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Because risk lurks around every corner, meeting pros need to stay abreast of all the latest trends and tips. PAGE 24

IMEX America, held in Las Vegas in October, provides numerous opportunities for networking. PAGE 28

Grand is back in Reno/Tahoe!

Grand Sierra Resort has recently completed a $25 million renovation, which includes 2,000 newly remodeled guest rooms and suites and a brand new spa. GSR features over 200,000 sq ft of flexible meeting and function space.

Scheduled for completion in July 2014 is a new $14 million indoor pool and private 25,000 sq ft function area that will accommodate up to 2,000 attendees for the most discerning reception crowd.

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GRAND IS BACK

GRAND SERRA RESORT AND CASINO

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Risk

TheMeetingMagazines.com • Corporate & Incentive Travel • March 2014
Exceptional customer service lives on. In addition to the fine customer service that premier hotel brands are known for, there’s more to the story.

In “Building Loyalty...Along with New and Renewed Spaces,” our cover story on new and renovated hotels, we learn that hoteliers also practice great customer service when they invest in their properties to improve and transform them to meet guest expectations.

Denise A. Diaz, who graces our cover, is director of communications for PepsiCo Warehouse Sales. A loyal customer of the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place, she was pleased that the Chicago hotel recently added a new 460-room tower and completely updated the existing 800-room tower. Her 600-participant program was held at the Hyatt last year, and Diaz confirmed, “We’re in RFP stage right now for July, and since the Hyatt has the capacity they will definitely be at the top of our short list.”

Great customer service that is recognized and rewarded makes the hard work and sacrifice well worth it for the hotels and their capable staffs. Thus, we invite you to take the opportunity to reward your favorite hotels, resorts, conference centers and convention and visitors bureaus that have demonstrated their overall commitment to excellence. Be sure to cast your ballot in Corporate & Incentive Travel magazines’ 30th Annual Awards of Excellence. Go to www.themeetingmagazines.com to cast your ballot by April 10th.

All of our 40,000+ subscribers are offered this opportunity to vote for those who have effectively hosted their meetings and incentive travel programs based on the criteria noted on the Awards page of our new, adaptive website, which is designed for optimal viewing no matter what device you use.

While you are there, check out all the latest industry news and features. For all three meetings magazines, we’ve organized our feature articles, destinations and perspective stories by category, so it’s easier than ever to find exactly what you want — fast.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher
Key Meeting Metrics and Higher Expectations For 2014 Reported by PCMA Meetings Market Survey

CHICAGO, IL — In March, PCMA Convene magazine published the results of its 23rd annual Meetings Market Survey. While the survey in recent years has included questions about other forces impacting the industry such as the use of social media and virtual events, it has cast, a spotlight on the key metrics of the industry’s health — attendance, budgets, exhibitors, revenues — consistently over the past two decades.

Of the 400-plus association, independent, and corporate planners who completed the latest survey in late 2013, 44 percent experienced an increase in attendance at their 2013 flagship event and 41 percent expected their attendance to grow in 2014. Thirty-three percent said they had more exhibitors at their main 2013 convention and nearly 30 percent expected exhibitor growth to continue this year.

The average exhibition footprint, however, shrunk from 124,000 sf in 2012 to 109,000 sf in 2013. While most survey respondents said leading meeting indicators were on the upswing, there were many who cited challenges negatively affecting particular sectors, including stricter guidelines for medical meetings and policies that cut in government-employee attendance — as well as rising hotel costs and airfares affecting all meetings.

www.pcma.org

News & Notes

Tropicana in Atlantic City Awaiting Approvals for Proposed Major Renovations

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ —Tropicana Entertainment Inc. recently announced a proposed series of significant renovation projects at Tropicana Casino & Resort Atlantic City. The multimillion-dollar capital improvements include major renovations to Tropicana AC’s boardwalk façade, the addition of retail areas, a new fitness center on Brighton Avenue and guest room renovations. Commencement of the projects is contingent upon receipt of various state and local permits and approvals. If approved, construction is anticipated to begin in 2014 with an expected completion date by late 2015.

The proposal includes the complete renovation of the casino’s boardwalk façade, which will boast a fully choreographed, high-energy interactive light and sound show via 20-foot-high light bollards and nine LED screens, which would run façade, which will boast a fully choreographed, high-energy interactive light and sound show via 20-foot-high light bollards and nine LED screens, which would run 30 percent expected exhibitor growth to continue this year. The average exhibition footprint, however, shrunk from 124,000 sf in 2012 to 109,000 sf in 2013. While most survey respondents said leading meeting indicators were on the upswing, there were many who cited challenges negatively affecting particular sectors, including stricter guidelines for medical meetings and policies that cut in government-employee attendance — as well as rising hotel costs and airfares affecting all meetings.

www.pcma.org

The Ritz-Carlton, Rancho Mirage Opens May 15

CHEVY CHASE, MD — One of Southern California’s most scenic venues is the setting for The Ritz-Carlton, Rancho Mirage, which is set to open on May 15. Less than two hours from Los Angeles and San Diego — with direct flights from the East Coast — the luxury desert resort is enveloped by the Santa Rosa Mountain range, on a 650-foot bluff overlooking Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley.

The hotel features 244 resort rooms and suites, residences, a two-story luxury spa, more than 30,000 sf of indoor-outdoor meeting space and destination dining with sweeping valley views. Resort amenities will offer cliffside swimming and serenity pools, and a destination spa unraveled in the Palm Springs Valley. Guests also have access to golf and tennis experiences with exclusive arrangements at premier clubs. The property is close to golf and tennis experiences with exclusive arrangements at premier clubs. The property is close to golf and tennis experiences with exclusive arrangements at premier clubs.

www.ritzcarlton.com/ranchomirage

Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego Transforms Meeting and Event Spaces

SAN DIEGO, CA — The Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego completed the first phase of its multimillion-dollar meeting space renovation project. The transformation includes a complete renovation of the first and fourth floor meeting spaces, including two ballrooms; significant upgrades to the wireless network, increasing from 40 Mbps to 450 Mbps, including the addition of wireless overlays to accommodate increased wireless device usage; additional hang-points for audio-video production creating more floor space for event use; comfortable “eight-hour banquet” chairs with flex backs and a webbed seat design; the addition of three meeting planner offices in close proximity to the meeting space; upgrades to the wayfinding system used; and more. The entire project is scheduled to be completed by 2015.

www.manchestergrand.hyatt.com

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H osting meetings and events with international participants has become the norm for many organizations. Making sure a gathering with multicultural participants is successful requires careful forethought, extensive planning and immediate attention to detail. Due to the tremendous complexity of internationally attended events, always consider hiring an experienced global event planning agency to help you. Their firsthand knowledge and extensive network of government, transportation, hotel, facility and destination partners will be invaluable.

