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The farm-to-table trend cultivates not only more flavorful, healthful menus, but environmental responsibility, too. PAGE 26

The Resort at Pelican Hill in Newport Coast, CA, exemplifies the Golden State’s scenic allure. PAGE 40
Record-Breakers

I wish I had a dollar every time I saw the phrase “record-breaking” in a news release these days. It’s welcome news, too, as events the world over experience record-breaking attendance. Destinations are celebrating record-breaking feats, too. Las Vegas was named the No. 1 trade show destination for the 20th consecutive year, and then there is Orlando’s news. George Aguel, the president and CEO of Visit Orlando, proudly announced early this month from the stage at U.S. Travel Association’s IPW in Chicago that Orlando welcomed 59 million visitors in 2013, setting an all-time record for U.S. destinations and a 3 percent increase over the 2012 milestone. Pittingly, Orlando will host the IPW in 2015.

One would be hard-pressed to find a savvy meeting planner who isn’t keen on staging meetings in Orlando — a destination that offers something new every year, has great value, and boasts built-in entertainment opportunities and fun for the entire family. Jeff Storley is one of them. In our cover story on Orlando on page 30, Storley, manager of commercial events for Rockwell Automation, brings his event often to Loews Royal Pacific Resort at Universal Orlando, because, among other features, he says that it is an “awesome value.” “We are very budget-conscious,” he says, “and they help us to make sure we manage our budget to the letter. We feel we get great value.”

When it’s time for you to acknowledge those hotels and resorts that consistently deliver great service and value, remember to vote for them in our award programs. The deadline has passed for our 30th Annual Awards of Excellence, but it’s not too late to cast your ballot for Corporate & Incentive Travel magazine’s Greens of Distinction awards. The ballot is available on our website www.themeetingmagazines.com. Seize this opportunity to recognize those outstanding golf hotels, resorts and conference centers that have this past year demonstrated their overall commitment to hospitality excellence and effectively hosted your meetings and incentive travel programs. Then, you also can check out up-to-date industry news and features on www.themeetingmagazines.com. Seize for everything you need to plan your Australian event.

TROPICAL INCENTIVES
In Australia’s Top End

Think you’ve seen everything Australia has to offer? If you’re yet to visit Darwin and Australia’s Top End then you certainly haven’t. This tropical wonderland is full to the brim with unique experiences. Give your delegates an amazing array of handmade craft, and amazing nature-based accommodation. Give your delegates an experience they’ll never forget.

DELIVER THE WOW FACTOR

DAY 1:

Arrive in Darwin in the tropical “Top End” of the Northern Territory and check-in to the city’s newest five-star villa-style resort, SKYCITY, spectacularly set amongst tropical beachside gardens. Enjoy a leisurely afternoon around the lush tropical lagoon with its swim-up bar before indulging in a luxury spa treatment. Alternatively, take an escorted walking tour of Darwin with a local Indigenous guide. Include a visit to the famous Mindil Beach Sunset Markets to experience more than 250 stalls offering exotic foods, as well as an amazing array of handmade-craft, crocodile products, Indigenous art and unique jewellery. A special dining area set aside exclusively for your group provides a tantalising view of a breathtaking tropical Northern Territory sunset over the sparkling waters of the Arafura Sea.

DAY 2:

Start the day with a scenic flight over the pristine Kakadu National Park wilderness. Upon landing, a chauffeured 4WD vehicle awaits to provide your transfer to one of the Territory’s renowned wilderness lodges, where you will stay for the evening. A fascinating rock art excursion en-route to the lodge provides a break in the two hour journey before arrival at the lodge, where you will get a chance to experience the abundant wildlife of the seasonal floodplain — crocodiles, buffalo, hundreds of species of birds and other amazing Top End creatures. A range of activities are on offer to keep the day full of new adventures: for outdoor activities, try quad-biking, hiking or fishing. Alternatively, join a cooking class or simply laze by the infinity pool for the ultimate in relaxation. Dinner is a degustation feast featuring Territory specialties such as prime beef and the renowned Barramundi fish, with exotic bush-tucker touches.

DAY 3:

Start the day with a spectacular sunrise wildlife cruise on the calm waters of the nearby ‘Bilabong’ followed by a gourmet breakfast. Spend the morning enjoying a cultural walk to the edge of the wetlands, sampling a ‘bush Tucker’ morning tea and gaining insights into an ancient culture, accompanied by your Indigenous guide.

After transferring back to Darwin, a light lunch is served at a location overlooking the sparkling waters of the Arafura Sea. Following lunch, you will have an opportunity to browse through Darwin’s high-end boutiques where a range of unique, luxury goods including pearls and designer crocodile-skin accessories can be considered for take-home gifts and mementos. A private transfer takes you to the airport for your return flight home.

Optional activities in the Top End include extended exploration of the rich culture and pristine wilderness of Kakadu and Litchfield National Parks, staying in a unique crocodile shaped hotel, and cruising the world-renowned Yellow Water Bilabong. For those who have more time you might like to combine your Top End experience with a visit to Uluru (yers Rock), the true heart of Australia.

START PLANNING NOW
Find more itineraries and pitching resources at businessevents.australia.com. For more information, contact Samantha Holmes, Business Events Executive for the Americas, at tourism@australia.com or +61 305 695 3027.
Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort Opens

ORLANDO, FL — Universal’s Cabana Bay Beach Resort officially opened its doors March 31. The new value and moderately priced property is the fourth onsite hotel at Universal Orlando Resort in Orlando, FL, and evokes the classic, retro-feel of iconic beach resorts from the 1950s and ‘60s. When complete, Universal’s Cabana Bay Beach Resort will feature a total of 1,800 rooms — 900 family suites and 900 standard guest rooms.

Family suites sleep up to six people. Cabana Bay guests enjoy benefits including priority access to Universal Orlando Resort’s three theme parks, on-site transportation, access to the resort’s lagoon pool, and a $10 discount on each theme park admission.

Gardner stated, "We are extremely excited about this relationship, as it brings together many of our peers from around the world with like-minded philosophies of delivering outstanding DMC experiences for our customers.”

Stuart J. Gardner and Associates Inc., a Florida corporation doing business as Florida Meeting Services, has operated in Florida as a destination management company since 1985. Gardner has served on statewide tourism boards and is a member of SITE, MPI, SKAL and ADME.

Global DMC Partners is a global network of independent destination management companies and sales advisors, offering planners world-wide solutions to their destination management needs. Global DMC Partners has exclusive partnerships with more than 50 DMCs representing 51 destinations in The Americas and Caribbean, eight destinations in Africa and the Middle East, 26 destinations in Europe and 16 destinations in Asia and the South Pacific. Global DMC Partners represents more than 100 destinations worldwide.

www.floridameetingservices.com

Florida Meeting Services joins Global DMC Partners

ORLANDO, FL — Stuart J. Gardner, president and owner of Florida Meeting Services with offices in Fort Lauderdale and Orlando, announced that his company is the official, exclusive DMC Member of Global DMC Partners serving the entire state of Florida, effective March 15, 2014.

"We are so pleased to announce this incredibly exciting news on the closing day of IPW 2014, when travel industry professionals around the world shift their sights toward next year’s IPW event in Orlando,” said Aguel. "Thanks to the strong global marketing and sales efforts of our team at Visit Orlando and the leadership of our tourism members and community leaders who share a common vision for our destination, Orlando continues to lead the nation as its most visited destination.”

Orlando is experiencing one of the most significant expansion periods in the destination’s history as a variety of additional attractions and enhancements to the popular retail, dining and entertainment districts are underway. By 2017, Orlando will be among the first destinations with on-airport intermodal facilities in the U.S., which will conveniently support air travel, ground transportation and rail.

www.visitorlando.com

Orlando Welcomes 59 Million Visitors in 2013, Setting All-Time U.S. Record

ORLANDO, FL — Visit Orlando President and CEO George Aguel announced that Orlando welcomed 59 million visitors in calendar-year 2013, setting an all-time record for United States destinations. The total of 59 million visitors represents a 3 percent increase over the previous milestone set in 2012.

"We are so pleased to announce this incredibly exciting news on the closing day of IPW 2014, when travel industry professionals around the world shift their sights toward next year’s IPW event in Orlando,” said Aguel. "Thanks to the strong global marketing and sales efforts of our team at Visit Orlando and the leadership of our tourism members and community leaders who share a common vision for our destination, Orlando continues to lead the nation as its most visited destination.”

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Snapshots

1 The Minnesota Chapter of the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI) was named the 2013 Chapter of the Year at the annual HSMAI Mike Leven Leadership Conference in Las Vegas. 2 Visit Orlando and members hosted a Meeting Planner Familiarization during the Arnold Palmer Invitational at Bay Hill Club & Lodge in March. On tap were (l to r) Ken Barnett, director of strategic partnerships for Visit Orlando; Jason Hickman; Terry Manion, V.P., Meridican Incentive Consultants and Sodexo V.P. Operations Sean Anderson. 3 At the 33rd IACC-Americas Annual Conference near Los Angeles in March, attendees were “entertained” by (l to r) President of IACC-Americas and Dolce Hotels & Resorts General Manager TJ Finnigan; Dolce Hotels & Resorts V.P. of Conference Centers Paul Dolce; Benchmark Hospitality International President & CEO Alex Cabanas; FUK International S.V.P. Hotels & Conference Centers Neil Gardner; and Sodexo V.P. Operations Sean Anderson. 4 San Francisco Travel’s Washington, DC, team enjoyed a night of San Francisco flavors with clients at a reception in Bethesda, MD. 5 The colorful booth of exhibitor Kazakhstan at the Gulf Incentive, Business Travel and Meetings (GIBTM) held in Abu Dhabi in March. 6 The Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) Mexico hosted its annual GBTA Mexico Conference 2014 at the World Trade Center in Mexico City. A record number of 350+ business travel professionals from Mexico, the U.S. and Latin America registered for the event.

April 2014 • Corporate & Incentive Travel • TheMeetingMagazines.com
**The Real Rules of Attendee Engagement**

**Encouraging Engagement**

The typical presentation or workshop is 45 minutes long, and the average adult can only pay attention for about 20 minutes. So take a look at your agenda and content. If it’s a continuous flow of data, details, PowerPoint slides and speakers — then you have very, very little engagement. Tossing in a couple of videos or a simple game won’t help.

To encourage engagement, give people valid reasons to talk, interact and participate in activities that are relevant to them. A game, activity or a competition isn’t engagement unless there is a point. Be sure you explain the reason, point and benefits when you ask attendees to become involved with the information and each other.

