Introducing one incredible offer for guests and an extraordinary benefit for Meeting Planners

It's the ideal situation—the meeting planner gets an amazing value for their entire group, plus they get the valuable recognition and reward they deserve.

Pick Your Corporate Perk:
Your guests receive either free beverage packages, free gratuities, or up to $300 per stateroom to spend on board.*

Reward the Meeting Planner:
The meeting planner will automatically be given membership to our Captain's Club loyalty program as a Select member on this sailing.* Select status membership includes:

* Entrance to the exclusive Captain's Club Celebration event on board
* Premium Offers, including discounts on Internet service, spa treatments, photo gallery, and so much more
* Entrance to the exclusive Senior Officers' Cocktail Party
* Priority embarkation (where available)

Also, the meeting planner will be named a “Guest of Distinction” and receive special recognition and surprises in their stateroom.

*To Qualify for Pick Your Corporate Perk Offer, the following requirements must be satisfied. The Incentive (I) or Corporate/Continuing Education Meeting Cruise (O) must be booked May 1 – July 31, 2014 (the “Offer Period”). The “Offer Period” must be a 4-night or longer cruise that departs June 2014 – April 2016. Offer excludes Celebrity Xpedition®, Transatlantic, and Transpaciﬁc cruises. Offer requires ocean view or higher stateroom booking at the non-discounted standard cruise fare. Offer cannot be combined with any other offer, promotion or price program. Offer is applicable to new bookings of less than 100 stateroom groups. Bookings that meet all of these requirements are “Qualifying Bookings.” All members of the group must select the same choice of the following options: Classic Beverage Package for Two, Free Gratuities for Two, or Onboard Credit (“OBC”). Savings are not applicable to optional cruise excursion prices, except as speciﬁed. Offer does not apply to any pre/post cruise land programs. “Demo” staterooms are not eligible for the offer. All offers must be reconﬁrmed upon rebooking “Qualifying Bookings” due to the expiration of the “Offer Period” ending July 31, 2014. “Qualifying Bookings” must be booked on or before July 31, 2014. ‘OBC’ option is one per stateroom and the amount is based on the number of cruise nights: 4-5 nights $100; 6-9 nights $200; 10 nights or more $300. OBC has no cash value, is applicable only to on-board spending (excluding gratuities), and will be applied pre-cruise in the form of a credit added to your shipboard account. OBC is per person, per stateroom. OBC must be selected by each stateroom member. Offers exclude interior staterooms.

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Celebrity Cruises*
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Publisher’s Message

Just Call Me Old-Fashioned

Rapidly advancing technology is changing the way we learn, the way we do business and the way we live our daily lives. It seems there is something “new” on the technology front to discover, explore and conquer everyday. It’s all well and good, but I prefer conducting my business the old-fashioned way: I pick up the telephone, either my desk model or my new smartphone, and call for a live chat. My first choice is always face-to-face, but because that is not always possible, I pick up the phone and call.

Many professional meeting planners happen to agree that building and nurturing business relationships by working the telephones is a good business strategy. In our cover story this month, What Planners Want from Hotels —Forging Optimal Relationships Requires Real Partnership and Communication,” Lisa Langford, corporate meeting planner for Finance and Resource Management Consultants, shares her vision of success. “I have always approached hotels with one simple, basic premise,” she says. “We both want our client to remember a great meeting, at their particular hotel, for a fair price.”

But does she get to that point? Langford believes in what she calls the “retro practice of phone conversing.” This, she says, “goes back to my core belief that we both want this to work but need to strategize outside the box together. That way: I pick up the telephone, either my desk model or my new smartphone, and have saved us several times recently, and all were fostered through conversations.”

Blue Janis, who graces our cover this month, is a national account manager for Experient in Broadview Heights, Ohio. He concurs that relationships must always be infused with effective communication to work. “I believe that fundamentally, it comes down to communication,” Janis says. “The better each party understands the goals of the other, the more likely there will be a successful meeting and a happy client.”

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher
Changes Name to IBTM America

AIBTM Announces Dynamic New Format,

The exhibitors will be from all sectors of the MICE market and will be set to open in late 2016, the new facility will feature 100-plus courts (a mix of hard and clay) and will house the USTA’s Community Tennis and Player Development divisions. Plans also include a 200-room hotel with an additional hotel and conference center planned within 3–5 years of the facility opening. Smith said.

The agreement also allows for Visit Florida, the state’s official tourism marketing corporation, to partner with Visit Orlando and the USTA on marketing programs aimed at utilizing the entire state’s exposure in the domestic and international marketplace. www.visitorlando.com

Visit Orlando, U.S. Tennis Association Announce Exclusive U.S. Open Sponsorship

NEW YORK, NY — Visit Orlando has been named the exclusive global tourism partner of the U.S. Open, one of the world’s highest attended sporting events. The news came on the heels of the United States Tennis Association’s (USTA) announcement to build a state-of-the-art tennis facility in the Lake Nona area of Orlando.