Whether you decide to plan your own event or work with an agency, here are nine critical factors to keep in mind to make your event successful.

1. Analyze Your Potential Attendees’ Country of Passport Origin
   It’s important to know what passports your participants hold — not necessarily where they are currently living. This will determine what destinations can be considered and how long ahead you’ll need to plan for visas. You don’t want to select a destination that won’t allow citizens of certain countries to enter.

2. Plan Farther Ahead Than You Normally Would for a Domestic Event
   Providing letters of invitation and then obtaining passports, visas and other entry requirements can take months. With today’s volatile political situations, governmental agencies often can be extremely slow and methodical in processing paperwork. Attendees should be working on gaining necessary documentation at least six to eight months before your event takes place.

3. Consider Your Event Site Carefully
   While smaller countries, cities and out-of-the-way resorts certainly can be appealing in terms of experience and cost, they may not be able to provide the support services you will need to serve your international guests. Make sure your destination can easily provide:

   • Convenient airline connections. For events taking place over seven or fewer days, travelers will want to have as few connections as possible and reasonable layovers in connecting cities; should a flight be cancelled, you don’t want your guests stranded for several days waiting for the next inbound or outbound flight.

   • Translation services. You may need translators at airport greeters, at the hospitality desk, at the check-in desk, to accompany tours and offsite events, and to attend dinners and meetings. Larger cities will have more resources to draw upon.

   • Culturally appropriate menus and nearby restaurants. For example, the Indian diet is very specific so you may need to hire an Indian chef if you have a large Indian guest list; South Americans prefer to dine later, so nearby restaurants that are open late will be desirable. Venues should have the expertise and flexibility to provide basic food needs for the variety of diets your guests may have.

   • Embassy or consulate support. Should a guest run into any difficulties, illnesses or crisis back home, help from their country’s embassy or consulate can be invaluable.

   • Acceptance of diversity. Small out-of-the-way places can be very insular in any country, so be sure the location is generally welcoming to international guests with very different customs.

   • Smoking availability. Most U.S. hotels restrict smoking or are smoke-free. Yet, because many international travelers smoke, you’ll need to work with your venue to accommodate smokers in the U.S. as well as accommodate U.S. non-smokers when in other countries.

   • Access to services for foreign travelers. This can include multilingual hotel staff, currency exchange availability onsite or nearby, international power and phone jacks in rooms, and foreign television stations and newspapers.

4. Study Calendars Before Picking the Event Dates
   Bank holidays, national holidays and religious holidays can impact whether guests choose to attend and what services will be available. For example, Muslim guests will not travel over Ramadan, and U.S. guests will want to be home over the Thanksgiving holiday. Most travelers like to do some shopping and touring so it’s important that stores are open and local attractions aren’t extremely busy with local tourists.

5. Set Expectations With Pre-Trip Communications
   Develop webinars, videos, interactive Web platforms and print communications that carefully explain to the international travelers what the customs are of the event destination. Encourage travelers to immerse themselves in this new cultural experience. Guests may choose not to change their own habits to adapt to different customs, but they must at least be aware of them.

For example:

   • Time expectations. In some cultures, a time is merely a suggestion not a mandate. If you will stick to a specific schedule, make that clear. If dinner is scheduled at 7:00 p.m., make sure guests know that the food will be served at that time. Or if a tour leaves at 8:00 a.m., the bus will not wait for late-comers. Likewise if the cultural norms are that an 8:00 p.m. dinner means you can show up as late as 9:00 p.m., make that clear too. Also describe if the country uses 12-hour or 24-hour time notations.

   • Food expectations. Describe what foods are normally served at that destination for breakfast, lunch, dinner and receptions. Provide lists of foods and how they are customarily prepared and eaten. If you will provide alternative menus, let the travelers know.

   • Clothing and dress expectations. In addition to weather, guests must know what clothing is considered appropriate in hotel lobbies, at meetings, on tours, for parties, when entering religious or government sites, etc. Strolling in the hotel lobby in swimwear is fine in the Caribbean, but not acceptable in many other locales.

   • Gender mixing. If attendees have gender restrictions at public events such as dinners or on buses, guests need to be aware if your event will offer separate accommodations or if they will need to accept a mixed group. They should also be aware if your staff is mixed gender.

   • Behavior expectations. Educate attendees about how to properly greet others (formally or by first name), how to approach a handshake, how to distribute a business card, the significance of a head nod or a specific hand gesture, the appropriateness of maintaining eye contact, and other local customs that can create very unprofessional impressions.
Attendees should be working on gaining necessary documentation at least six to eight months before your event takes place.

Mary MacGregor
joined BI WORLDWIDE (BIW) in January of 2013 as corporate vice president – event solutions. She comes to BIW after serving as the leader of business development, events and marketing for other major third-party organizations. In her current role she is responsible for all operating areas of the BIW Event Solutions Group including purchasing, design, delivery, group air, individual incentive travel, onsite operations, technology, communications and merchandise. She leads a team of more than 175 industry professionals who deliver memorable experiences and measurable results for their customers. In 2011, Mary served as global president of Site (Society of Incentive & Travel Professionals). For more information, visit BIWorldwide.com or email info@biworldwide.com.
Meeting planners are entering a seller’s market, causing site selection and RFPing to take up an increasing amount of their time. No longer fishing around for the best deals, planners must research carefully and zero in on a few choice venues before sending out RFPs.
Just like any business economy, when Daiichi Sankyo Inc. “Hotels are being booked, they fit in your budget and are available on your dates is becoming increasingly difficult in many cases, especially when booking in close.