**Empowering Engagement**

Engagement comes from the audience and not from the front of the room. You can empower it by recognizing that you don’t have a single audience. In reality, you have all sorts of smaller groups who share some common interests and needs. So empower engagement with some audience segmentation. Take a close look at the needs and desires of the major groups.

Learn these four key things:

1. How do they want to be engaged?
2. What is the most effective way to communicate with them?
3. Who is the best or most acceptable person to work with them?
4. How are they different or unique?

**Motivating Engagement**

Remember, we said that people are engaged about something or in something that interests them. It may be a topic, skill, controversy, decision or a benefit, but it is something personal to that particular audience.

**Building Engagement**

To build engagement you need to:

- **Encourage it**
- **Empower it**
- **Motivate it**

Just giving an audience the opportunity won’t work. Engaging someone isn’t a reaction or a programmed interaction. It has a beginning, middle and, hopefully, no end.

**Engagement Is a Relationship**

It’s involvement, commitment and personalization. It’s a relationship about a specific topic for a set period of time. People are engaged about something or in something that interests them. It may be a topic, skill, controversy, decision or a benefit, but it is something personal to that particular audience.

**But How?**

Unfortunately, the basic idea of engagement has mutated like a movie alien into a hot, new business buzzword and an event industry cliché. You know the list:

Attendee engagement, audience engagement, employee engagement, client engagement, customer engagement, engagement marketing, engagement design, engagement analytics, engagement modeling, statistical engagement lifecycle...it sounds like the options at a very bad speed-dating party. To get to the heart of engagement, you have to forget the analytics, statistics and psychology, and focus on what is actually important.

**The Real Rules of Engagement**

**Successful engagement is a three-way relationship:**

- organizers and presenters to the attendees; the attendees to the organizers and presenters; and attendee to attendee. To make the most of that conversation, try following these rules.

1. **Populate your events with interesting people.** Get the influencers and experts out of the general sessions and into the breakouts, workshops and trade shows. When you ask attendees to become involved with the information and each other.
2. **Shake up the content.** Get the audience out of their comfort zones and surprise them with information they haven’t heard before.
3. **Look at the event as a whole.** If every part of the agenda has the same style, then tear it apart and rebuild it. Change a few session formats, add discussions, target groups, roundtables, etc. Mix things up! If it’s predictable, it isn’t engaging.
4. **Build in legitimate networking opportunities.** Give groups of like-minded people a time, a place and something relevant to talk about, and you will trigger more powerful engagement.
5. **Give attendees things to do that relate to your event goals.** Random activities aren’t engagement. Just attending isn’t involvement. Make sure you create activities that support both the content and what attendees need from it.
6. **Plan, promise and communicate in advance how people will have opportunities to engage.** Then deliver on your promise. In addition to firing up the audience, you’ll increase attendance.

**The Bottom Line**

In the end, the goal of engagement is for all of your attendees to want to know, understand and discover more — together.

You can achieve it only if you view attendees as a collection of individuals and not as statistics, demographics and headcounts. Having valuable content is vital. How your audiences get involved with the content and with people who share common interests is engagement. Make engagement a part of your planning and you’ll develop events, conventions and conferences that people will enjoy and want to attend. And — you’ll make them like you.

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**The goal of engagement is for all of your attendees to want to know, understand and discover more together.”**

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**By Andy Johnston**

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**Engage Early and Often**

It should be no secret that attendee engagement doesn’t begin when people enter the room. It begins the day you announce the event. Start engaging attendees as a part of your marketing. Hey, emails are cheap.

Give attendees something to do when you first invite them. Communicate with specific audience groups. Ask them questions, send a survey and begin the conversation. It’s much more effective to continue and grow a conversation at an event than to try to start one.

The more you involve attendees early, the more they will understand who you are, what you’re telling them and why they should care about the event. Instead of a list of topics, sessions and workshops, they’ll see valuable opportunities they won’t want to miss.

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**CRIT**

**By Andy Johnston**

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is president and creative director of The Idea Group and is a sought-after industry expert in developing ingenious ways to engage and motivate audiences. Andy has deep expertise in strategic planning, messaging, creative direction, marketing and events. He can be reached at andy@ideagroupatlanta.com or 404-213-4416.
Due to a strengthening economy, many companies and organizations are hard at work launching new products, hosting challenging sales incentive programs, training additional staff and managerial crew, and setting new goals, objectives and five-year plans for the future.

There’s no better way to do that, of course, than to meet face-to-face at a premier downtown meeting hotel or golf and spa resort, near or far.

While one might expect budget belts to be somewhat loosened as more business is conducted and more meetings are scheduled, however, “it ain’t necessarily so” as the old song claims.

That’s because nowadays the budgeting process is more complex. Planners are more entrenched in strategic meetings management, and therefore more concerned about return on investment and meeting business goals than they are about just event costs.

At least that’s the new spin on budgeting these days, a lesson that was sorely learned as more business is conducted and more meetings are scheduled, however, “it ain’t necessarily so” as the old song claims.

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Budgeting Basics

Glenna Fulks, assistant director of corporate events at the Trevose, PA-based Advertising Specialty Institute, joined us for a brief Q&A.

What is the most important part of the budget?

Fulks

The first thing I look at is food and beverage, especially if I’m hosting a large reception and dinner combination. In the process of negotiating concessions, I always ask for a discount on the food and beverage so that I have a little something extra up my sleeve. If I save some money on the overall menu then, perhaps, I can spend the savings on upgraded wines. And, if I know that the group tends not to rush down in the morning and load up on a heavy breakfast, then I don’t plan for waffle and omelet stations.

How do you budget for offsite events, which tend to be more expensive?

Fulks

When I book offsite activities and entertainment, I investigate whether I can partner with a local DMC. The ears of vendors perk up when you say that you have to work with. And, if you save in one category, that doesn’t mean that you have to save in every category.

How was your last meeting budgeted?

Fulks

I started with the number of people who had attended the last event and then looked at the group history of food and beverage, as well as room block and activities. I come up with a per-person total cost and then go back to the bargaining table with options that I think will lower that cost. Then, I begin to fine-tune the menus and activities with options that run from a three-course to a four-course plated dinner, or a buffet with serve-yourself stations, or special chef-attended stations.

Is there any particular complexity in your corporate budget that is not part of the norm?

Fulks

Yes, I happen to work for a company that does not believe in the “there’s the total budget,” but rather they tell you specifically the budgets for food and beverage activities, speaker fees, room charges and so on that you have to work with. And, if you save in one category, that doesn’t mean you can apply the savings and spend more on something else. You have to stay inside the categories. The example I used of saving on food to spend more on upgraded wines is realistic, because I stay inside the food and beverage budget.

What is your overall No. 1 tip for cost-effectiveness?

Fulks

Not to sound like a broken record, but wherever and whenever possible, partner with a company you know, and your budgeting will be easier and less stressful.

— SJ

Money Isn’t Everything

Again, when budgeting for corporate meetings and events, money isn’t everything. One New York-based meeting planner of a large publishing company claims that “saving money on meetings doesn’t mean anything if you don’t get the expected outcome. Today, budgeting for meetings is more about ROI — and not just that but, now, ROO (Return on Objective) as well.”

She says that what has changed for her company, an aviation leader that regularly hosts major industrial events, is its marketing strategies. “Instead of blindly mailing and emailing material to promote exhibitions, trade shows and other events, we are seriously testing markets now and looking more closely at the demographics we want and need at the events to make them a success, which, in turn, leads to increased business and expansion — our objectives — or ROO,” she points out.

“Instead of looking at who was on the attendee list and the potential ROI that each attendee brought to play, if a CEO cancelled their attendance and replaced it with a director, then there is scrutiny as to whether that director can bring the same weight as what his CEO would have contributed to the event. Certain events are marketed and targeted towards the very top echelon of attendee, while other events are not. So, the budget is weighted.”

Billy Bauer, marketing director at Royce Leather, Secaucus, NJ, underscores the importance of ROI and ROO, the new wrench in a meeting planner’s tool box. He says that he has been facing increasing pressure from management to clearly demonstrate the financial return on investment of staff development and encouragement initiatives.

“We hold conferences twice a year at our corporate headquarters in New Jersey, once in July and once at the end of December. During that time we fly in all of our regional sales managers, IT and logistics people and distribution center employees from around the world to either hype them up for the second half of the year, or thank and celebrate them after another successful year,” Bauer says. “To save costs, we host these conferences onsite as we have a gorgeous plot of land around our main U.S. distribution center so we have a big picnic in the summer, and in the winter we transform our massive show-room into a gala area. We also know the exact dates and times of these events, as we have been doing them for a long time, so everyone is on the same page from a coordination perspective; therefore we save money on speakers, vendors and suppliers also by booking well over a year in advance for each event.”

Furthermore, Bauer notes that while it is sometimes difficult to demonstrate the ROI on human capital management initiatives, the company generally tries to measure it by collecting “happy sheets” premised on employee feedback.

“But now, this is a fairly light touch, which is no longer sufficient to satisfy the CEO,” he observes. “Today’s economic climate is forcing marketing and human resource executives to demonstrate that their talent development initiatives justify the meeting investment and necessary ROI.”
by using convincing metrics, which indicate a substantial monetary ROI and ROO. Flimsy estimates of impressions and reach are now unacceptable forms of reporting,” notes Bauer. “Now, every hashtag of information is not only available, but also immediately collectible, quantifiable and deliverable. Because anyone can potentially double-check your report facts, it’s important to use reliable third-party tools to back up your ROI/ROO claims.

“When Money Does Matter

While planners must be more artful in crafting their budget than ever before, especially in regard to ROI and ROO, keeping an eye on the bottom line is always a concern. To accomplish that, planners must be creative and Schuster notes that a good rule to follow is “no one category should exceed 30 percent of the total budget.”

In addition, Fulks reminds us that at the time that once the hotels started offering these items during the lean years, that they would never be able to put Pandora back in the box when times returned to normal,” she says. “And it’s been true. The guest may agree to. They may offer to meet you halfway.

If you ask for a 10 percent discount on F&B and the hotel declines, ask if they will consider designing a per-person menu around a set price; or if they will agree to allow you to use the 2013 menu pricing, even if the meeting is in 2014, as long as you sign by the end of the month.

Rebates. Ask the hotel if they will consider a rebate on the room block if you get your contract signed by the end of the month. If they agree to 5 percent on the room block as a rebate, then ask them to apply this as a credit to the overall bottom line.

