels, Foxwoods offers planners accommodations to please every group’s distinct travel tastes.

At the AAA Four Diamond MGM Grand at Foxwoods, it’s all about anticipation just steps away from modern gaming, pulsating with music and surrounded by celebrity-chef dining, shopping and a grand outdoor pool. MGM Grand at Foxwoods’ guest rooms and suites are outfitted with retro-chic, modern décor, featuring the latest technology for the savvy traveler.

Foxwoods’ tradition of elegance awaits guests at the AAA Four Diamond Grand Pequot Tower. Flanked by striking art and architecture, the soaring lobby leads to a tower of spacious deluxe rooms and plush suites. In 2013, guests will begin to see a new design concept introduced in rooms and hallways, including contemporary décor with a blend of seafoam blues and soft earthy accents. Fine dining at Paragon Restaurant, relaxation at Norwich Spa and some of the most popular casinos are minutes away.

Guests at Great Cedar Hotel will enjoy 217 spacious accommodations, recently renovated to a new level of sophistication, landing Foxwoods the 2012 Connecticut Building Congress Project Team Award in the category of Major Renovations. Located in the heart of the casino, attendees are close to dining options, exciting entertainment and boutiques.

A country retreat located beside the main complex, Two Trees Inn provides a perfect destination for guests who want a relaxing experience a step away from the energetic pace of the main resort and casinos. With a delicious restaurant, merry bar and heated indoor pool of its own, the restaurants, spas and casinos are still only a short walk or complimentary shuttle away.

We’ll resort to the sky not even being the limit.

Melanie Clemente
Senior Catering Sales Manager

Jason Morgan
Director of Food and Beverage

At Foxwoods®, there’s no end to what we’ll do to make every event flawless. Our team is committed to success and your meeting is no exception. When you choose Foxwoods® Resort Casino, you can rest assured we’ll resort to taking care of it all, so you don’t have to worry about a thing.
In perfect harmony with her timeless charms, New Orleans’ newest great improvisation — The Great Hall — which will be the future site of many a command performance, debuted January 2013 in the Crescent City. The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center now features the 60,300-sf divisible Great Hall, boasting 25,400 sf of multiuse prefunction space and hotel-like appointments throughout.

The Great Hall
The impressive 1.1-million-sf center, which so perfectly complements the city’s walkable hotel packages, is now more attractive than ever to groups large and small.

Additional features of The Great Hall include a 4,660-sf junior ballroom, complete with a 3,420-sf rooftop terrace, a 980-sf indoor balcony and a 5,700-sf executive club lounge. A new pedestrian plaza provides a grand sense of arrival to all attendees and serves as a seamless connection to nearby hotels.

Technological Opportunities
The ballroom expansion project is the latest in a series of $140 million in upgrades to the facility since 2006. The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center — the sixth largest convention center in the nation — boasts a 1 gigabyte fiber optic Internet backbone that is 100 percent redundant, providing meeting planners with unlimited technological opportunities to extend programming to attendees and exhibitors.

In addition to a repainted exterior and extensive landscaping, the center’s vast lobby features comfortable furniture groupings in more than 150,000 sf of space for registration, information kiosks and sponsor banners.

Attendees will enjoy learning the origins of unique New Orleans words via an interactive QR code on the “Word Wall.” The lobby’s decorative banners feature iconic New Orleans images of art, music, food, history and architecture, and purple-coated “Fleur de Lis Ambassadors” greet attendees at every entrance.

Digital, flat-panel audio-video information systems are strategically placed throughout the main lobby, meeting room levels and in prefunction areas. In addition, key card access and a fully integrated, digital signage system with screens were implemented in all 140 meeting rooms and throughout public space.

The center offers a full suite of high-definition video equipment for a variety of satellite broadcasts, presentations or recording formats and the trained personnel to design, capture and edit programs onsite.

The full-service UPS Store provides show management, attendees and exhibitors a full range of services including large-image, onsite printing of meter boards, directional signs and banners; in-bound and out-bound small package handling; and a satellite mobile kiosk for printing, packing and shipping.