“We do try, whenever we can, when we get a green light on a budget, to book as far in advance as we can and lock down a contract, because that kind of procedure works best for everyone’s budget,” Brennan shares. “The venue knows they’re getting the business. They can check it off the list. Where we run into a snag is when we book closer in. That’s when they can ride the rails and get more money for the room.”

“The leftovers might be a little higher priced and that’s why no one booked them earlier, but also, they know they have you,” she continues. “They can look at the sourcing system and see there’s no rooms for that block, and they can say that we’re the only one with space available and we’re really going to ride the high, align a price and structure. When that happens, I try to book something else 12 months out and even out of the budget, but locking in multi-year contracts is also a priority right now. Especially for meetings that are cookie-cutter, where the agenda stays the same, two nights, three days. I actually just did three years and get a major deal from some big hotel chains.

“For general business meetings, we like to have at least six months notice,” she says. “Incentives are 12 months minimum, but that would be a rush. That’s the latest you can book. For small meetings, we sometimes get two weeks, but for a smaller meeting, it’s typically running three months. That’s because budgets are coming in and business owners are finding money and saying, ‘Yes, we can do it.’”

“When you book close in, in today’s competitive market, with a very specific space request, you can end up with very few viable options. ‘For my upcoming Dallas meeting, I just sent out a bunch of requests and all the properties are already spoken for. I’ve been running through this problem for some time now, but some of those I did decline fairly quickly because they just gave me a room that I thought wasn’t really big enough,’” Watanabe says. “For U-shaped seating for 30 people, they wanted to give me a room that was less than 1,000 sf. In theory they would fit, but I can’t make them feel like they’re in a sardine can.

“A few people said, ‘For those dates, that’s all I’ve got,’ and a few said, ‘I can give you this room, but it might be a little too big,’” she explains. “I’m going to lean toward the largest rooms I can possibly get, knowing that even though I have a target number of attendees, it could grow, and I don’t want to have to turn people away. Now, 10 weeks out, what I’m working with is that the attendee size increased so I went back to both the hotel, and she may not be able to give me that space, but it might be a room that’s all I’ve got,” and a few said, ‘I can give you this room, but it might be a little too big,’” she explains. “I’m going to lean toward the largest rooms I can

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“I do try to rotate it,” she says. “In 2012, our meeting was on the West Coast in San Francisco, and in 2011 it was in New Orleans. I always try to pick a city I haven’t been to before and one that is easy for attendees to get in and out of. For 2013, I thought it was easy to do San Francisco’s sister city, which is Boston. We also acquired a company in

Dream destinations, accommodations and meeting spaces that are guaranteed to wow all of your attendees may still be out there, but the chance that they fit in your budget and are available on your dates is becoming increasingly less likely the more the industry recovers from the recession.

“‘But sometimes...they want to go off-property and experience Dallas. That meeting happens to have the budget where I can do the transportation, but oftentimes, the client will say, ‘We can go offsite but it has to be walkable.’”

DIANE WATANABE, CMP Senior Meeting and Events Planner, CSP Business Media, Mesa, AZ

Selecting a destination includes discovering districts like Sixth Street — the heart of Austin’s live entertainment scene, which boasts great food and live music options.

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WHICH CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION?

While competition from other meetings is putting a strain on the site choices available to planners, internal politics also are increasingly narrowing the field.

“It’s been more difficult recently in a way, because the sales team is who really sells the meeting, and they don’t understand my logistical needs,” says Watanabe. “Sometimes I’m lucky enough to book seven to eight months

in advance and sometimes I’m pushing the envelope and booking four to five months out. For example, I’m currently trying to book something for mid-May. I don’t want them to feel like they’re in a sardine can.

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Some Things Never Change, But Change Is on the Horizon

I’m having the meeting, so it’s the right time of year to visit that destination.”

Walkable Cities Are Drawing Planners in Drovers

One of the best ways to enchant attendees and keep costs down is to let them explore their destination — not constantly move them from bus to meeting room to bus to ballroom. If the destination is too large or too spread out, though, becomes a challenge.

“I think it’s important to be able to walk because we do have some free walking distance, and that makes it a little bit easier,” says Watanabe. “Some clients don’t have a problem being in a banquet room for all meals, so sometimes if they stay on property if the restaurant has a private dining room, but sometimes, like the Dallas meeting, they want to go off property and experience Dallas. That meeting happens to have the budget where I can do the transportation, but oftentimes, the client will say, ‘We can go offsite but it has to be walkable.’”

While “walkable” has become an important buzzword when researching destinations, it’s also code for a more intangible sensation that sets your events apart. “I like my group to still have some feeling of intimacy,” says Rhoads. “That also is key in terms of picking a city. I want to keep it homegrown, close and informal, and I have to pick a property that allows me to do that. I don’t want to pick a convention center. That isn’t the experience that I want, I want historic, intimate venues and where I can keep everything in one place.”

New York City leads the 2014 Walk Score list of most walkable cities followed by San Francisco, Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia.

Lowell, a suburb of Boston, in late 2012. But I try to look at the time of year that I’m having the meeting, so it’s the right time of year to visit that destination.”

Walkable cities with accessible downtowns (or pseudo downtowns, as you’ll find in Las Vegas), make it easy for attendees and keep costs down is to let them explore their destination — not constantly move them from bus to meeting room to bus to ballroom. If the destination is too large or too spread out, though, becomes a challenge.

“I think it’s important to be able to walk because we do have some free time in the afternoon,” says Rhoads. Walkable cities with accessible downtowns (or pseudo downtowns, as you’ll find in Las Vegas), make it easy for attendees and keep costs down is to let them explore their destination — not constantly move them from bus to meeting room to bus to ballroom. If the destination is too large or too spread out, though, becomes a challenge.