“Becoming the exclusive tourism partner of the U.S. Open provides a unique forum for Visit Orlando to reach a global audience of potential travelers in all of our key markets,” said Visit Orlando President and CEO George Aguel. “By working closely with the USTA through our U.S. Open partnership, as well as leveraging the USTA’s future presence in Orlando, we plan to attract incremental visitation to our destination through the penetration of key audience segments.” Aguel noted that the multi-year sponsorship will reach a loyal fan base of affluent visitors, giving Visit Orlando access to partnership extensions such as sponsorship of Arthur Ashe Kids’ Day, with more than 95,000 attendees, as well as year-round marketing programs to reach the estimated 700,000 members of the USTA and exposure in global broadcasts. Visit Orlando also will be able to connect with the more than 700,000 consumers attending the national tennis championships.

Site Study: Group Travel Is Top Motivational Tool

CHICAGO, IL — Does prior experience with a supplier influence program decisions? This and related questions were the focus of a second joint research study conducted by the Site International Foundation and IMEX, the world-wide exhibition for incentive travel, meetings and events. The research revists and compares results from a similar study conducted in 2013. Utilizing the combined databases of The Site Index Panel and the IMEX Group, the study asked industry professionals to comment on their experiences in purchasing motivational travel. Of the study participants from more than 16 countries, 40 percent are users of incentive travel and 60 percent represent providers.

Key observations:
• Group travel is growing in importance.
• Past relationships with a supplier matters.
• Higher management and purchasing departments influence buying decisions.
• Providers believe that price is the major factor in not winning a bid.
• Trade shows are a valuable source for identifying service providers.

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How to Decide if a CSR Activity Is the Right Fit for Your Event

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) continues to be a popular component in meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions. CSR event components are a good way for organizations to build social good will, set an example, inspire event participants to get involved in their own communities outside of the event and extend their brand promise. They also can be a lot of fun!

Simple to Intense

CSR components range in scope from simple things like employees at a company-required meeting are more likely to make sure your event component relates somehow to literacy.

1. **Do the participants at my event share my CSR values?**
   - Employees at a company-required meeting are more likely to embrace your CSR values. External customers may like your product and service, but may view your CSR values from a very different perspective. Make sure you are on the same wavelength with the majority of your participants.

2. **Does the event component align with my CSR values?**
   - If your organization routinely supports literacy, for example, make sure your event component relates somehow to literacy. This furthers your brand promise. Including an event that appears to have no connection to your organization is confusing and can come off as gimmicky or just a way to get a tax write-off.

3. **Is the activity in line with the participants’ interests and talents?**
   - Participants need to feel comfortable and competent to do the activity you are asking them to perform. If it’s working on a construction site, do they have the skills and physical ability to do the job? If it’s working with disabled children at a sports event, do they have the empathy and personality to engage with these special individuals? While it can be good to encourage people to step outside their comfort zones, it’s not always in everyone’s best interest to do so.

4. **Does the CSR component add value to the locale where the event is being held?**
   - Virtually every community has public-service and social-enhancement needs. Make sure your CSR component serves a real need in the community. Just because your organization’s CSR strategy focuses on the needs of children, doesn’t necessarily mean the community has the same priority. They may be in dire straits over serving an elderly population or veterans. Work with your destination management company or event planning agency for help in identifying the right component that aligns with both your CSR strategy and community needs. It would be unusual not to be able to find some common ground.

5. **Am I willing to make participation at the event optional?**
   - This can be tricky depending on who your attendees are. If everyone is a direct employee, how important is it to you to require participation? Some companies see the CSR activity in the same light as a teambuilding event — which they can be! If you do require participation for employees, make sure they can handle the work (see question 3). Someone who is afraid of water is not going to find going out in a canoe to do water-quality testing to be a positive and engaging experience.

6. **What questions can I ask about the event planning agency or destination management company where the event is being held?**
   - When attending an event, are the CSR activities a top priority? Will all of the CSR activities be in line with the majority of the participants’ interests and talents? Can the activity be tailored to meet the needs of the attendees? Is the activity in line with the CSR strategy and mission of the community where the event is being held?

CSR Has a Very Valuable Role to Play

A well-planned CSR component can be extremely rewarding for your participants and the community you are helping. While not everyone will want to participate, you can make a positive impact on your brand, your organization, your attendees and the community where your event is being held. When including a CSR component, make sure it is:

- **Aligned:** It needs to relate to your organization’s CSR strategy, mission, values or culture.
- **Appropriate:** Participants need to have the skills, abilities and confidence to perform the tasks.
- **Community-specific:** It needs to meet the top priorities of the community, not just be a “feel-good” experience for participants.
- **Relevant:** Participants must see the value of their contributions and in certain situations, must be able to opt-out.

By Mary MacGregor

A Clean the World event at MPI WEC. Gently used hotel soaps and shampoos are recycled and redistributed to customers in need.

A volunteer works on home construction in a Habitat for Humanity program.

A group with Fairmont’s Meetings That Matter program works to restore habitats for native species in Hawaii.

Help Is Available

Consult with your event planning agency or destination management company for help in deciding if a CSR component is right for your event. They have knowledge of the community you are visiting and have good local contacts to ensure that your CSR activity is positive and productive for everyone involved.