The center’s food service contractor, Centerplate, is committed to providing the essence of the New Orleans food experience, operating three on-site restaurants featuring live local music and menus of iconic Louisiana dishes by award-winning chef Donald Link.
Southern hospitality and modern elegance combine at The Peabody Orlando — the largest non-gaming Forbes Four Star, AAA Four Diamond hotel in the United States and the No. 1 meetings hotel as ranked by Cvent. Its world-class facilities, services and unrivaled location make it the preferred Orlando meeting and convention hotel for professional meeting planners.

The Peabody Orlando provides an unrivaled guest experience for travelers with its world-class Peabody Service Excellence and ultra-luxurious accommodations designed to meet the needs of business travelers and vacationers.

The Newest Accommodations
The Loft at The Peabody is the Orlando luxury hotel’s newest accommodations experience, expanding its acclaimed service with boutique accommodations and upscale amenities. The Loft comprises 52 rooms located within three private-access floors in the Mallard Tower. Each guest room is elegantly appointed with premium comfort items, including plush blankets, robes and slippers, and upgraded bath amenities with aromatherapy products for a spa-inspired experience. Additionally, a Keurig Brewing System is provided along with complimentary coffees and herbal teas — adding extra taste and convenience for travelers.

Access to the private lounge furnished with spacious seating and contemporary décor completes The Loft experience. Guests of The Loft are invited to enjoy a complimentary glass of wine and gourmet snacks during The Loft’s daily wine reception from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

For guests with discerning tastes, The Peabody Orlando’s 1,641 comfortable guest rooms feature contemporary décor and amenities. Among the hotel’s 10 delectable dining and entertainment options, NAPA offers wine country-inspired gourmet cuisine, while Rocks, a 6,000-sf lounge, serves lively libations.

Relaxation is provided in the hotel’s 22,000-sf spa, salon and fitness center, along with its three luxurious pools. And, who could forget the world-famous March of The Peabody Ducks? A twice-daily tradition enjoyed by all.

Unparalleled Meeting Facilities
The Peabody Orlando’s 300,000 total sf of flexible function space includes the pillar-free 54,652-sf Peabody Grand Ballroom, the 34,378-sf Windermere Ballroom, the 26,923-sf Plaza International Ballroom, two junior ballrooms and 105 meeting rooms. In addition, the meeting space offers state-of-the-art telecommunications technology, audio-visual, production and business support services, as well as outstanding banquet and catering services — everything today’s professional meeting planner could possibly need.

From unparalleled hospitality and contemporary amenities, The Peabody Orlando’s location is also something to be desired. Nestled in the heart of Florida, it is central to all of the state’s world-famous theme park destinations, restaurants, beaches, premier shopping outlets and specialty shops and cultural arts.

Situated within the International Drive Convention and Entertainment District, and next to Pointe Orlando’s dining and nightlife, two covered sky bridges connect The Peabody Orlando to the Orange County Convention Center, a 2.1 million sf facility housed with exhibition and meeting space.

Guest Rooms/Suites: 1,641/193
Meeting Space: 300,000 sf; 105 meeting rooms.
Special Services & Amenities: Along with its commitment to Peabody Service Excellence, The Peabody Orlando offers state-of-the-art facilities and technology, award-winning catering, and food and beverage services for memorable meetings and events.

The Peabody Orlando — named the best meeting hotel in the U.S. by Cvent. Come see for yourself why we’re #1 — we’ll be happy to cover airfare for qualified planners. For offer details and to schedule your visit contact our sales professionals at 800.42.DUCKS or sales@peabodyorlando.com.
The Villas of Grand Cypress

The Villas of Grand Cypress is ready to reveal a whole new look. Located within minutes of Orlando’s top entertainment attractions, the resort has spent the past four months transforming all 146 Club Suites and one-to four-bedroom Villas.