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Building Loyalty
...Along With New and Renewed Spaces

By Patrick Simms

Great customer service in the hospitality industry is not just the province of the staff, whether a friendly concierge or a resourceful convention services manager. Hoteliers themselves practice customer service, in a broad sense, when they invest in their properties to render them more appealing and functional for incoming guests. Serving longtime clients in this way is also important: Their longevity does not necessarily mean they think the hotel is ideal in every respect, and they may well have in mind certain renovations or expansions that should be undertaken. If more years go by and the hotelier does not make the property investments those reliable clients are looking for, they might find another lodging option. Smart hoteliers will not take that risk.

First-Tier Refreshment
When a hotel in a first-tier city expands, planners take note. Lodging space is always at a premium in towns such as Chicago, so more rooms create more opportunities for groups. Last summer, the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place completed a $110 million improvement project that made it Hyatt’s fourth-largest hotel in the world with the addition of a new 460-guest room tower, along with a complete renovation of the existing 800-room tower.

Denise A. Diaz, director of communications for PepsiCo, provides the perfect example of how renovation investment helps to create loyalty and repeat business, in her case, at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place.

“The reason the (Hyatt’s) new tower is an advantage is because in the summer in Chicago there are so many citywides that I have a really hard time getting all my people in one place,” Diaz notes. She plans a national sales meeting every July for 600 participants coming in nationally. The program was held at the Hyatt last year, and “we’re in RFP stage right now for July, and since the Hyatt has the capacity they will definitely be at the top of our short list,” she says. The hotel houses 50,000 sf of function space, and the recent investment also redesigned the 4,000-sf Prairie Room and renovated the 25,000-sf Hyatt Conference Center. “A couple of years ago I used the conference center for training, and I really liked that space,” Diaz comments. “One of the things that’s really important to me, even for a very simple meeting, is a high ceiling, and their conference center has that.”

The Windy City is also home to the world’s largest Hyatt, the 2,019-room Hyatt Regency Chicago, with 228,000 sf of function space, and five restaurants and lounges. Last April the hotel completed a $168 million renovation that included all the guest rooms in both West and East Towers and featured plenty of creative accents, such as black-and-white images of Chicago by local photographer Anthony Tahlier. The final phase of the project renovated the East Tower lobby, in addition to the hotel’s meeting and event spaces, and added four new dining concepts: Stetsons Modern Steak+Sushi, American Craft Kitchen & Bar, Market Chicago and Big Bar. And in keeping with the creative emphasis, the hotel enlisted photographer and abstract artist Christopher Kennedy to produce unique Photo Luminism artwork for display in the Grand Ballroom lobby.

PepsiCo held its national sales meeting at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place last year, and now, following a $110 million renovation, the hotel is on PepsiCo’s short list for their July 2014 meeting with 600 participants. (Right) The hotel’s newly redesigned Prairie Room.
Loyal Customer

Ongoing upgrades are just as vital for customer loyalty even in more out of the way locales, such as Snow King Hotel at Snow King Resort, a Benchmark Resort in Jackson Hole, WY, which completed a $17 million renovation of its 203 guest rooms in December. The funds also went toward improving the exterior, public space, spa and salon, and additions such as a new restaurant and activity center. The interiors of all function rooms now have new carpet, wall and window treatments, and artwork.

But it was the revitalized guest rooms that were most significant to Dublin, CA-based Contemporary Forums, a company that stages national continuing education conferences for health care professionals. Two or three of those meetings are held every summer at the Snow King, and according to Pam Jenkins-Wallace, MS, VP. Program Development, “It’s a big draw for families,” says Jenkins-Wallace. “They were very dated and the bathrooms in the guest rooms were difficult to manage. So when the resort finally went into the big renovation, we were tremendously relieved. We were there last July, and in June they had pretty much finished up everything that was essential to us. They delivered on what they promised, so everything was functioning when we were there. Our repeat guests were very impressed and very pleased, they felt it was good value for their money.”

Guest rooms now feature new beds and soft goods, new furniture, carpet, wall décor and updated bathrooms. Flat-screen televisions, modern refrigerators and a state-of-the-art phone system also have been installed.

“Exciting Renovations”

Renovations are often dubbed “transformations” when they involve sweeping physical changes that create a very different experience for guests. According to Lesley Kinney, communications manager for Madison, MS-based Hood Packaging Corporation, attendees of the company’s annual HR meeting were tremendously relieved. “They had updated the carpet in the rooms, the lighting, wall décor and updated bathrooms. Flat-screen televisions, modern refrigerators and a state-of-the-art phone system also have been installed.”

“Guests found them so welcome,” Kinney says. “That’s a big draw for families,” says Jenkins-Wallace. “They were very dated and the bathrooms in the guest rooms were difficult to manage. So when the resort finally went into the big renovation, we were tremendously relieved. We were there last July, and in June they had pretty much finished up everything that was essential to us. They delivered on what they promised, so everything was functioning when we were there. Our repeat guests were very impressed and very pleased, they felt it was good value for their money.”

“The Broadmoor Hotel Irvine Jamboree Center in Irvine, CA, is undergoing a complete makeover, which will be completed this year.

Eco-Friendly Meeting Space

The Coral Classroom at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Destin, FL.

The upper pool deck and fire pits at Snow King Hotel in Jackson Hole, WY.

When the resort finally went into the big renovation, we were tremendously relieved. . . . They delivered on what they promised.”

The Coral Classroom at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Destin, FL.

“**The Broadmoor Hotel Irvine Jamboree Center in Irvine, CA, is undergoing a complete makeover, which will be completed this year.**

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**The Coral Classroom at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Destin, Fl.**

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45th Street in the heart of the theater district, the property offers 8,000 sf of meeting space, including a 2,000-sf ballroom and 1,400-sf outdoor terrace event space overlooking the city. Attendees can revitalize in the 4,200-sf spa, and enjoy river-to-river views and indoor-outdoor fireplaces at a 54th-floor rooftop lounge set to open this spring. Guest rooms are spacious, averaging 364 sf.