Relationships. But, more than anything else, Fulks advises planners to create a solid working relationship with the sales manager at the hotel. “It is so much easier to do business with someone with whom you have a relationship. They will go the extra mile for you and vice versa. Connect with them on LinkedIn and then recommend them for their skills or write a nice recommendation of your experience working with them. This will take only 15 minutes of time, and they will repay this favor 100 times over because you have gone to the effort of publicly praising them in front of their boss and other customers.”

**Sharing.** Find out what kind of audio-visual setup the group before you is using and work out an arrangement to use all or part of it to save setup costs.

**Concessions.** Don’t be afraid to ask, because you have no idea what the hotel

**“Today’s economic climate is forcing marketing...executives to demonstrate that their talent development initiatives justify the meeting investment by using convincing metrics, which indicate a substantial monetary ROI and ROO.”**

**Billy Bauer, Marketing Director**

**Royce Leather, Secaucus, NJ**

**“Five years ago, we were able to negotiate inexpensive hotel rates and added concessions. Today, the hotel expenses have increased, yet our overall event budgets have not.”**

**Gail Schuster, Village Gatherings Director**

**DaVita HealthCare Inc., Denver, CO**

**during the financial crisis of 2008 and beyond there were a number of hotels that created money-saving initiatives for corporate planners. “I’m talking about rebates back to the master account if a certain threshold of spending was achieved, or offering guest room Internet connectivity into the overall room rate and so on. I remember saying willing to discount their rate as well as throw in concessions that will add up to cost savings.**

**Thinking local.** Hotels like to showcase their area, so play up what the area is known for. For example, if you’re meeting in Atlanta, consider serving pickled watermelon or fried green tomatoes.

**SOMETHING DIFFERENT ON THE AGENDA**

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More than ever before, whether an attendee is a baby boomer, Gen Xer or millennial, or whether he or she is Muslim, Jewish, or a health or environmental devotee, distinctions among attendees usually means a separate set of planning decisions.

Diversity among attendees is an issue that is important to the entire meeting industry,” says Yolanda Brown, associate at Herndon, VA-based global consultancy Booz Allen Hamilton. In a year, Brown has planned about 35 meetings, which included both domestic and international attendees. “There’s been a shift in the generational composition of meetings, because you now have Generation Y (millennials) employees advancing quickly and looking for opportunities to show their merit and their worth. But now you also have baby boomers who have delayed retirement and are still around. And a distinct like that is obviously going to affect who you focus on as constituencies.”

Jenny McCullough, director of training and events at Kampgrounds of America (KOA) in Billings, MT, agrees that generational considerations now play a more significant role in her job.

“Just in the three years I’ve been with KOA, we’ve seen a big difference in how we promote our big annual meeting,” says McCullough, who plans the KOA annual franchisee convention and a half-dozen smaller training meetings. “For example, we used to do printed promotional materials, such as newsletters and invitations to the meeting from our president. But more and more now, we’re doing video invites that franchisees can access online, and we’ve also really picked up our e-mail marketing campaign more than ever before.”

Such changes are driven primarily by evolving generational preferences, McCullough says.

Other current examples of a generational concession are mobile apps and electronic promotional content versus traditional printed materials, such as a meeting program. And that’s a change that sometimes triggers generational disagreement.

“We’ve found that although we’re moving toward a digital-friendly meeting, many of our more mature franchisees still prefer a printed program for our annual convention,” McCullough says.

For example, for decades many KOA campground owners have kept printed programs from their annual conventions as valuable mementos. “And that’s one reason that for us, printed programs will never go away completely,” McCullough says.

At the same time, however, she notes, KOA is striving to make its meeting more interactive and also wants to be able to leverage ever-evolving mobile technology to be able to disseminate more information to attendees throughout the long annual life cycle of the convention.

Brown says Booz Allen also is encountering the same general issue of mobile versus print. “We definitely experience that difference in preferences when it comes to the generations,” she says.

“But what we’re doing now is that we send the material out electronically, and then if someone does want it printed, as opposed to online, then they can get it printed on their own and bring it to the meeting.”

Yet another issue that is now impacted by generational differences is site selection.

“That issue is a big one for us now,” McCullough says. “We’re starting to see a lot of second- and third-generation kids take over the family campground business. So we’ve got people who are in their 60s coming to our convention. But we’ve also got people in their 30s that have young families. So now, when we select a destination for our annual convention, we try to find a place that has stuff to do for older couples without children and also for young couples with children.”

Local attractions and activities, including family-oriented attractions and activities for younger attendees, are becoming more and more of a factor in KOA’s destination selections, McCullough says.

For example, that consideration was among the factors that led them to go to Orlando in 2012. “It was our largest meeting ever in terms of attendance,” McCullough says. “And we had over 50 kids.”

Cultural and Dietary Considerations

In addition to generational issues, cultural considerations — and attendee expectations — are now increasingly playing a role in how meeting planners must do their jobs.

“Culturally, there are now differences in terms of geography with people,” says Christine Gorham, senior associate at Booz Allen Hamilton. “For example, you have to be considerate of either their limitations and/or the different ways they receive and perceive information, whether that’s technologically or just a matter of time.
Mastering Generational Dynamics

Chuck Underwood, president of The Generational Imperative in Manassas, VA and author of The Generational Imperative: Understanding Generational Differences in the Workplace, Marketplace, and Living Room (2007), trains meeting planners in how to deal with generational differences on the job. He is creator and host of the multi-part series “America’s Generations with Chuck Underwood.” New episodes will air on PBS TV stations across the country later this year.

He cites four essential principles that planners must understand and master.

One of the most important considerations is the format of meeting sessions.

“The key is you have to be generational in your appeal,” Underwood says. “And first and foremost, understand that in the selection of speakers or presenters, none of the three generations that dominate today’s workforce want young, hip and cool speakers. They want the best possible experts in their field. And that is particularly important to young millennials.”

“Millennials also want to have one-on-one time with the speakers. They want short, five-minute sessions after the presentation when anyone who wants to can have access to the speaker and ask individual questions.”

Only a minority of meeting planners understand that point or make such access available.

Consider generational differences in the selection of entertainment and social activities.

“Don’t assume that traditional social and entertainment activities remain universally appealing,” Underwood says. “Generation Xers often do not like to be at social events that are going to be dominated by older people. Don’t underestimate the psychological distance between Gen X and boomers and millennials. Gen X is an ‘island generation’ in many ways when it comes to their core values. They are going to be less interested in a cocktail hour that is dominated by boomer executives than they are in an activity that is more individualistic. And Gen Xers prefer to be in the company of other Gen Xers whenever they have the opportunity to choose. Baby boomers and millennials tend to be much more outgoing and more comfortable in your typical cocktail reception.”

Carefully consider session lengths and design them by type of meeting.

“You can’t always make everybody happy either. If you are just trying to introduce a topic or information, as opposed to training people, an introduction session should be 45 minutes of presentation and 15 minutes of Q&A, followed by the opportunity for individual audience members to have five-minute one-on-one conversations with the speaker,” Underwood says. “If it is a training session, if the goal is for people to leave with actionable information, then it absolutely needs to be longer than an hour and could be as long as a half-day. One of the big mistakes meeting planners make is not distinguishing between ‘introduction’ meetings and training meetings.”

If there is free time during the meeting, the selection of destination is a critical consideration.

“Millennials are looking for new experiences in the destination,” Underwood says. “They are looking for creative activities. They are also looking for unique dining experiences. Generation X is much more individualistic and might be looking for a more solitary and unique experience. Baby boomers tend to align with millennials in liking group activities that also are new and include what the travel industry calls ‘soft adventure.’”

Soft adventure travel often includes activities that are relaxed, educational, and not “hard” or dangerous. Examples include wine and culinary tours, architectural tours and the like. Mild physical activity is balanced with downtime for attendees.

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— JB

Yolanda Brown
Associate
Booz Allen Hamilton
Herndon, VA

“With Generation Y, regardless of where they come from, there is just an expectation now that you’re going to understand what their needs are prior to them getting to the meeting.”

“And the hotels have been great, because they are for people to leave with actionable information, then it absolutely needs to be longer than an hour and could be as long as a half-day. One of the big mistakes meeting planners make is not distinguishing between ‘introduction’ meetings and training meetings.”

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— JB

Christine Gorham
Senior Associate
Booz Allen Hamilton
Herndon, VA

"You need to know your audience and what their various requirements or expectations are going to be. And if you don’t know that, you need to ask the right questions to find out."
“The No. 1 thing is having a clear sense of purpose for your meeting. Purpose transcends generations. If the value...is not clear, people are not going to care about the meeting.”

“I don’t really think the generations are that different,” says Burmeister, author of From Boomers to Bloggers: Success Strategies Across Generations (Synergy Press LLC, 2008).

In fact, she adds, it is generational commonalities and cross-generational concerns that should be driving the conversation about how meetings are changing and why.

“At the end of the day, everybody wants to think that what they do matters,” she says. “They want to feel important, special and valued in the creation of it, people will support that and help create it.”

And that kind of consideration has little or nothing to do with age, Burmeister says. It has to do with universal human nature.

The real key to success is having people understand what the underlying purpose of the meeting is and having attendees willingly want to contribute to the success of it, she says.

“No body wants to be talked to. Everybody wants to be in a conversation with someone else. And that’s true of every generation today.”

However, she says, there is one area of meeting planning where there is a distinct difference between younger and older attendees. And that has to do with the length of meeting sessions.

An ever-growing body of research demonstrates that younger attendees want shorter, more focused sessions that also are much more interactive than the traditional PowerPoint presentation from a stage.

The key question today is how well meeting planners and speakers address that reality, Burmeister says.

“Your sessions have to be short, to the point and interactive,” Burmeister says. “You have to get all that stuff straight so that when speakers or executives stand on the stage, they are prepared to deliver 20 minutes of really valuable information. And it takes a long time to prepare 20 minutes of really good information that people will relate to. It takes a lot of thinking. And the constant consideration should be how you make the information more palatable, more relevant to your audience.”

And that is the area where planners struggle most, in Burmeister’s observation. “And where they’re most often lacking is in the planning stage of content,” she says.

Beyond that, her message to planners is: “The No. 1 thing is having a clear sense of purpose for your meeting. Purpose transcends generations. And if your purpose is not clear, if the value of the meeting is not clear, people are not going to care about the meeting. And that’s true, regardless of what generation they’re from.”

Nevertheless, adds Chuck Underwood, president of The Generational Imperative in Miamisburg, OH, to do their jobs effectively today (see “Mastering Generational Dynamics,” page 18), “Meeting planners must be fully and accurately trained in generational dynamics. And from that training, they will develop what I call a ‘generational gearbox’ that enables them to shift smoothly from planning meetings and activities that appeal to one generation to planning events that will appeal to all three generations.