The Vision and Design
The property-wide renovation of The Villas of Grand Cypress had an impressive budget of more than $100,000 per villa. Living areas throughout the redesigned Club Suites and Villas are spacious, inviting and residential in style. Fine furniture in Italian and midcentury modern styles includes American leather sofa sleepers and club chairs. Pulling inspiration from the area’s surroundings, custom-designed woven carpets from Axminster feature the magnified lines of topographic maps that evoke the natural landscape. Artwork includes eye-catching original bronze sculptures, custom chandeliers and expressionist designs. Select villas offer sleek dining room tables generously sized for 10 and gas-lit fireplaces. Stylish beds with upholstered headboards illuminated by ambient bedside lighting are inviting with elegant bedding, plush pillows and 300-thread-count linens. Outdoors, guests can enjoy expansive private patios or decks overlooking the fairways or waterways of the North Course.

Guest Villas: 146 Meeting Space:
Nine meeting rooms and 10,480 sf. Special Services & Amenities: Flexible meeting space, teambuilding, tropical outdoor venues for themed events, and 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature-designed golf.

Offering newly remodeled luxury accommodations, a true sanctuary in the heart of Orlando.

Be the first to experience the spectacular new Villas of Grand Cypress in Orlando, Florida. The accommodations feature completely redesigned interiors, new fixtures and finishes, upgraded furniture, enhanced in-room technology, as well as a brand new state of the art fitness center. Essentially redesigning the resort into a one-of-a-kind first-class sanctuary.

Your attendees will embrace abundant recreation, 10,480 sf. of flexible meeting space, clubhouse, on-site dining, and 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature-designed golf.
Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa

With a long-standing tradition of providing award-winning facilities, deluxe accommodations, impeccable service and luxury resort amenities on Florida’s Northwest Gulf Coast, the 598-room Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa is raising the bar with more than $5 million of recent enhancements to its meeting space, accommodations and fine-dining restaurant.

Meeting Facilities
The largest, full-service resort on Northwest Florida’s Gulf Coast, the Hilton Sandestin Beach Beach boasts more than 32,000 sf of flexible meeting space, showcasing a fresh new design inspired by the resort’s beachfront setting. The renovation includes many details incorporating state-of-the-art technology, with new teleconferencing facilities in the boardroom and touch-screen lighting in the ballrooms. With its 9,504 sf of Emerald Ballroom, 20 breakout rooms, 106-seat theater, and more than 20,000 sf of deck areas overlooking the Gulf of Mexico, the Hilton Sandestin Beach is able to effortlessly accommodate more than 2,000 guests in a variety of settings. Seagar’s Prime Steaks and Seafood, a AAA Four Diamond 150-seat restaurant, has blended its tradition of excellence in culinary creativity and service with sophisticated new decor. In addition to new furnishings, there also is a new semiprivate dining room created to showcase Seagar’s 600-label wine list. Named one of Conde Nast Traveler’s “Top 20 Florida Golf Resorts,” “Top 100 U.S. Spas” and “Top 150 U.S. Resorts,” Hilton Sandestin Beach continues to distinguish itself as a premier resort hotel.

Enjoy 32,000 square feet of award-winning meeting space – completely renovated in January 2013 – and now ready for your group!

Meeting registration and management websites and software that TCG may use onsite to collect attendee and client information. “We have always asked a lot of questions and delved deep into the security of websites. It comes down to having a conversation about how they secure data and what happens to it at the end of the event. You also want to know if there is an online backup and how they secure credit card data,” Brown says. According to security experts, planners must make information security a top priority for several reasons:

- They use a growing variety of PCs, laptops and handheld devices to store and transmit huge amounts of client and attendee data.
- They increasingly use standalone meeting planning and registration software available for free or for a fee.
- They hire third-party management services that often use their own proprietary systems to manage meeting information.
- They hold meetings at the growing number of hotels, convention centers and other venues offering free and open Wi-Fi, which is notoriously vulnerable to hackers.

Needless to say, hacking is a growing problem. According to the latest study from the Identity Theft Resource Center, during the first six months of 2012: "Malicious attacks involving 'hacking' continue to represent an ever increasing growth, with 30.5 percent of the breaches so far this year identifying hacking as the root cause, up from the 27.7 percent reported for the same period in 2011. If this rate increase continues, 2012 will be on pace to have another record-high year in this category."