“Summer in the City” will bring the opening of the Park Hyatt New York on West 57th Street, two blocks from Central Park. All 210 guest rooms are spacious, averaging 364 sf. The Grand Parlor at the new Downtown Grand Las Vegas Hotel & Casino.

“We had our meeting last year just a few weeks after (Hilton Sandestin) completed their renovation, and it was astounding.”

Lesley Kinney, Communications Manager, Hood Packaging Madison, MS

The Broadmoor assured us they were going to be finished (in May), and I’ve seen other improvement projects completed in a timely fashion.”

Will Brown, Director of Marketing, Kinder Morgan, Houston, TX

Central Park. All 210 guest rooms are at least 475 sf, and more than 8,000 sf of “residential style” function space will be available, including a ballroom, 1,050-sf outdoor terrace, three breakout rooms and a boardroom. A 20-meter indoor swimming pool will be located on the 20th floor.

In Southern California, The Irvine Jamboree Center in downtown Irvine is undergoing both a brand and building makeover. Formerly the Hyatt Regency Irvine, the 536-room hotel is now owned and operated by Irvine Company Resort Properties, which also owns and operates The Resort at Pelican Hill in Newport Beach, CA; and the Island Hotel Newport Beach. The Hotel Irvine Jamboree Center, which was recently accepted into the Associated Luxury Hotels International portfolio, is beginning a comprehensive “reinvestment” project scheduled for completion in 2014. The work will focus first on redesigning the 536 guest rooms, and the meeting and event space; followed by the outdoor areas, first-floor restaurant and lounges. A spokesperson notes, “Each floor of the 14-story property will be targeted individually in phases, allowing day-to-day business to operate as usual. Each guest room will be outfitted with vibrant new color palettes and contemporary designs, and our social spaces will reflect the same chic style. We’re eager to welcome business, social and leisure guests to this new, stylish escape.” Hotel Irvine has 36,000 sf of meeting space, including a 14,700-sf ballroom.

Marriott seems to be running on all cylinders when it comes to new property development. This May, the company will make a very significant contribution to the East Coast meetings market with the debut of the 1,175-room Marriott Marquis Washington, DC, housing 105,000 sf of indoor-outdoor meeting space, five dining outlets and a state-of-the-art, bi-level health club. Attendees will be able to walk via underground concourse to the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, as well as to the National Mall and all the surrounding tourist attractions. Designed to be LEED Silver accredited, the hotel will feature a glass atrium lobby filled with natural light and an appropriately patriotic 56-foot sculpture, “The Birth of the American Flag,” by sculptor Rodney Carroll.

And in the spring of 2015, the JW Marriott Austin (currently under construction) will bring more than 1,000 guest rooms to the “Live Entertainment Capital of the World,” not to mention 110,000 sf of banquet space and 35 meeting rooms.

As if these sizable developments aren’t enough, the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority in Chicago recently announced the selection of Marriott as operator of the 1,200-room headquarters hotel that is scheduled to open in late 2016 next door to McCormick Place. The new hotel will have the distinction of being the only Marriott Marquis in Metropolitan Chicago.

Another major opening complementing a convention center is the Omni Nashville Hotel, which opened its doors in September a few months after the debut of the adjacent Music City Center, which houses more than 1.2 million sf of function space. A LEED Silver Certification, New Construction for New Construction, the 800-room hotel offers a formidable 48,000 sf of meeting space, as well as a physical connection to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, which presents intriguing special event options.

Next door to a very different kind of museum — the Mob Museum in Las Vegas — is the new Downtown Grand Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, which opened in November. The 634-room hotel offers stylish restaurants (including a San Francisco-style steakhouse) and event spaces such as the “industrial chic” 3,000-sf Grand Parlor, which can accommodate up to 200 attendees. Open this spring is Picnic, the property’s signature rooftop venue, where groups of up to 1,500 can gather and enjoy a restaurant-bar, infinity pool, entertainment area and cabanas overlooking downtown Las Vegas.

Debuting this July at the Grand Sierra Resort and Casino in Reno, NV, will be a new indoor pool and a new 25,000-sf reception area, which will accommodate up to 2,000 attendees. This on the heels of a recently completed $25 million project that remediated all 2,000 guest rooms and added a spa. The resort’s 200,000 sf of flexible meeting and convention space allows any size meeting — with up to 4,000 attendees.

The new hotel will have the distinction of being the only Marriott Marquis in Metropolitan Chicago.

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The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa Tucson
An East Coast gaming destination has recently announced proposed major renovations: Tropicana Casino & Resort in Atlantic City, NJ, is awaiting approval on a $35 million plan that would completely renovate the casino’s boardwalk facade and feature a new, fully choreographed, interactive light and sound show via 20-foot high light bollards and nine LED screens. Also in the proposed plan, all 434 guest rooms in the North Tower would be renovated; three new retailers and a fitness club would be added; and the Fin’s dining room expanded.

Tucson’s The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa, a Southwestern desert gem with a Santa Catalina Mountain setting, is looking shiny and new following an 18-month, $35 million, resort-wide renovation that was completed late last summer — the first since 1986. All 487 guest rooms underwent a top-to-bottom remodeling, which included the addition of 42-inch HDTVs, work desks with charging stations, expanded walk-in showers and more. The 60,000-sf conference space was updated as was the grand lobby, from which guests are treated to dramatic views of the mountains. The five pool areas were refreshed with new cabanas, fire pits with fountains and travertine stonework. The greens and bunkers at La Paloma Country Club’s Jack Nicklaus Signature golf courses also were refreshed and resurfaced. The club’s tennis courts also received new surfaces. The resort is partnering with the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum to create a Sonoran Desert Walkway, showcasing indigenous flora and fauna, set for completion in mid to late spring.