‘And planners have to get into the heads of all three generations — baby boomers, Gen Xers and millennials — to understand the core-values that are unique to each generation and which drive the decision-making of each generation — including their decision about whether they even want to attend the meeting.’
After years of waiting, wondering and rule changes, the big day finally arrived on August 1, 2013, the effective date of the Physician Payment Sunshine Act, which mandates the reporting of payments or transfers of value between pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers and physicians. But while some departments spent the first part of this year scurrying to collect data for the first reporting deadline on March 31, 2014, for a surprising number of medical meeting planners, it’s more or less business as usual. With overbooked schedules, record numbers of meetings to plan and new internal global strategy partnerships to lead, for many medical planners, compliance systems are handling the changes with relative ease as planners focus on increasing efficiency in other areas.

The advent of the Sunshine Act demonstrates a major shift in medical meeting planning that has been growing ever clearer in recent years: The role of meeting planners in this industry has shifted from pure execution to managing new roles and regulations. Whether physicians are really truly aware of what’s going on. A lot of companies I know ask mandatory questions like, “Do you acknowledge and accept that we will be reporting on this?” It’s funny because no matter how much you tell them, sometimes people don’t read it. I think it will suddenly be a light bulb for physicians.”

Communicating With Physicians
Engaging physicians in the planning process is a key way that many medical meeting departments are staying on top of reporting, so this awareness is crucial to the success of implementation for pharmaceutical companies. “What I did last year, because I knew this was coming, was that when I sent out my information to physicians, I requested the information you don’t normally have and is hard to get after the fact. I was collecting it on the front end,” says Sandra Dewberry, CMP-HC, meeting services program manager at Greensboro, NC-based Merz North America Inc. “I put on the registration that this information was required, and when I got it back I looked at every single one and made sure that they answered each question. I’ve probably done four meetings since the beginning of the year, and I required the information before we got onsite, they weren’t able to confirm or register until I had this information. There were no questions. They’ve all been very compliant. They all knew that this information was coming, and I think they have a lot of education on it too, because they knew what we were talking about.”

Taking a Hard Line on Reporting
Unfortunately, not all physicians have been prepared with the information at the right time, and Dewberry’s team has taken a hard-line stance to make sure their reporting is accurate. “When we have meetings, we invite certain people, and then we allow walk-ins, and they don’t always have that information available, so it can be challenging to get the information,” she says. “Last year, when we first started asking for the information, there might have been one or two times when walk-ins didn’t have it, and I had to say, ‘I’m sorry, but I can’t admit you without this information.’”

Though efficient, not all planners are placing the burden of information-gathering on attending physicians. Some have created entirely new offices to handle the task. “We produce a lot of meetings, which creates quite a bit of data,” explains Jeannine Strampel, CMM, CMP-HC, associate director of meeting management services for Cambridge, MA-based Biogen Idec. “The reporting is a very big piece. All the information collection is completed upfront, and then it’s reviewed and audited. We go through constant auditing of the data to ensure accuracy. This puts a lot of strain on planners because of the time-consuming process, which creates quite a bit of work.”

For a long time, you heard people from companies saying, ‘Well, we’re just going to wait and see,’ and in those situations, I’d be curious to see where they are,” says Vachon. “If you’re waiting until after the meeting to pull this together, you’ll be so far behind the ball.”
Crunch Time

Dewberry agrees that she’s been see-
ing other planners take a less proactive ap-
proach to capturing Sunshine informa-
tion that can have important repercus-
sions down the line. “I’m seeing a really big
chunking in getting this information and
interpreting the template, figuring out exactly what information they need,”

“Something that will be very critical
this year will be living through that
first reporting cycle and trying to get
your head around where there are
opportunities to improve your process.”

James Vachon, CMP, Associate Director, Events, Meetings and
Conventions, Millennium Pharmaceuticals, Cambridge, MA

she says. “It’s like reading Latin, and a lot
of people didn’t capture that information before, and now they’re doing catch up.

“You can collect whatever information
you can and go back to your office and
go back to the database and try to find
that person, but while our national databases you can go to, the problem is that
with that is that you have to make sure it’s the right physician and not someone with
the same name,” she continues. “I don’t like that because you’re never sure
it’s the right one, and this information is going to be posted publicly.”

Under Sunshine Act rules, data from the 2013 reporting cycle will be made public
September 30, 2014.

Across the board, though, the consen-
sus is that once this initial rough period vi-sualisation is over, the headlines of
Sunshine reporting will fade
for planners. “I see it going smoothly in the future, be-
cause now we know what we need to
send, and I think that as time goes on, more and more physicians will bring
‘information with them,”’ Dewberry
explains.

“It may not be as clear to people who are not tenured in the
industry, not as experienced, but any-
one who has been in an organisation like this finds that it doesn’t take a sig-
nificant amount of time before people

buy in and develop expectations around
those standards,” Vachon agrees.

The New Role of Medical
Meeting Planners

Throughout the meeting planning in-
dustry, there has been much talk, at first
tentatively, and now increasingly confi-
dently, that things are finally rebound-
ing after the shake-up of the re-
cession, but the landscape has changed in
key ways.

For medical meeting planners, post-
recession caution goes beyond simple
budgetary concerns. In fact, in most cases, planners are not finding themselves try-
ing to do more with less. Rather, they are
finding their meeting planning process shifting in a much more fundamental and
basic way: meeting objectives.

“As the economy is turning, there’s
more opportunity, but also more pressure
on how and when we spend our dollars,”
says Vachon. “It’s not like years ago. It
used to be, if you had money at the end of the
year, people would say, ‘We have extra
money, so let’s spend it.’ I think the pres-
sure is changing things more indirectly. I
think now in order to be a good corpo-
rate citizen you have to bring strategy
to the table. The meeting sponsors and
planners are not just focused on the end
result whether ROI or content devel-
oment, and we have to really guide them.

“Instead of planning a series, you’re
more apt to say, let’s do this one program and
then make sure we can get all our
goals, and if we can’t, what is the right
mechanism to use for follow up — may-
be it’s not a meeting. Maybe it’s a portal
that becomes available for physicians
with patient information resources, or
a message that gets pushed out,”

Strampel explains. “I truly believe that
if I hire someone with a CMP-HC they
understand the business, the strategy
behind it, not just booking meetings,
but that我相信 that we agree with our
vendors and stakeholders. They are
extremely valuable to our meetings.”

The next CMP-HC exam will be issued
in November and November. The appli-
cation period for the upcoming November
exam is May 14 to July 31, 2014.

Site Selection Is All Business

In the medical meeting planning space, the shift in focus towards increased effi-
ciency and strategic oversight trickles
down from meeting planners’ jobs to the
meetings they plan. “Early on, as the
industry started being scrutinized and
compliance became a large part, there
were lots and lots of changes, but, now,
mainly, I see meetings being more pro-
ductive,” shares Dewberry. “Companies
are only inviting the number of physi-
cians necessary and doing it in a
way that becomes available for physicians
are smaller and more productive.

There are fewer but they get more
done.

“With fewer people… it’s just more
concentrated and focused. I see longer
sessions, working lunches and taking advantage of the
breakfast, where they actually
share of challenges, but continue to re-
mains the norm, but digital meetings are
now there’s one full day of meetings and a
travel day. They come in the night before
and then their meeting and they’re out the next day or that evening.”

"Fly In, Get to Work, Fly Out”

Strampel has found her meetings shifting to a similar focus on physician
needs, which it also affects how she
manages her destinations. “When we have phy-
icians attend our meetings, we value their
time and we don’t want them to travel
beyond our set boundaries or their
time,” she says. “We’re not picking
Dallas because it has warm weather. We
book Dallas because it has good airlift
and non-stop flights. It’s pretty much
an hour and a half for everybody to get
there. We use a lot of airport hotels in
most of our cities. They’re very conve-
nient for our fly in, get to work and then
fly out approach.”

For meetings with external stake-
holders, face-to-face, in many ways, re-
ains the norm, but digital meetings are

We go through constant auditing of the
data to ensure accuracy. This puts a lot
of strain on planners because of bow
time-consuming it is, so I actually have a
separate staff now to do the reporting.”

Jeannine Strampel, CMP, CMP-HC,
Associate Director, Meeting Management Services
Biogen Idec, Weston, MA

“Companies are only inviting the number of physicians that they need. Meetings are smaller and more productive. There are few people but they get more done.”

Sandra Dewberry, CMP-HC
Meeting Services Program Manager
Merz North America Inc., Greensboro, NC

on the rise, and not just for the reason
you’d think. “Working in a global envi-
roment, you sometimes have to rely on
the virtual component, you’re certainly
going to fly people in for a half-hour
meeting,” says Vachon. “I think that vir-
tual meetings are becoming more and
more part of our everyday life. We have
people who are taking advantage of those
use them for internal programs. It’s a
combination of economy and ease.

“However, there are a lot of people
who think that if we do this meeting virtually we won’t have any travel ex-
pense, but you’ll have a significantly higher tech expense,” he says. “You have to know how to use your capabilities are. But if you’re just looking from a budgetary standpoint, you might

be missing the boat; what are the results, are they achievable virtually?

“If you develop your content appro-
riately, that should be able to happen,”
Vachon explains. “Let’s say you’re having
an investigator meeting, and there are
components where the face-to-face time
you have with investigators and study co-
ordinators allows you to understand how
they work and how their methods interact
with what you’re trying to do, but maybe
you could cut a day by providing protocol
trainings with a virtual component. Maybe
you’re not cutting down travel but cutting
down the numbers of days. Then once you
develop those online materials for that
meeting, you don’t need to do it again for
the next one. It’s more cost-effective.”

Walking a New Road

Whether it’s the economy, the
Sunshine Act or another new regula-

tion coming down the road next, medical
meeting planners face more than their
share of challenges, but continue to re-

strain with strength by intrinsic changes in their skill set.

“When you look at meeting planning,
and I’ve been in it a long time, more than
20 years, it was always looked at as the
fun group or a fun occupation to have,”
says Strampel. “But now, because of the
pharmaceutical industry and what we’ve
done as a meeting planning industry —
with the credentials we’ve earned and the
certifications, meeting planning is
viewed differently.

“The role of the meeting planner is
absolutely changing, and we are defi-
nitely looked at as a partners with our
stakeholders. They rely on us immense-
ly. Now they’re more like adding to a
meeting. Five or six years ago it might not have been like that.”