Some planners, especially small independent shops, have a weak information security measures because they lack computer savviness, are too busy to know it, or don’t have an in-house or third-party IT consultant. However, securing information isn’t rocket science. Following are examples of actual information security practices and the areas they cover. Robert Glowczewski, DMCP, director of operations, Access Destination Services–Orange County, describes practices for protecting his company’s information. "Our general practice is to use an enterprise anti-virus system because it’s easier to maintain at all work stations instead of having individual products that would have to be updated at individual work stations," he says. "We have multiple backup systems on- and off-premises. A good firewall and password authentica- tion are important as is a good spam monitoring system because there are many phishing emails and viruses.

Access educates employees on anti-virus practices, creating strong passwords and avoiding unknown websites, pop-up ads and links. The company also uses third-party registration systems that follow industry standards for handling cred- it cards and have state-of-the-art security and efficiency, says Glowczewski. He adds that Access works with IT professionals to ensure optimal security. "That would be a smart thing to do for those who aren’t technically savvy. If you can’t afford to have an IT person on staff at least try to have a secure in-house or third-party IT consultant. However, securing information isn’t rocket science. Following are examples of actual information security practices and the areas they cover.

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and strengthens its security policies fol-
lowing a few security close calls early on in
the company’s founding. “We have in-
dependent, cloud-based servers for each client,
and they use an encrypted enter-
terprise server to protect 100 percent up-
time,” says McNell. “We have four lev-
els of backup both onsite and at remote ser-
ders in Europe.”

Unlike many companies, AMI doesn’t
keep client information indefinitely be-
cause it’s a security risk. “We keep all data
for about six months, although some
clients require up to 36 months. We deal
with large corporations, and we are of-
courit to keep the data between divi-
sion and another, one branch manager
and another. Sometimes we come back
with us to need information for a program
due to the fact that we have it, and that it’s
secure,” McNell says.

AMI’s information security measures
reflect those that large corporate clients
typically require as part of master ser-
vice agreements. Corporate planners require us
to have multiple backups of their con-
tent or attendee information they are
using our servers to hold,” says McNell.

Another question might address our policy
on physically guarding computer equipment and
information. One tip might be to ask: “Do
they ask what we do with credit card
information and registration forms after the event. Some
require us to hold the information
and then delete it after a certain length of
time, depending on their policy?”

The Perils of Free Wi-Fi
McNell takes steps to ensure that
any Wi-Fi network AMI offers is secure. “If we are providing a Wi-Fi network, we
will make sure that our encryption and work with the venue to make sure that it’s in
place. If you are an open or free Wi-Fi network, you must assume that someone
else is looking at your data,” says McNell.

When it comes to free Wi-Fi, sales
people should encourage attendees to
use only the free Wi-Fi network. “There is
little or no protection. The issue is how
to set up a secure connection between at-
tendees’ computers and the device provid-
ing the wireless service. The ideal would be
that every person registering for meetings
gets a username and password. That’s time
consuming and expensive, and that’s why
they don’t do it,” says Sileo.

Most planners appreciate free Wi-Fi as an
attendee convenience. However, plan-
ers typically don’t consider the security
risks of Wi-Fi, says Brown. “For planners,
nothing guarantees that the attendees are
secure,” says Neuman. “That’s the reason
why we do the monitoring. If you’re taking
all the maximum bandwidth to do it, there’s
no hackers trying to get information from
attendees. A monitored network helps protect users.”

Brad Neuman, Director, Attend-eSource Technologies
metroConnections, Minneapolis, MN

“Ask if anyone is going to help monitor
activity on the Wi-Fi network so that you
have assurances there are no hackers
trying to get information from attendees.”

Change Passwords Often
Planners’ information can never be tru-
ly secure unless they have a policy for creat-
ing and securing passwords. “Creating safe
passwords, and changing them when the,
it’s even huger,” says Siciliano. “Managing
several passwords correctly can be an over-
whelming task for some people. One way
to make people aware of the risk is having a
plug-in pass-
word management software.”