Longtime group clients of a hotel, such as Contemporary Forum’s patron of the Snow King Hotel, enjoy many advantages: For example, the planner and attendees know they can count on quality service and amenities based on prior experience; negotiating leverage often can be obtained based on volume of business; planning time is reduced due to familiarity with the property and local area; and many attendees are often on a first-name basis with staff, who have become acquainted with their individual preferences. At the same time, there can be that “same old, same old” feeling among attendees that planners want to avoid, and a renovation — particularly a “transformation” — effectively makes the experience more engaging for repeat participants.

The crop of new properties that opened last year or will in the near future, given that they are all top-tier lodging products in key meeting destinations, will no doubt have their own longtime group clients in the future.

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The Arizona Deck at The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa in Tucson, AZ. The hotel completed a major, resort-wide makeover, including new walk-in showers, expanded conference space and a new look and feel throughout the property.

Rendering of a proposed new retail location that is part of a major $35 million renovation plan at Tropicana Casino & Resort in Atlantic City.
Risk Management

Security Should be Job 1
How to Prepare for Threats Ranging From Cybertheft to Kidnapping

By John Buchanan

Since 9/11, the general notion of meeting and event security has evolved from acute concerns about a terrorist attack to much more practical and likely threats, such as hackers stealing sensitive company information or an employee dying during the meeting. However, even though the focus has shifted to more likely eventualities, the underlying concern remains the same — legal liability of some sort and a hefty

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an onsite disaster, such as a fire, Clay says. “A few years back, we didn’t get a lot of questions about that, but now people are really concerned about things like external threats and staging areas in case of some sort of disaster,” Clay says. “People now ask about our ability to respond to a range of emergencies that could happen on property.” Specifically, he says he gets a lot of requests for details of the resort’s emergency evacuation plan.

The possibility of there being an active shooter on-property is a hot topic right now, Clay says. “So we get asked how we would respond to that — what our exact procedures are.”

“Although concerns about things like a shooter or a fire prompt a lot of questions from planners these days, the more immediate concern — and the one that needs an equal amount of attention — is internal considerations within the meeting group,” Clay says.

Full Disclosure

“Trust is a big part of the process,” Clay says. “If meeting planners have to be prepared to sit down and go over with us everything they think could possibly happen at the meeting that could require some kind of emergency response.”

For example, the group include attendees with a heart condition or someone who suffered a heart attack in the past? Do you have any disgruntled former employees who have made any kind of threat against the company? Has the company received any external threats and if so, from where and from whom?”

Specifically, he says he gets a lot of requests for details of the resort’s emergency evacuation plan.

“This is internal considerations within the attendee population, rather than from the outside.”

“When those kinds of questions are addressed, Clay says, “there is sometimes something we learn that could occur, whether that’s a medical condition or some kind of threat. The point is that we need to know everything that the planner knows about the kinds of things they might encounter during the meeting.”

It’s only with such complete disclosure and knowledge, Clay says, “that a full spectrum of protections can be properly put in place.”

Threats From Within

Palomino points out that in reality, the most likely threats to a group originate from within the attendee population, rather than from the outside.

Therefore, at a large meeting open to third-party attendees, every registrant must be fully vetted. “You have to make sure you know who everyone is at your company and also understand exactly why people are at the meeting.”

A reliable and disgruntled employee who is planning to leave the company after the meeting — and who is planning to take very valuable information with them to inflate their market value. “And it’s hard to know who those people are,” Palomino says.

Best practices for onsite security under such circumstances “start at the curb,” Palomino says. “You really need to make sure that the only people pulling up to the curb are people that belong at the meeting. And at that point, people who know who the attendees are must be checking badges to make sure everyone showing up is a legitimate attendee. And you have to have people identifying and challenging anyone suspicious before they ever get into the hotel or venue.”

And because of the importance of doing that properly, Palomino says, “the first touch point,” Palomino says. “You don’t want a sayng person nel fel at $10 or $15 an hour to clear people into the meeting, because they don’t know your people, and they don’t know what to look for. You have to have people there that know each and every attendee and can identify them.”

Once an attendee is inside the venue, identities need to be checked and confirmed again when they check in. “And there are a lot of meetings these days where that is not done properly.”

The reason is they think it’s a very lucrative global enterprise. “So, they don’t do anything,” Palomino says. “They’re using their cell phones to check into the meeting and that’s the way the world is going, I think international security is going to become more and more of a concern.”

And because of the importance of preventing that type of threat, companies now often provide expensive around-the-clock bodyguard protection for top executives at international meetings, unless they want to roll the dice on an even more expensive problem, Palomino says.

“A specific and very real concern internationally is the kidnapping of executives for ransom, which companies have been known to pay and then keep the incident quiet,” Palomino cited the example of a CEO kidnapped overseas not long ago. And the company paid a ransom in the millions. “And nobody ever heard anything about it,” Palomino says.

“Even the company kept it quiet. And that is not that uncommon anymore.”

“Unfortunately, he adds, he does not think the average meeting planner or attendee understands the vulnerability of a public Wi-Fi network. “The reason is they think it’s more valuable — the information being disseminated at the meeting, the great er the threat. “And because industrial espionage has become a very lucrative global enterprise. “So you have to be extremely careful today,” Palomino says.

And no vulnerability is greater than that of unprotected wireless Internet service, Brill says.

Unfortunately, he adds, he does not think the average meeting planner or attendee understands the vulnerability of a public Wi-Fi network. “The reason is they think it’s more valuable — the information being disseminated at the meeting, the greater the threat. “And because industrial espionage has become a very lucrative global enterprise. “So you have to be extremely careful today,” Palomino says.

And now that more and more major hotel flags are introducing free Wi-Fi throughout the property as a selling tool, the threat is being further exacerbated.

The good news is that protection via the use of VPN (virtual private network) technology is also now readily available and inexpensive, Brill says. And all meeting planners should out-transferring the data or storing it on the laptop.

The International Situation

To the extent that genuine external physical threats exist today, they are largely limited to overseas destinations, particularly in places such as Ukraine and Venezuela, where violent political upheavals could have created severe problems for a meeting group that happened by coincidence to be there when the trouble started.

“That’s the issue that currently keeps me awake at night, because for an overseas meeting, when my attendees are landing, I’m sleeping,” Palomino says, adding that international arrivals and departures are now the greatest concern.