CIT
Whether corporations are going through lean times or living high on the hog, planners know all too well that skimping on F&B is a surefire recipe for a meetings flop. A great food experience can be the best binding ingredient for attendees who are meeting face-to-face, and can be one of the best memory-makers. Expectations run high these days, too, as the foodie trend is turning average attendees into more discerning critics who believe that great meals are defined not just by great food, but by the total culinary experience. Planners such as Guy Genis, founder and CEO of Eventmakers, based in Toluca Lake, CA, notes that most of these changes have occurred within the past five years alone. “First off, people in metropolitan cities, particularly members of the younger generation, have become far more savvy about food and beverage than ever before,” he says. “And, with the advent of the Food Network and reality food competitions like ‘Iron Chef America,’ the general public has also become more aware of where their food is coming from and how it is prepared. These new preferences affect how and what the public orders, and what guests and attendees would like to see served at conferences, meetings or other corporate events.”

Planners Must Balance Food Trends and Tastes Along With Dietary, and Budgetary, Restrictions

Slicing & Dicing F&B Budgets
Paul Ahasey, CMP, CSEP, president and partner of P&V Enterprises in New York City, observes that budgets are still a huge concern — and that doesn’t appear to be changing anytime soon. “Otherwise, I agree with the findings of the 2014 Culinary Forecast, the association surveyed 1,300 professional chefs, members of the American Culinary Federation. Below are survey results for just four of several food and beverage lists in the forecast.

Top 10 Food Trends
1. Locally sourced meats and seafood
2. Locally grown produce
3. Environmental sustainability
4. Healthful kid’s meals
5. Work with the chef. “This is tanta- mount to the success of any F&B event and imperative in developing a cost-saving menu in the planning process. Include items such as locally grown food items and portion sizes. Chicken is one of the least expensive ways to go, although some people might be tired of it. Work with the chef to determine the best cuts and spices to use to make it special.”
6. Sustainable seafood
7. Farm/estate branded items
8. Hyper-local sourcing (e.g., restaurant gardens)
9. Children’s nutrition
10. Non-wheat noodles/pasta (e.g., quinoa, rice, buckwheat)

Top 5 Main Dishes
1. Locally sourced meats and seafood
2. Sustainable seafood
3. New cuts of meat (e.g., Denver steak, pork flat iron, tri-tip)
4. Non-traditional fish (e.g., branzino, cod, trout)
5. Half-portions/smaller portions

Top 5 Beverage Options
1. Milk-based/artisinal spirits
2. Locally produced beer/wine/spirits
3. “New” wine
c4. House-made beer
5. Food-beer pairings

Top 5 Desserts
1. Hybrid desserts (e.g., cronut, tonnie, ice cream cupcake)
2. Savory desserts
3. House-made/artisinal ice cream
4. Bite-sized/min-desserts
5. Deconstructed classic desserts

For more “What’s Hot” lists from the 2014 Culinary Forecast, visit www.restaurant.org.
— SJ
Also, stagger appetizers throughout the evening.

A budget-saving tip is to have “butlered” wine, beer and a pre-planned signature cocktail hour. Cut down on the order: If there are 150 people in attendance, or —

“Sometimes, there are some fun options that can seem like they cost much more than they do,” observes Ahaesy. “A budget-saving tip is to have ‘butlered’ hors d’oeuvres as you have more control of portions.”

An inexpensive lunch idea Ahaesy recommends is to have pre-made sandwiches served buffet-style, as well as easy-to-eat fruit available, too.

“And don’t use bottled drinks. As far as beverages go, limit choices to an event-themed beverage, a white and a red wine, and sparkling water,” she says.

To save on beverage, Janow finds that coffee by the gallon is budget-friendly. “Also, stagger appetizers throughout the cocktail hour. Cut down on the order: If there are 150 people in attendance, order 100 pieces per appetizer served instead. I also cut back on bar time by much as 45 minutes depending on time of day.”

**Dietary Considerations**

NACE’s Hopkins emphasizes that dietary restrictions are a top consideration in meal planning, noting that chefs and caterers are now getting creative with these requests. “The trend of dietary restrictions is really coming into the mainstream now and, while it isn’t very glamorous, it is an absolute must that planners and caterers work together to ensure their menu plans include an appropriate offering for guests who require special accommodation for food allergies, medical restrictions, lifestyle-personal choices or religious practices.”

According to Hopkins, there was a time when guests and attendees would call the hotel, privately, and speak to an appropriate staff member about special dietary requests on an almost confidential basis, but all that has changed. “Now, this information is reaching the catering office through the planner, as guests are disclosing their information to them more openly. Caterers also are more proactive in asking about allergy-related questions in pre-con meetings,” adds Hopkins.

To address this growing awareness of healthful food choices, Hyatt Hotels Corporation launched its “Food. Thoughtfully Sourced. Carefully Served” program two years ago. The brand-wide initiative focuses on sourcing and providing food and beverage choices that offer balanced nutrition, controlled portions and natural ingredients. Examples include reducing the hamburger size from eight ounces to seven ounces of meat; mandating gluten-free and vegetarian options on all menus; offering Stay Fit Cuisine menu items on full-service brand menus; and providing natural bacon, organic produce and hormone-free milk as menu options.

The program also embraces environmental responsibility by sourcing sustainable seafood, naturally raised beef and pork, planting on-property chef’s gardens, recycling programs, and new to-go containers and packaging.

Hyatt also supports local communities through this effort by sourcing through local suppliers and mandating that five local ingredients be utilized on the menu.

**Nosh-working**

Sometimes the battle cry is for food and beverage events that are interactive and foster networking among meeting attendees. Cassie Brown, CSEP, chief experience officer of TCG Events in Charlotte, NC, advises, “We recently catered a party where we served paella over an open fire pit. We served barbecued beef, Brazilian, chorizo sausage-style, on skewers, which provides an easy wow factor and gets everyone involved,” Brown notes. “At a different event in Orlando for a financial firm, we’ve had the chefs prepare dinner at each of the tables, which fosters easy conversation among the attendees. Also consider serving dinner family-style and pass around the bowls and dishes, and have staff help guide you walk up and create your own sweet master-piece. We did this for an oil company with great success.”

But, when all else fails, Guy Genis recommends others to keep it simple and to plan with the mindset that the group in question is your own family. “How would you honor them with a meal? Then, go from there,” he notes.

**New & Noteworthy**

**Centralized herb box**

The Music City Center in Nashville recently announced that it has been awarded REAL Certification by the U.S. Healthful Food Council. REAL stands for Responsible Epicurean and Lifestyle and is a nationwide program that helps combat diet-related disease by recognizing food-service operators committed to holistic nutrition and environmental stewardship.

The REAL Certification program launched with a restaurant campaign in Washington, DC, last year, and it has since grown to more than 80 locations that include restaurants, workplace dinning facilities and public venues across the country.

**Dining with sharks**

When an unforgettable meal function must have an unforgettable setting, too, the 1,675-seat Seascape Ballroom and Shark Reef Aquarium at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas fill that order. Seascape is home to 30 sharks and other amazing aquatic creatures all within a 1.3-million-gallon exhibit that comes complete with tour guides — also providing a built-in source of entertainment.

The unique venue is perfectly suited for intimate receptions, sit-down dinners and board meetings. A 1.75-mile outdoor patio and lounge is adjacent to the ballroom, creating an excellent option for an indoor-outdoor reception or other corporate event.

**Amovable Feast**

PGA National Resort & Spa has rolled out its new “iTruck,” a gourmet food truck experience for groups. The Music City Center at Château Élan Winery & Golf Club in Atlanta, GA, has recently introduced local farm products to the menu, and to support his farm-fresh mission, he, too, has created his own herb and vegetable garden. Gomez meets the demand for farm-to-table ingredients with his own rooftop herb and vegetable garden. With the assistance of his culinary team, as wells as students from nearby Stratford University, the garden features a variety of fresh herbs and vegetables including basil, chives, curry, peppermint, oregano, rosemary, thyme, peppers and tomatoes. He plans to add to this garden every year and to eventually make the garden a community initiative.

Similarly, executive chef Bill Downes at the nearby Baltimore Marriott Inner Harbor has recently introduced local farm products to the menu, and to support his farm-fresh mission, he, too, has created his own herb and vegetable garden that includes restaurants, workplace dining facilities and public venues across the country.

**Hyper-local sourcing**

That can mean an industrious chef with a green thumb and a rooftop garden.

For example, Baltimore Marriott Waterfront’s executive chef Carlos Gomez meets the demand for farm-to-table ingredients with his own roof-top herb and vegetable garden. With the assistance of his culinary team, as well as students from nearby Stratford University, the garden features a variety of fresh herbs and vegetables including basil, chives, curry, peppermint, oregano, rosemary, thyme, peppers and tomatoes.

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Orlando doesn’t rest complacently on its lofty perch as one of the world’s top meeting, incentive and convention destinations. The city relentlessly continues to add more of everything corporate planners need.

As a matter of fact, Orlando is experiencing one of the most significant expansion periods in the destination’s history. According to Visit Orlando, Universal Orlando Resort will open the world’s first centrally themed, multi-park experience this summer by expanding The Wizarding World of Harry Potter across both of its theme parks. SeaWorld Orlando recently opened Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin — the biggest expansion in its company’s history, while Walt Disney World Resort will complete a multiyear project that is doubling the size of FantasiaLand when it debuts the Seven Dwarfs Mine Train coaster this summer.

Meetings held earlier this year in Orlando include the biannual Business Alignment Meeting (BAM) of Milwaukee, WI-based Rockwell Automation. Business and sales leaders from more than 40 countries gathered for a five-day meeting at the 1,000-room, South Seas-themed Loews Royal Pacific Resort, according to Jeff Storley, manager, commercial events, Rockwell Automation. BAM was held at the Loews Royal Pacific Resort in 2012 and also is scheduled for 2016 and 2018. Rockwell Automation also held three software technical education conferences for end users and other business partners at the resort in 2003, 2005 and 2007. Loews’ 85,000 sf of flexible conference space is a big reason Rockwell Automation returns often to the property. Conference facilities, which are located on one floor, allow attendees to flow efficiently between classrooms when sessions are on a tight schedule, and the U-shaped arrangement is conducive to training sessions, says Storley.

Theme Park Bonuses

The BAM meeting held roughly 90 classes over four days in about 20 different classrooms. The technical education conferences had nearly 1,000 computer users in the conference space networked together for end users and other business partners.

Storley also likes Universal Resorts’ self-contained setting and the endless variety of entertainment and activities available on-property. “We had an event at Streets of New York, says Storley. “We rented out a section of Universal, and they gave us a number of rides as part of that. We also opened up their shops and restaurants and had Universal character actors roaming through the crowd. The big attractions for us were the Transformers ride, the Despicable Me ride, Shrek 4D and Revenge of the Mummy. Some people also went to Disney, Cape Canaveral and SeaWorld during their visit to Orlando.”