Short of that, there are several basic pre-
cutions and conferences. “Ask if anyone is going to help monitor activity on the Wi-Fi network so that you have assurances there are no hackers trying to get information from attendees.”

Brad Neuman, Director, Attend-eSource Technologies
metroConnections, Minneapolis, MN

that planners can take to thwart pass-
word theft. Make sure that each pass-
word needs to be unique and that there
are at least one number and char-
acter. Never use the same password for
two accounts. Many people create one
long and complicated password and use it
repeatedly, making only small changes at
the end. Such passwords are relatively easy
do exploit, says Sileo.

Technology experts also suggest that planners
get a sheet of security from the
meeting management software they
download online or use via third parties.
The tip applies especially to free software
available online, says Siciliano. “General-
ly with free software, they may not have al-
located the resources for application
security, which involves basically trying to
beg the software during stages of dev-
lopment so that it’s relatively bulletproof
when it’s ready for prime time. With free
software, you want to know the pros and cons and ask questions,” he says.

Experts suggest asking: What part of
the budget went into application secu-
rity? What risks do I take by using the
software? Is the software periodically up-
dated? Are you sure that they have all
the information you need? Are you
considering feedback or future meetings, but for
whatever reasons they don’t and end up
keeping it,” says Sileo.

Sileo agrees. “Planners tend to col-
llect more personal information from
attendees than they need. They may in-
tend to use the information they have
in the subject of keeping your equipment
secure and leverage the power of their
digital privacy, identity and reputation,
is also an author on several books and
case studies involving the use of
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read the terms and conditions of
Wi-Fi services to understand the risks
and encourage attendees to do the same.
Don’t forget to ask questions.

“Know what type of Wi-Fi security is in
place,” says Brad Neuman, director, Attend-
eSource Technologies, a suite of web-based
planning solutions at metroConnections,
A Minneapolis-headquartered company
that plans corporate meetings, events, in-

Meeting High Expectations

Whether it’s the rustic Rocky Mountain landscape of Colorado Springs, the urban sophistication of Denver or world-famous ski resort towns such as Vail, Colorado offers a tantalizingly extensive list of memorable scenic settings for meetings.

Colorado Springs
Located 65 miles south of Denver and ranking as the state’s second-largest city, Colorado Springs is a favored destination for many loyal planners because of its spectacular landscape and roster of offsite venues and attractions. Kevin Fleetwood, marketing director at Atlanta-based financial software provider CRIF Lending Solutions, used Colorado Springs — and Colorado — for the first time last September for a four-day, three-night user conference for 28 attendees.

“We have offices in five cities across the U.S.,” Fleetwood says. “And each year, we try to pick a location that is close to one of those offices. We happen to have an office in Denver, so we decided to go to Colorado this time around.” After doing his initial research on Colorado destinations, Fleetwood chose the AAA Four Diamond Cheyenne Mountain Resort (316 guest rooms; 40,000 sf of IACC-certified meeting space) because of its unique rustic location and ambiance. He also liked the offsite options available in Colorado Springs. “There are multiple venues in Colorado Springs for unique evening events,” he says. “For example, we did a behind-the-scenes evening event at the U.S. Olympic Training Center. Our theme for the meeting — which was about elevating the use of our products and elevating the bottom lines of our customers — was partly elevated by the fact that we were in Colorado Springs and could do an event at the Olympic Training Center. And it fit in very nicely because ‘stronger, faster, higher’ is a theme of U.S. Olympic athletes, and that really struck the tone we wanted during the meeting.” The U.S. Olympic Complex is home to the U.S. Olympic Committee and the Olympic Training Center programs.

The evening included a tour of the facility, as well as a sit-down dinner in one of the gyms. “We had a demonstration from the men’s gymnastics team, which had just returned from the London Olympics,” Fleetwood says. “We also had a fencing demonstration. So it was a very special evening.”

The company also arranged local tours for small groups of attendees to the spectacular outdoor mountain venue Garden of the Gods, Pikes Peak and the U.S. Air Force Academy. “Colorado Springs has many, many interesting tourist attractions that most people aren’t familiar with,” Fleetwood says. “That really adds to a meeting.”