“And the way the world is going, I think international security is going to become more and more of a concern.”

Alan Brill

Sensor Managing Director

Kroll

Secaucus, NJ

“I think it’s a very valuable practice for any kind of machine anymore,” Brill says. “If in kind any of external device, such as a thumb drive or other kind of secure memory chip.”

“In fact, you shouldn’t store data on any kind of external device, such as a thumb drive or other kind of secure memory chip.”

Implementing the solution

To implement VPN security as a standard practice for all meetings and events, Brill adds. He also advises that if valuable intellectual property or other sensitive data is being discussed at the meeting, it should never be stored on a laptop or smartphone.

“If in fact, you shouldn’t store data on any kind of machine anymore,” Brill says. “Keep it on some kind of external device, such as a thumb drive or other kind of secure memory chip.”

For example, if they are discussing something that is protected, but they never think about that.”

And now that more and more major hotel flags are introducing free Wi-Fi to meetings, the more true that is.”

Data Theft

The vulnerability of sensitive data or intellectual property to theft is a prima-
I t used to be that content was king. If you looked at meetings a decade ago, says Shuli Golovinski, founder and CEO of events software company Newton-strand and an innovator in this space, “It was 95 percent content and five percent networking.” But that’s changed — attendees want more networking and less content (something they can always get online).

Meetings and events technology maven Corbin Ball, CSP, CMP, says that while networking has always had a role to play in events (“One good contact can pay for an entire trip,” he points out), the problem is that planners have never really had the right tools to facilitate it. “For years the key networking tool has been the name badge,” he says, adding that networking formats such as cocktail parties and receptions hadn’t changed much either.

What’s Wrong With Cocktail Parties?

The problem, says Golovinski, is that these conventional networking activities don’t work very well.

For example, a 15-minute networking break built into an all-day meeting program may work just fine for some individuals, particularly if they are extroverted. “So you may be a very open and easy-going guy who can start a conversation with anyone, but I’m kind of a

Key Strategies and New Tools for Effective Networking Events

By Michael Bassett

Networking

Making the Right Connections

The show floor at last year’s IMEX America offered countless opportunities for networking.
“In our discussions with our director of corporate responsibility, we kept bearing ourselves talk about how the quality and quantity of networking at these events was limited.”

Justin Murrill, Global Sustainability Manager
American Micro Devices
Sunnyvale, CA

"Speed networking," which is akin to March 2014 •

says AMD's Murrill. "...It's the kind of discussion that will more likely lead to a continued relationship after that initial interaction.

AMD provided a unique networking opportunity in conjunction with the South by Southwest ECO Conference in Austin, TX. Attendees

Golovinski says. Rather taken aback, with a woman who really didn't have could provide.

typical ‘who do you work for and what
time — I'm not going to network
of time — I'm not going to network

So for people like me with that kind of personalty, that 15 minutes is a waste of time — I'm not going to network with people during that break.

Speed Networking
Another networking activity is "speed networking," which is akin to speed dating and which Golovinski says is potentially a "huge waste of time." He recalls a speed-networking event he attended for the events industry in London in which he spent five minutes with a woman who really didn’t have a clue about what Golovinski did or could provide.

"I asked her what she did, and she told me she ran a dry cleaning service," Golovinski says. Rather taken aback, he asked her why she was attending a function for the events industry and was told that many of her clients were from that industry so she considered herself to be an "events professional" who wanted to grow her business.

"So I told her — with all due respect — that this had been a total waste of my last five minutes," he says. "I would prefer to spend 15 minutes with a planner instead of five minutes with the dry cleaning lady!"

In addition, Golovinski adds, from a numbers point of view, speed networking doesn’t make a lot of sense. If there are 50 people in the room and a planner wants all of them to meet each other in five-minute segments, that works out to about five hours of non-stop speaking.

"So the question becomes that in a meeting or conference — some of which can be as big as 20,000 people — how do you identify the five or 10 people that you would like to meet throughout the event," he says.

Corporate Responsibility as Networking
American Micro Devices (AMD), a multinational semiconductor company headquartered in Sunnyvale, CA, was the driving force behind the integration of a volunteer corporate responsibility event at a South by Southwest (SXSW) ECO Conference in Austin, TX.

It was the first time this kind of event had been integrated into the ECO Conference and, according to AMD Global Sustainability Manager Justin Murrill, it was inspired by a certain sense of disappointment with experiences at similar events in the past.

"When we come back from a lot of these events we talk about what we learned and what we liked about these conferences," says Murrill. "And in our discussions with our director of corporate responsibility, we kept hearing ourselves talk about how the quality and quantity of networking at these events was limited. The other thing we are supposed to get excited about is the cause that we were there to support, but there was never any kind of action taken at the events — just decided to do something about it."

In coordinating the corporate responsibility aspect of the event, AMD collaborated with several local businesses such as Dell and Whole Foods, as well as the City of Austin, Austin Community College and the University of Texas at Austin. It also partners with nonprofits such as Keep Austin Beautiful, the Waller Creek Conservancy, American YouthWorks and the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center.

In conjunction with the conference, AMD sponsored the cleanup of Waller Creek, inviting hundreds of volunteers to help clean up trash along the urban waterway. Starting on the University of Texas campus, volunteers worked their way down to Lady Bird Lake, picking up litter by foot and by kayak. The day-long project covered 25 blocks of creek through central Austin and included tree planting on the UT campus.

So not only did AMD maximize attendance involvement in an activity that complemented what the conference was all about (environmental action), it also created a model it hopes it can follow in other events. And it did so in a manner that provided multiple networking opportunities for its employees — one that differed from the traditional reception/cocktail party that doesn’t always work.

So what did this event achieve from a networking perspective, that more conventional methods didn't?

"I think there is an intrinsic value associated with the activity," says Murrill. "So it creates a deeper, more meaningful experience when it comes to building relationships. It's a much different experience that facilitates deeper conversations and gets people beyond the 'tacit knowledge' — the kind of actionable intelligence that people can use to solve their business problems.