The Loews Royal Pacific Resort also is a property of choice for Rockwell Automation because it provides great value. “It’s an awesome value,” says Storley. “We are very budget-conscious, and they help us to make sure we manage our budget to the letter. We feel we get great value. We have been working with the same salesperson for every meeting.”

Later this year, Walt Disney World Resort will host a meeting of a major international candy and confections company.

Visit Orlando President and CEO George Aguel earlier this month proudly announced that Orlando set an all-time record for U.S. destinations by welcoming 59 million visitors in calendar year 2013 — a hefty 3 percent increase over 2012.

Add that triumph to a number of other accomplishments such as CVB of the Year by ConferenceDirect in 2013 and HelmsBriscoe in 2012. Aguel says he “likes the sound of CVB of the Year.”

And troves of meeting professionals couldn’t agree more with Aguel, who asserts, “Orlando is one of the top destinations for meetings, conventions and trade shows in the world. Our award-winning convention center is recognized each year for its outstanding service and amenities. We offer an incredible diversity of hotel and resort properties for meeting professionals to choose from.”

Aguel continues, “As a city, we’re constantly evolving. Orlando is a destination where there’s something new every year. Universal’s Cabana Bay Beach Resort just opened, and this season is also constantly evolving with new restaurants that will excite even the most discerning attendees. From elegant, top-rated Zagat restaurants to casual pubs, there’s something for every taste — all within minutes from the convention center and convention hotels.”

George Aguel, President and CEO Visit Orlando, Orlando, FL

The future home of the Orlando Eye (observation wheel) — which will add more restaurants, shops and attractions to the mix. “Of course, there also are our outstanding theme parks. Groups can take over areas of the parks for private events that guests will remember for years to come. Our restaurant scene is also constantly evolving with new restaurants that will excite even the most discerning attendees. From elegant, top-rated Zagat restaurants to casual pubs, there’s something for every taste — all within minutes from the convention center and convention hotels.”

Rockwell Automation attendees like the atmosphere, the food and beverage and energy found on the Streets of New York — one of Universal Studios’ popular gathering places.
As luck would have it, a former executive at our company became an executive with Disney and encouraged us to look at it as a possibility. I agreed to go there on a site visit, and we’ve been going since.”

Walt Disney World Resort is the company’s destination of choice for several reasons. “There are so many opportunities to have different experiences in the same venue that we wouldn’t have been able to have at a reasonable cost anywhere else,” she explains. “You couple that with the fact that Orlando is one of the least expensive places to bring a large group. And here’s a key: They offer amenities to the family and friends of attendees who want to come a few days before the meeting or stay on afterwards.”

In addition, meeting at Walt Disney World provides good value. The candy company initially signed meeting contracts year-by-year, but now has a great multiyear deal, says the planner. “The room rates are very good,” she says. “The food and beverage rates are competitive. If someone is looking for food and beverage price alone, they probably wouldn’t choose Disney, but there are so many other things included in the packages that make it a good value.”

The company’s four-day sales meeting at the Yacht Club Resort last year included about 450 attendees. The group took full advantage of all that the hotel offers, starting with the beach. “We had a beach party for a welcome reception,” says the planner. “They closed off a balcony for us to watch a light show and fireworks. Another year, we did a special event at Disney’s Hollywood Studios, and we had private access to the rides. We also had customized food and entertainment. They learned about our brand and helped us incorporate it into our theme through entertainment, whether it was a comedian or strolling musician. One year, they customized dessert and 3-D eyeglasses to our brand.”

Making Meetings Easy

The candy company’s planner cites Disney’s overall commitment to great customer service as a major reason for returning year after year. “If there is anything that stands out no matter which venue we use, it’s the partnership with the people,” she says. “From the sales teams to the people at the convention center, the way they partner with you sets them apart from other venues, and it keeps us coming back. They make meetings easy for us.” That’s one reason why the company’s research and development as well as its brand team also have held meetings at Disney, she adds.

Planners point out that Orlando is a world-class destination partly because its theme parks offer such dedicated service to meetings both large and small. An oil and gas services company based outside of Florida held a three-day meeting earlier this year for 125 of its banking business partners, mostly from the northern and central U.S. It’s the eighth consecutive year that the company (which would like to remain anonymous) has held the meeting at Disney’s Grand Floridian Resort & Spa.

Although the oil and gas company has met at the same property for eight consecutive years, the group continues to find new activities, entertainment and experiences. “This year we did a dinner at Epcot’s World Showplace pavilion in a venue that is not open to the public,” says Luz France, the planner. “It was themed to the colors representing the traditional high-honor awards for career sales accomplishments. We used black, gold and red colors, and changes in lighting and drapery to make the ballroom look like it was converted into something different than it was during the general session. We had an after-party in a hospitality room, where we brought in dueling piano players.”

The sales group’s previous annual meetings at Disney have taken full advantage of other activities and entertainment offerings. “One year we did a dinner at Epcot’s Theme Park,” says the planner. “They closed off a balcony for us to watch a light show and fireworks. Another year, we did a special event at Disney’s Hollywood studios, and we had private access to the rides. We also had customized food and entertainment. They learned about our brand and helped us incorporate it into our theme through entertainment, whether it was a comedian or strolling musician. One year, they customized dessert and 3-D eyeglasses to our brand.”

Dining in Downtown Orlando is getting a lot of buzz nowadays. Groups are welcome, and attendees on their own time have a variety of choices.
Orlando continues to increase its supply of technologically modern hotels. The projected total of all rooms jumps to 120,575 for 2015. Here’s the latest property news for Orlando.

New and Improved

Universal Orlando Resort’s Cabana Bay Beach Resort opened March 31. The retro-style, 1,800-room resort is the largest of Universal’s four onsite Loews Hotels. Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando completed a $14 million renovation of its 750 guest rooms and suites and refurbished the hotel’s façade. Loews Portofino Bay features 42,000 sf of meeting space. The 444-room Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World is scheduled to open in late summer 2014. The lakeside resort will offer 37,750 sf of meeting and function space including ballrooms of 14,000 sf and 6,000 sf. Groups will enjoy nightly fireworks views, great golf, the spectacular five-acre Explorer Island and much more.

The 1,417-room Hilton Orlando’s new 50,000 sf outdoor Promenade features spectacular water and fire fountains and provides a lush landscaped lawn and patio ideal for intimate gatherings or large events for 100 to 3,000 guests. Four distinct areas include the Sky Terrace, Grande Lawn, Fountain Plaza and Sun Garden. Tents, catering, lighting, sound and entertainment are available for custom-designed events. An elevated pedestrian bridge connects the hotel to the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC).

Sheraton Lake Buena Vista Resort is undergoing a $25 million makeover. The project includes the hotel’s 429 guest rooms, meeting spaces, redesigned pools and dining options.

The Westin Orlando Universal Boulevard, located directly across from the North/South concourse of the OCCC, has opened a new meeting and special event center. The 5,575-sf Lotus Ballroom increases the 315-room hotel’s total function and prefunction space to 13,685 sf. The new ballroom accommodates up to 300 guests for a banquet setting or meeting and up to 500 guests for a reception. The new ballroom is adjacent to the hotel’s free-form outdoor pool, another ideal location for outdoor group functions.

The 2,000-room Orlando World Center Marriott has completed a five-year, multimillion-dollar refurbishment that included the North Tower’s 514 guest rooms, 10 suites and 110 guest suites. The Hall of Cities meeting rooms also underwent renovation. The property boasts 450,000 sf of function space. Over the past 40 years, Rosen Hotels & Resorts has delivered experiences that our in-house technology people worked with the hotel staff, says France. “Our audio-visual included a company video that we shot in HD and put together mainly for this meeting.” France adds that the hotel’s premier HD equipment made his audio-visual content look “very sharp.”

State-of-the-art audio-visual and technology help cement Orlando’s status as a premiere destination. Andrew Taffin, CEO of Iselin, NJ-based Tallen Technology Rentals, which has served Orlando with up to 5,000 attendees, describes the destination’s audio-visual and technology services as “unlimited.”

More Orlando properties are tying audio-visual and other technology to mobile-event apps, many of which integrate games and fun, interactive features such as contests and scavenger hunts. Orlando properties also are using interactive technology such as displays and touch-screens to connect meetings in separate rooms and other function spaces both indoors and outdoors.

Overall, meeting planners will be pleased to learn that Orlando has plenty of room for all their events. Orlando boasts more than 450 hotels with more than 118,000 rooms. Out of that total, meeting properties number 36, with a total of 33,343 rooms. (Meeting hotels, also known as convention hotels, are defined here as having a minimum of 300 rooms and no less than 20,000 sf of meeting space.)
ered one-of-a-kind Orlando experiences. Their three meeting hotels include Rosen Shingle Creek, Rosen Plaza Hotel and Rosen Centre Hotel. Rosen Plaza Hotel was connected to the OCCC West Building via the Gary Sain Memorial Skybridge in September. Rosen Plaza is updating its fine-dining restaurant, Jack’s Place, slated to open in the fall. Rosen Centre Hotel is opening a new poolside restaurant this summer, Harry’s Poolside Bar & Grill.

The newly renovated Wyndham Orlando Resort International Drive boasts new resort-chic décor for the property’s 613 guest rooms and suites, a newly renovated lobby lounge, and 25,000 sf of newly constructed meeting space and expansive outdoor venues for events.

Other Developments

Orlando-based Unicorp National Developments Inc. is busy with two development projects: the $100 million I-Shops redevelopment/expansion of the Wyndham Orlando Resort and the future home of The Orlando Eye on International Drive — the $200 million dining-shopping-entertainment complex. The new Orlando Eye — a 425-foot observation wheel — will be complemented by attractions such as Sea Life Aquarium and Madame Tussauds wax museum. LongHorn Steakhouse is now open and Yard House Orlando is set to open in April. Other restaurants will open as they are completed.

The 1,641-room Peabody Orlando was reflagged as the Hyatt Regency Orlando. Before it changed hands last fall, the property was renovated for approximately $440 million. The property also boasts a spa, fitness center, three pools and three restaurants. It has 315,000 sf of meeting space and is attached to the OCCC.

Earlier this year, Arnold Palmer’s Bay Hill Club & Lodge landed on the prestigious 2014 Conde Nast Traveler Gold List, scoring a 100 percent ranking for service. The property offers 70 rooms, 9,000 sf of meeting and banquet space as well as 27 holes of golf.