Based on his experience, Fleetwood recommends Colorado Springs to planners who have never considered it. “Because of its proximity to Denver, Colorado Springs gives you multiple ways of getting people in for the meeting,” he says. “That means it’s very easy to get people in and out. And as I said already, there are just so many venues in town for doing special events or arranging tours for attendees. They have a lot of very nice restaurants. And it’s also just a pretty unique destination, so it turns out to be a very nice surprise when you get there and actually experience it. It’s a very charming, interesting place. We couldn’t have asked for a better destination for this particular meeting.”

Fleetwood also gave a glowing review to Cheyenne Mountain, which completed a $20 million, property-wide renovation in 2011. “The property was just perfect for the size of our meeting, with just the right kind and amount of meeting space,” he says. “The sleeping rooms and meeting space are both very nice. And we liked the whole setup of the hotel, including the European Plan for meals and their AV facilities. In general, Cheyenne Mountain just had the overall look and feel that we wanted for this particular meeting.”

“The food is just incredible,” she says. “In my 30 years of doing meetings, it’s the highest rating I’ve ever seen a hotel receive from the people who attended the meeting.”

Kevin Fleetwood, Marketing Director CRIF Lending Solutions, Atlanta, GA

Denver
Thanks to the status of Denver International Airport as a hub for United Airlines, the Mile High City delivers easy access to the city and the community,” says Melissa Risteff, senior vice president, enterprise engagement, at locally headquartered social technology software provider NewsGator. “We’re blessed with access to the Rocky Mountains and temperate weather year-round. And because we’re centrally located, most people can get here pretty easily. We have a great airport and are a hub, so there are many different ways to get here. We have a great food scene and great museums. So it’s just a great destination.”

Risteff is a big fan of Denver’s AAA Five Diamond hotels.

For the last three years, she has hosted NewsGator’s annual user conference, as well as several other meetings, at The Ritz-Carlton Denver (202 guest rooms; 13,000 sf of meeting space, including a 6,264 sf ballroom and 1,960 sf junior ballroom), the city’s first and only AAA Five Diamond hotel. The company held its most recent meeting, its annual kickoff conference, for 100 attendees, in January. In March, Risteff will host her annual user conference.

Why is she so loyal to The Ritz-Carlton? “Hands-down, it’s the service we get from the people we deal with,” Risteff says. “We’ve been dealing with the same team for three years now, and they do a great job because they have the talent. So that means I don’t have to start from scratch every year. But even back the first time we did a meeting there, it was probably one of the most pleasant experiences I’ve ever had — not just in making sure that everything has been put in place properly, but also onsite for the meeting. Their staff is just amazing. They anticipate your needs, and everything they do is spot-on. We’ve never had any kind of problem or issue.”

Risteff also cites the hotel’s convenient location, near the company’s headquarters, and praises its food and beverage. “The food is just incredible,” she says.

Risteff also gives high marks to The Ritz-Carlton’s meeting space. “Its configuration is perfectly suited to our meetings,” she says. “For example, we hold our general sessions and cocktail receptions in a ballroom. The hotel also has...
Rock On
Jeffrey Wood, vice president, product management, at Hewlett-Packard, based an hour north of Denver in Ft. Collins, CO, is another fan of the Mile High City. For the last seven years, HP has held its annual “Rock On” training event in Denver, bringing in 1,000 attendees from across the U.S. and around the world. Last December, Wood hosted the five-day event for the first time at the AAA Four Diamond Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center (1,190 guest rooms; 60,600 sf of meeting space).

Like Risteff and many other planners of major meetings, Wood finds Denver very convenient thanks to its access. “It’s easy for us to bring in a large group from around the world,” Wood says. “And that is increasingly important to us, because the meeting is growing in size.”

As a result, he says, for the December meeting the company moved up to the Hyatt Regency and into the adjacent Colorado Convention Center for its general sessions and breakouts. “We simply outgrew the hotel we had been using previously,” Wood says. “And the Hyatt Regency is just a fantastic venue. They have enough sleeping rooms and suites to meet the exact needs of our group, plus they are located next to the convention center so that makes it very convenient. And moving the meeting itself into the convention center really allowed us to spread our wings.”