"The most important aspect of Sage City, says Michel, is that it’s designed to foster networking not only during the actual event, but before and after as well. Before the Sage Summit takes place, AMD customers are contacted and interested information is gathered about an attendee’s background, interests, passions, concerns, and other local business situations such as “name five people you’d like to sit next to during dinner.” The idea, Michel says, is to give attendees the opportunity to connect with people who work in the same space and are like-minded, "before they ever got to the event."

At the actual conference, the two-hour live networking event worked like a ‘theater in the round’ — in this case a ballroom that on its perímeter had a series of villages representing the kinds of different jobs the attendees performed, with Michel in the center acting as the lead facilitator. And at each village participants had the chance to talk about hot topics collected from the attendees during the registration process. The groups met for two 40-minute rotations giving the attendees the opportunity to network in different villages and rotate. Michel also says that one concern was that “kept them up at night.”

"This got people connected from the get-go," says Michel, "and those connections built up during the week." And was also a part of the process that fostered the creation of the "Sage City online community," which gives the attendees the opportunity to continue the conversation that began back in Washington, DC.

This kind of emphasis on network combined with education is critical, because that’s really what conference attendees want, says Michel. "Networking includes both the creation of the ‘Sage City online community,’ which gives the attendees the opportunity to continue the conversation that began back in Washington, DC."

"The question becomes that in a meeting or conference — some of which can be as big as 20,000 people — how do you identify the five or 10 people that you would like to meet throughout the event."

Shuli Golovinski, CEO/Founder
Newtonstrad
Lakewood, NJ

Colorado Springs, CO, helped organize what is called “Sage City” for Sage Summit 2013, a huge annual gathering of customers and business partners of Sage, an accounting and business management software supplier for startup, small and mid-size businesses. It was held at the Gaylord National Resort and Conference Center in Washington, DC.

Instead of an opening general session with a keynote speaker, the summit features Sage City, a two-hour live conference networking event that allows people to meet and interact with what Michel refers to as “tacit knowledge” — the kind of actionable intelligence that people can use to solve their business problems.

"The question becomes that in a meeting or conference — some of which can be as big as 20,000 people — how do you identify the five or 10 people that you would like to meet throughout the event."

"So it creates a deeper, more meaningful experience when it comes to building relationships. It's a much different experience that facilitates deeper conversations and gets people beyond the type of work you do for and what you do, interaction. It's the kind of discussion that will more likely lead to a continued relationship after that initial interaction.

In addition, the activity itself, by definition, required a degree of collabora-
and discussions over bagel and coffee—activities many aren’t interested in, says Michel. “But when you reframe the question and tell them ‘we’re going to make sure the networking you do is educational and we’re going to set it up for you to get some tacit knowledge,’ then that’s what they want.”

What planners have to do is to create the space for that kind of networking to occur, Michel says. “Putting out bagels and coffee, saying we’re going to have a networking hour, and then hope that at least 50 percent of the room isn’t introverted and won’t know how to initiate a conversation, just isn’t going to work.”

Networking Tools

What does technology have to offer? Newtonstrand has developed a tool called Chance2meet, which, Golovinski says, empowers structured networking. Prior to the event, attendees can log on to the event’s website where they can see the profiles of attendees (absent their personal and contact information) to get a sense of which ones are worth networking with. It gives the attendees a chance to pre-schedule meetings — without the hassle of going through some ice-breaking process — so they can get right down to business and network for a prescribed period of time. “And if the chemistry is good, you can continue that discussion through and after the event,” Golovinski points out. “It’s a way for participants to take full advantage of a networking event.”

There’s been a “whole plethora” of social media tools that recently have been designed for meetings and events, says Ball. “Meetings were really the original social media, so they really go hand-in-hand with these new tools, many of which are free.”

One that he’s particularly excited about is a mobile networking application called Bizzabo. With Bizzabo a planner can create an instant social network for his or her attendees before an event takes place. The planner can incorporate event details such as logos, agendas, locations and social media links so that attendees can access meeting agendas, check out who’s attending the conference, message other attendees and schedule face-to-face meetings, and use social media links such as Twitter and LinkedIn.

Bizzabo also provides event analytics and polling features, which give planners some real data to work with while eliminating the need for feedback forms. “And it’s free, so the price is right,” says Ball. “It’s a good example of how mobile technology is changing networking.” Bizzabo also offers a tiered pricing schedule for larger events.

“We’re a gregarious animal—we’re always looking for ways to congregate and meet. It’s a biological imperative,” says Ball. “Now, we’re finally getting better tools to do it with.”
Alvin Wong was appointed director of sales and marketing for the Wailea Beach Marriott Resort & Spa on Maui and the Waikoloa Beach Marriott Resort & Spa on Hawaii Island. He was the director of sales and marketing for the Sheraton Princess Kaiulani Hotel in Waikiki.

Jenni Gaherty has returned to her position as the director of sales and marketing at the JW Marriott Denver Cherry Creek, Denver, CO. She previously served as the director of sales and marketing for the hotel from its opening in 2003 through mid-2011, when she took a break to spend more time with her young children.

David Friedberg was named director of sales and marketing for Bonaventure Resort & Spa, a Benchmark Resort in Fort Lauderdale, FL. He was most recently director of sales for The Kalahari Resort of Sandusky, OH.

The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa, Tucson, AZ, has named Matt Brody as director of sales and marketing. He was most recently with Marriott International as the director of sales and marketing at the JW Marriott Starr Pass Resort & Spa in Tucson.

Royal Palms Resort and Spa, Phoenix, AZ, has named Mark Lindsey as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing for Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson, AZ.

Wayne Kearney was appointed director of resort sales at The Omni Homestead Resort, Hot Springs, VA. He was director of group sales at the Pinehurst Resort, Pinehurst, NC.

The Anaheim Marriott, Anaheim, CA, has named Erica Westmyer as director of group sales. She was city-wide sales executive for Marriott International’s Los Angeles/Anaheim market sales team.

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