Extra, Extra

Combining business and pleasure just got a little easier at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin as the new Disney FastPass+ allows hotel guests to reserve up to 60 days in advance of their trip and choose from a broader array of options, including Disney Character Greetings, fireworks and parade viewing areas, shows and spectacles.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin, located in the heart of Walt Disney World, offers 2,265 guest rooms and more than 329,000 sf of meeting space including 84 meeting rooms, two executive boardrooms, four ballroom options, 110,500 sf of contiguous convention/exhibit space, outdoor function areas and two business centers.

Disney Differences are part of the package at Swan and Dolphin, too. They may include such items as access to Walt Disney World Theme Parks for “magical” parties and events; Disney Character appearances at group functions; the world-renowned executive training of the Disney Institute and the Walt Disney World business programs; behind-the-scenes tours and personal enrichment programs; access to ESPN Wide World of Sports for sporting events, teambuilding programs and themed functions; exclusive mid-day and multi-day meeting/convention tickets to the Walt Disney World Theme Parks; extra Magic Hours benefit; complimentary transportation throughout the resort including water taxi service to Epcot and Disney’s Hollywood Studios; access to four nearby championship Walt Disney World golf courses; and more.

Planners considering Doubletree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld, formerly the Doubletree Resort Orlando – International Drive, will find extra benefits as the property is an official onsite SeaWorld partner hotel. The resort offers 1,004 guest rooms and suites, 60,000 sf of flexible indoor/outdoor meeting and banquet space, multiple dining options and complimentary transportation to the major theme parks. Complimentary Quick Queue at SeaWorld; compli-
mentary transportation to SeaWorld, Aquatica, Discovery Cove, and Universal Orlando and others are a few of the extra benefits available.

Theme Park Additions

Universal Orlando Resort is expanding the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, adding the London-themed Diagon Alley area in Universal Studios this summer. The new attraction, which doubles the size of the Harry Potter world, will feature new experiences based on Diagon Alley and Knockturn Alley from the Harry Potter series.

Connecting the existing and new Harry Potter lands will be the Hogwarts Express train, which will treat guests to two completely different experiences depending on whether they’re traveling to Hogsmeade in Islands of Adventure or to Diagon Alley in Universal Studios. It’s the first time that a train will connect two themed areas at Universal.

Once seated in the cabin, passengers will be able to look out their windows as scenes and characters from Harry Potter books and films pass by. They’ll see Hagrid come alongside the train on his flying motorbike, Buckbeak the Hippogriff swoop gracefully over the black lake, the Weasley twins on brooms and up to their usual antics, the Knight Bus swerving through London traffic — and other special moments and surprises.

Universal Orlando’s CityWalk will open eight new culinary venues in CityWalk during 2014, including the Hot Dog Hall of Fame, featuring iconic hot dog creations from famous ball parks; Cowfish, an innovative and trend-setting concept out of Charlotte, NC; the popular Cold Stone Creamery; and Menchie’s. Original concepts include Antojitos Authentic Mexican Food, a unique tapas-style restaurant; Bread Box, a home-style sandwich shop; a new modern Italian kitchen concept, where guests can watch as the culinary team handcrafts their pasta from scratch; and Red Oven Pizza Bakery — Universal’s first-ever Neopolitan-style pizza bakery, which is now open.

Walt Disney World Resort broke ground on an Avatar-inspired land. The new attraction, located at Disney’s Animal Kingdom, is the largest in its history and will take several years to complete.

Disney’s Magic Kingdom Park debuted the Disney Festival of Fantasy, its newest daytime parade. The parade will include characters from stories such as “The Little Mermaid,” “Dumbo,” “Sleeping Beauty” and “Pinocchio.”

Walt Disney World Resort also announced the return of Star Wars Weekends to Hollywood Studios by late spring. The annual event includes a parade, Jedi Training Academy, “Hyperspace Hoopla” and themed meet-and-greets.

Perhaps no other destination epitomizes such pure fun more than Orlando. Coupled with the all the other benefits of meeting in Orlando and the excellent value, who could ask for anything more? C&IT

When it comes to meetings and events, Orlando always over delivers. A number of distinctive dining and entertainment districts. An ever growing number of accommodating hotels. And the No. 1 convention center in the country.* No wonder Orlando is a leading destination for meetings and events.

*According to Business Review USA.
Eureka!
Discover Meetings
Gold in California

Here are plenty of golden meeting opportunities waiting to be mined in The Golden State of California. Not only is there a long list of outstanding hotels, resorts and convention facilities, there also are an endless variety of activities and attractions to go along with the sun, surf and sand. But for Sandra Ponce, associate manager, human resources for Taco Bell, choosing the right California destination was all about sterling service.

Newport Beach

Ponce leads a leadership development class for the company’s restaurant general managers. The one-week program, called The Mark, is conducted in a series of eight waves throughout the year with 60–65 attendees at each session. For almost five years now, the company has been housing its general managers at the 335-room Radisson Hotel Newport Beach. The actual training takes place at Taco Bell’s headquarters in nearby Irvine.

She explained why they chose the Radisson. “When we first started looking for a location, we were looking for a place that was committed to extending the experience the GMs were experiencing here in the session. When meeting with the staff at the Radisson, I just felt that they were committed to going above and beyond. They got the purpose of what we were doing, and they were truly committed to taking care of our restaurant GMs and providing them with an experience that was just as great as what they were experiencing here at the restaurant support center.”

Ponce gave a few examples of the Radisson’s “above and beyond” service. “Because they’re close to the airport, they’re able to pick up our GMs from the airport when they come in. They host a welcome reception for them with hors d’oeuvres and drinks. It’s an opportunity for them to start networking and making them feel really welcomed. Also, in partnership with Visit Newport Beach (the city’s CVB, also known as Newport Beach and Company), they provide transportation for us for the week so we’re not relying on hotel shuttles. It is a bus that is reserved for us, so again, it’s about (the GMs) being together, being able to do all of our activities that week because of the transportation that is being included.”

She offers an example: “On Wednesday, we have a community service event. We are across the street from the Irvine Spectrum (a large outdoor shopping, dining and entertainment center). We have our GMs go to Target and shop and fill up 10 backpacks for underprivileged teenagers who we are helping and supporting, and so they transport us back and forth for that. On Thursday, we give them a free night to explore the town, and they have been gracious enough to take our GMs to the Irvine Spectrum as well as to the Balboa Pier.”

Ponce describes what she likes about hosting her leadership program in Newport Beach. “Everybody I’ve interacted with has been extremely helpful and willing to make this a memorable experience for everybody who comes and attends our program.”

Located approximately 40 miles south of Los Angeles, Newport Beach is easily accessible from John Wayne Airport in Orange County. The city is known for its natural beauty, coastal lifestyle and Newport Harbor, the largest small yacht harbor in the U.S.

Also located in the Newport Beach area is the luxurious 332-room Pelican Hill Resort in nearby Newport Coast. The property is part of the Irvine Company’s resort properties division. Set on 504 acres offering spectacular coastal views and bordered by more than 50,000 acres of protected natural open land, the resort features an elegant architectural design inspired by Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio. For
By the end of 2014, the Hotel Irvine is scheduled to undergo a $15 million renovation. Tran recently held a meeting there. “When I arrived at the valet, the gentlemen who were former Hyatt employees recognized me by name. And they always park our co-founders’ cars up front.” She asked them how they knew to do that. “Their response was ‘Oh, we recognized them.’ We hadn’t been there in six months. That, to me, is very impressive.”

San Diego

The Sheraton San Diego Hotel and Marina recently completed a $1.7 million renovation of its food and beverage venues to enhance the guest experience. The project included a redesign of the hotel’s signature dining venue, Harbor’s Edge restaurant and lounge, and an expansion of Tapatini Bar. After a $15 million transformation project, The Westin San Diego features 436 upgraded guest rooms and the hotel’s restaurant, lobby, bar, lounge and meeting space have all been revitalized. The project also included the installation of a vertical garden wall in the lobby designed to improve air quality and create a relaxing environment. Perhaps at the other end of the spectrum are the hotel’s self-described “War Rooms,” private spaces designed by lawyers for lawyers as places to prepare for trials, conduct dispositions and briefings and conduct other legal meetings.

“The iconic US Grant Hotel located in the city’s Gaslamp Quarter, dates back to 1910. The hotel has now partnered with a group called On Demand Lifestyles to offer an exclusive fitness package to meeting groups. One option they offer is to schedule a group workout during breakout sessions. Also, with at least 10 days’ notice, attendees can select a personal trainer who will create a customized workout that can be completed in the guest’s room, in the hotel’s fitness center or while out and about in the city.

Perched atop the San Diego Marriott Gaslamp Quarter, Altitude Sky Lounge, touted as “the West Coast’s highest open-air rooftop venue” — 22 stories above street level — now also offers an indoor venue called City Sights. The new addition features a glass-walled balcony, affording the same panoramic views of the city, San Diego Bay and MLB’s Petco Park no matter what the weather.

Oak Creek Golf Club. The hotel offers 35,000 sf of meeting space, including 25 meeting rooms, and is home to the largest ballroom in Irvine.

Sophia Tran, senior executive assistant to the CEO, Specific Media, Irvine, CA

“The hotel’s attention to detail, the attention to the guest, and the attention to the employee make it a great place to work for anyone,” says Tran, who oversees 250 employees.

“San Diego is a beautiful city, and we’re honored to be a part of it,” said Joseph Team, president and CEO of Specific Media. “When Sophia comes here, she is the CEO of Specific Media, and all the employees know who she is and treat her with the utmost respect.”

Social media also has a place at the San Diego Marriott Gaslamp Quarter, where a Facebook page, a Twitter account and an Instagram account are used to engage guests and build a community. The hotel also offers an in-room technology package that includes a high-speed wireless Internet connection, a 42-inch flat-screen TV, a laptop and a printer, a feature that is especially popular among business travelers.

“Some of my best clients are those who travel for the meetings,” says Tran. “They come here, and they don’t have to worry about their work. They can look out our windows and see the city.”

San Diego Marriott Gaslamp Quarter

San Diego Marriott Gaslamp Quarter to its portfolio of managed properties. The guest rooms will be re-done floor by floor, and the meeting space, outdoor areas and first-floor restaurant and lounges also will be renovated. The announcement of the renovation project was all Tran needed to hear to bring her annual sales conference for over 500 employees back to Irvine. It has been held in Los Angeles for the past two years. “They guaranteed us that the renovations will be completed before our event, so we are really excited to see their plans come to life and into fruition for our event. This is something that we definitely need for Orange County.”