The event featured main stage presentations on two mornings, with more than 50 breakout sessions over ensuing days. “The facilities at the convention center are fantastic,” Wood says. “But an ever bigger benefit is their ability to accommodate us from a food-and-beverage point of view with excellent on-site catering.” The convention center provided F&B services for daily lunches and breaks. The Hyatt Regency catered an opening night welcome reception in one of its ballrooms. “The food and the service were really excellent,” Wood says.

On the second night, attendees had free time, so small groups of coworkers or team members could go to local restaurants for dinner. “And there are a lot of good places to eat around the hotel and convention center,” Wood says. “That is a huge factor for us, because social activity and networking are important parts of the meeting. And Denver is a very good destination for that because attendees can walk to lots of places near the hotel. And that means you don’t have to coordinate transportation to move people around. And another thing is that we have plenty of great options for breaks. We have plenty of great options for breaks. In addition to the facilities and amenities at Vail Cascade, Copanas and her attendees and management also like the cozy, exclusive Vail Village for its offsite venues including trendy local restaurants. One she favors is Mango’s Mountain Grill, in the nearby small town of Red Bluff. "And on the way there, you pass over two silver mines," Copanas says.

Jeffrey Wood, vice President Product Management Hewlett-Packard, Ft. Collins, CO

Rocky Mountain resorts

Rocky Mountain resorts have much to offer for in-person meetings. The Keystone Resort (above) and the adjacent Colorado Convention Center (right), owned by legendary former Denver Broncos quarterback John Elway. The restaurant offers private dining for up to 50 guests. Risteff also likes TAG, which offers a next-generation flourish on the small plates crate. “They do things like Kobe beef sliders,” Risteff says. “The place is very upscale and the food is just superb. They have a nice private room downstairs with a dedicated bar. We usually do heavy hors doeuvres there. That makes for a very nice evening.”
Catherine Salerno was named di-
rector of sales and marketing for the
Hamilton Park Hotel and Conference
Center, Florham Park, N.J. She most
recently was area director sales for HII
Hotels and Resorts in Virginia.

The Venetian and The Palazzo
have named Lori Aparicio as director
of national accounts Northeast; and
Karen Petty as director of national ac-
counts Midwest. Aparicio most recently
was director of national accounts/
pharmaceutical-medical specialist
for Gaylord Hotels, Nashville, TN.
Petty was director of vertical sales for
the Grande Colonial Hotel in La Jolla,
CA.

The St. Regis Aspen Resort, Aspen,
CO, has named Justin Todd as director
of sales and marketing. He was direc-
tor of sales and marketing at The Little
Nell, Residences at The Little Nell and
the Limelight Hotel, both in Aspen.

The Bonaventure Resort & Spa,
Weston, FL, has named Amy Hyde
as small markets sales manager; and
Deborah Puccio as senior sales manager.
Hyde was group sales manager for the
Charlestonville Albermarle Convention
& Visitors Bureau, Charlestonville, VA.
Puccio most recently served as national
sales manager at LaPlaya Beach & Golf
Resort, Naples, FL.

Alan Feuerman was appointed
director of sales and marketing at
The Westin Cleveland Downtown,
Cleveland, OH, scheduled to open in
spring 2014. He was most recently the
director of sales and marketing at
Embassy Suites Cleveland Downtown.

Mandarin Oriental, Atlanta, GA,
has named Tony Jones as senior cor-
porate sales manager. He formerly
served as business travel manager for
the Atlanta Marriott.

A choice of 3-day, 4-day, 5-day, 6-day, 7-days, or longer
Popular destinations including The Bahamas, Caribbean,
Hawaii, Mexican Riviera, Alaska, Bermuda, Canada &
New England and Europe
16 convenient U.S. domestic departure ports
We’re serious about our commitment to you and
your program.

We offer you the greatest choice and selection.
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activities and entertainment, complimentary meeting
space and venues, plus a/v equipment
Carnival Corporate University — creative team-building
Flexible value-added amenity program

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