Tran also lauded the service she experienced at the Hotel Irvine when she recently held a meeting there. “When I arrived at the valet, the gentlemen who were former Hyatt employees recognized me by name. And they always park our co-founders’ cars up front.” She asked them how they knew to do that. “Their response was ‘Oh, we recognized them.’ We hadn’t been there in six months. That, to me, is very impressive.”

“Irvine is a great city, and the hotel is a great location,” says Tran. “We have a lot of corporate clients here, and they love the hotel.”

“Irvine is a great location for us,” says Tran. “We have a lot of corporate clients here, and they love the hotel.”
Los Angeles

Universal Studios Hollywood in Los Angeles is making an unprecedented five-year investment in new thrill rides and expansive themed environments. The most significant undertaking in the theme park’s 50-year history began in 2012 with the introduction of the Transformers: The Ride — 3D. Universal Plaza, a 37,000-sf art deco-styled piazza, debuted last summer, and Despicable Me Minion Mayhem and Super Silly Fun Land opens this month. Springfield, an immersive land surrounding The Simpsons Ride, will open in spring 2015, and Fast & Furious — Supercharged, based on the blockbuster film series, will be introduced in summer 2015 as the grand finale to the Studio Tour. The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, similar to the themed land 29 shows already booked into the Los Angeles Convention Center as of February, the center is on track to achieve its convention business is booming in Los Angeles. With 29 shows already booked into the Los Angeles Convention Center as of February, the center is on track to achieve its highest performance in a decade. “Los Angeles is hot right now,” says Ernest Wooden Jr., president and CEO of the Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board (LATCB). “Groups that are meeting here are finding they need to expand their room function area. The hotel also recently unveiled the Blue Sky Suite, a 3,000-sf purpose-built meetings suite offering three different meeting environments designed to encourage creative “blue sky thinking,” built-in AV and complimentary Wi-Fi. It can accommodate meetings for up to 15 people.

San Francisco

The Moscone Center which is comprised of Moscone North, South and West, covers more than 2 million sf and includes more than 700,000 sf of exhibit space, more than 100 meeting rooms and nearly 123,000 sf of prefunction areas. The three-level convention facility covers most of a city block in downtown San Francisco. The center has finished a two-year, $56 million renovation of the North and South buildings, which offer a total of 1.2 million sf of space. The project included a new wireless system that provides high-speed Internet for up to 60,000 devices simultaneously.

Future expansion plans call for the addition of 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space to the North and South buildings. Construction for the $500 million project is anticipated to begin this December with completion expected in summer 2018. Plans include a 50,000-sf ballroom and an enclosed pedestrian bridge connecting Moscone Center above Howard Street. Moscone was the site of a unique program planned by Penny Fonda, principal of Wit’s End Productions, headquartered in Roswell, GA. “We worked on an event that was in conjunction with a game developers’ conference,” she explains. “It was for a corporate client who was interested in gamification and learning about that, so they asked us to organize and produce a ‘hackathon.’ So we engaged game developers, and they all

Anaheim

The big news in Anaheim is the recently announced plan to expand the Anaheim Convention Center. The $180 million, 200,000-sf expansion project will create a state-of-the-art multipurpose, flexible meeting and exhibit space. The development will involve the replacement of existing parking spaces, the addition of new loading docks, vehicular entrance and a climate-controlled pedestrian bridge that will connect to the existing facility. The project, which represents the seventh expansion in the convention center’s 47-year history, is slated to begin late summer of 2014 and is expected to be completed by fall of 2016.

Today, the 1.6-million-sf facility is the largest convention center on the West Coast. The center features 815,000 sf of exhibit space, 130,000 sf of meeting space and an array of outdoor function space that includes the 100,000-sf Grand Plaza, which opened January 2013. Future hotel development plans could add 2,400 hotel rooms to the Anaheim Resort area’s 25,000 rooms within the next six years.

The iconic Disneyland Hotel, which opened in 1955, is conveniently located near Disneyland and the Disney California Adventure Park, and the Downtown Disneyland shopping, dining and entertainment complex. The hotel has revamped its 969 guest rooms through what it calls a “modern makeover with a magical twist.” The rooms now have a contemporary look and feature classic Disney artwork and memorabilia. The hotel’s new courtyard complex features two new private-event lawns that offer a total of 20,000 sf of space

The property has a 136,000-sf convention center, including the 18,000 sf Disney Grand Ballroom, which features a built-in stage, full lighting and sound capabilities, and a private pre-

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essentially got into a room and created games and wrote code for the games. At the end, it was judged to see which person won. It was pretty complex to plan it, actually. That was a very different event for us. Usually what we do is very corporate. “It worked out great. It was perfect,” she adds. Fondy had high praise for the staff at Moscone. “I found them to be exceedingly professional, helpful and responsive. They have a way of working. They have a system. They have everything down. It was a pleasure. That part of it was seamless.”

Fondy also was recently asked by a client to find a unique venue near Moscone Center for a private event for a group of C-level executives. After doing her research, she submitted a list of possibilities to her client. “The client selected one of the venues and is very, very happy,” Fondy says. The winning choice was B Restaurant & Bar. The contemporary-styled venue sits atop Moscone North and has an outdoor terrace overlooking Yerba Buena Gardens and the San Francisco skyline. The venue can accommodate a wide range of events, from a private wine dinner to a cocktail party for 400.

San Francisco Travel, a private, not-for-profit organization that was founded in 1909 to market the city as a destination, has recently made several staff changes to enhance its service to meeting planners. One of these changes is the promotion of Oleg Nakonechny to director, convention services. One of his goals will be to create an updated process for the hundreds of site inspections the city hosts each year.

The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco recently announced plans to renovate its 23,000 sf of meeting space. The project, which is expected to be completed in the fall, will include updates to the hotel’s Grand Ballroom, Terrace Room, conference rooms and boardrooms.

San Jose

Team San Jose has been a key driver for many planners who have used the destination in recent years. Unlike many CVBs, which hand off a planner to any number of other contacts after a meeting is initially booked, Team San Jose provides comprehensive, fully integrated support services in housing, event services, food and beverage, permitting, marketing support and technical consultation.

The city’s compact downtown area also offers a nice assort-

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Jose that take advantage of the city’s 300 days of sunshine a year. For example, the San Jose Museum of Art can host an indoor-outdoor event for up to 3,000, and the San Pedro Square Market, half a mile from the convention center, offers indoor-outdoor space for receptions with up to 1,850 attendees. The Tech Museum offers a rooftop terrace for 150 and 132,000 sf of gallery and meeting space for up to 2,500. Planners looking for a mid-sized theater will be delighted with the 3,036-seat, newly renamed City National Civic, a 1936 city landmark concert venue, which reopened in 2012 after a four-year renovation.

The expansion and renovation of the San Jose Convention Center (SJCC) was completed last fall. The project added nearly 125,000 sf of new space including 38,706 sf of additional meeting space and a 35,110-sf Grand Ballroom. The SJCC also upgraded its technology, improved the arrival experience for attendees and improved service levels by making changes to the way the back of the house functions. The convention center now offers a total of $50,000 sf of convention space and 305,000 sf of exhibition space.

Monterey

Kim Huerta, senior manager for store operations for West Marine, plans an annual internal meeting in Monterey. For the past several years, the event has been held at the Portola Hotel & Spa and the adjacent Monterey Conference Center.

This March, the event was attended by 500 internal associates and 200 of the company’s vendor partners.

“It’s convenient to our corporate headquarters,” Huerta explains. “We’re located in Watsonville and Monterey is very close. The size of the hotel meets our needs. The Portola Hotel is not too large and not too small. The hotel staff has been really fantastic — the management as well as everyone from the bellmen to room service.”

West Marine didn’t host any off-site events this year, but in the past they have used the Monterey Bay Aquarium. “They do a wonderful job with events,” she describes.

Huerta also worked with the Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau (MCCVB) and found them to be very responsive. “It’s a smaller town, so you get more personal service,” she notes. “They accommodate each individual client’s needs. I appreciate that. If you go to some of the bigger markets, you’re just another convention. Here, we always feel like a top priority,” she continues. “We are happy to partner with Monterey, the conference center and the Portola Hotel.”

In an overwhelmingly positive vote — more than 90 percent — Monterey hotel owners approved a plan to tax themselves to pay for a projected $32.3 million renovation and improvement project for the Monterey Conference Center. The next step calls for city staff to issue requests for proposals for project management, and design and architectural services.

The MCCVB is offering a “Fly-See-Book” promotion that allows qualified planners who submit an RFP the opportunity to receive roundtrip airfare (up to $500), a customized site inspection, hotel accommodations, ground transportation and meals.

Golden State Demand

There’s no doubt that the interest in California as a destination is high. According to a recent report from Hotel News Now, California was a market of choice in 2013 for hotel investors. One of the factors cited for investor interest is “a very strong demand story” which, as it appears is true of meeting and event planners, as well.

For more information or to submit an RFP, please contact us at 800-555-6290 or Sales@SeeMonterey.com.
Grand Traverse Resort and Spa, near Traverse City, MI, has named Ryan Buck as director of sales. He was complex director of group sales for W Hotels of Chicago, IL.

JW Marriott Houston Downtown has appointed Dawn Schuller as senior sales manager. She was a corporate sales manager at the Four Seasons Hotel Houston.

Brian D. Macaluso was named director of sales and marketing for Taj Boston. He was task force director, sales and marketing, Starwood Hotels & Resorts.

Shand Luce was promoted to director of sales and marketing for The Depot Renaissance Minneapolis Hotel and The Residence Inn at The Depot Hotel. He was director of operations for The Depot Renaissance Minneapolis Hotel.

The Anaheim/Orange County (CA) Visitor & Convention Bureau has named Dana Pickle as director of convention sales for the Central region. She was a national account executive for the Greater Houston CVB. Kara Bowman was named director of meeting sales, mid-Atlantic region. She was account director for Tourism Toronto. Victoria Diaz was promoted to director of meeting sales, Eastern region. She was client services manager for the bureau.

Visit Indy, Indianapolis, IN, has named Daren Kingi as senior V.P. sales. He was V.P. sales western mountain Pacific area for Marriott International.

Loews Ventana Canyon Resort, Tucson, AZ, has named Ryan Bunker as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing at Tucson Marriott University Park.
At the heart of every incentive experience is a message. Told well, it becomes a story. Told by Disney, it becomes unforgettable. Thousands of meeting planners trust Disney to reward and engage their top performers through our unique ability to blend business, entertainment and one-of-a-kind creative resources and create memories that last a lifetime.

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