For more information on how BI Worldwide can help your organization plan an engaging CSR event or examples of successful events planned for a variety of organizations, please visit BIWorldwide.com or contact us at info@BIWorldwide.com.

Mary MacGregor

joined BI WORLDWIDE (BIW) in January 2013 as corporate vice president — event solutions. She comes to BIW after serving as the leader of business development, events and marketing for other major third-party organizations. In her current role she is responsible for all operating areas of the BIW Event Solutions Group including purchasing, design, delivery, group air, individual incentive travel, onsite operations, technology, communications and merchandise. She leads a team of more than 175 industry professionals who deliver memorable experiences and measurable results for their customers. In 2011, Mary served as global president of Site (Society of Incentive & Travel Professionals). For more information, visit BIWorldwide.com or email info@BIWorldwide.com

“You can make a positive impact on your brand, your organization, your attendees and the community where your event is being held.”
Engaging Audiences Through Gamification

Keeping an audience attentive and engaged is one of the most challenging tasks for any event organizer. The average attention span of adults is estimated to be about 10 minutes, a fraction of the time an average speech or presentation takes at most events.

Today, event organizers are turning to gamification to utilize technology and social media platforms to elicit excitement, interest and joy for attendees. These positive experiences incentivize interaction and keep participants attentive and contributive.

Think about how people willingly subject themselves to extra layovers to earn more flight miles. The time, effort and inconvenience to engage in an otherwise unpleasant activity is motivated by the promise of a future reward that is very desirable and rewarding. Similarly, a lifeless speech or event could be as arduous as a long layover, but an injected incentive as attractive as extra flight miles could change the perception of attendees.

Event content is key to the successful execution of gamification in events. Information and processes must be easily graspable by the average attendee, but also have the quality and processes must be easily graspable by the average attendee, but also have the quality and rewarding. Similarly, a lifeless speech or event could be as arduous as a long layover, but an injected incentive as attractive as extra flight miles could change the perception of attendees.

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Here are some best practices to using gamification at events, and tips on picking the right kinds of incentives, and building deeper attendee engagement:

- **Stay away from offering “stuff.”** Most people give out physical objects as rewards although it is the least motivating. Granted, if you give away a million-dollar sports car to the most engaged participant in a two-hour presentation, you might yield some enthusiastic interest. But the typical gifts (especially cheap corporate gift sets) are not the way to increase engagement.

- **Go with SAPS rewards.** The best rewards can be categorized (in importance order) by SAPS—Status, Access, Power and Stuff. Status means recognition. The person receives a badge during game play for example, or their achievement allows them to take a two-hour lunch. Think outside of the box, beyond just the $5 ticket for a free airline drink. Perhaps the top participant earns the right to ask the first panel question or earns dinner with the renowned speaker, giving them access to an influential person. You can give active participants the power of three minutes with the microphone to talk about their work in the company and recent successes. People want to feel special and to acquire something worthwhile for their efforts, so focus on SAPS rewards to keep the audience engaged.

- **Engagement for single events.** Engagement rewards for one-off events need to be immediate and impactful—you only have one chance to grab their attention. Gamification in a single event needs to be relevant and allow attendees to complete the challenge within the session. Consider relevant trivia quizzes during the discussion to encourage engagement with the content and base incentives on participation levels.

- **Event series engagement.** A series of events that are tied together provide opportunities for deeper engagement. Smaller achievements can be gamified throughout a series of events so attendees can earn rewards as they progress through the series. Use technology to keep track of attendee retweets and other activities over time, so the top “interactors” can be rewarded at the end.

- **Incentivize sharing and networking.** People attend meetings and events to either find ideas or meet interesting people. Tie gamification to the act of sharing information through social platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. The technology enabling gamification needs to allow seamless connection to social sites in order to be used by busy attendees, and not distract them from the actual event. You also can incentivize networking by rewarding people for making connections with others, or making the sharing of virtual business cards a game in itself.

- **Leverage real-time feedback.** Event presenters can use new technology tools to monitor attendee engagement in real time. This allows them to maximize the impact of the event by marginalizing low-engagement content and promoting the topics that are stirring interest and intergroup discussions. Presenters who are giving multiple talks can use real-time feedback to refine their discussions so the next talk can be more engaging and productive.

- **Knowledge leaders.** If you see several people who are very engaged in the content (through observation of their sharing patterns or aptitude on quizzes), quickly accord them some form of recognition to spur them on. Utilize these people to help others in the group to understand the material, and give them a gamified “leader” status so they are proud of their deeper involvement. If you spot top thought leaders over several sessions, then perhaps these individuals can be recruited for special projects or tagged as management candidates.

- **Use surveys to gauge interest.** You can gauge engagement indirectly by looking at attendees’ sharing activity and conversations, or measure it directly through surveys. Gamification within the survey can make it fun and exciting for participants to offer their honest opinion. The standard questions such as “what did you learn today?” could be built into a game, with incremental rewards for answering multiple questions.

An important consideration before introducing gamification is to remember you aren’t looking to make your event into just a game. Gamification is a complement to the event experience, a way to present relevant incentives in a more engaging and fun context. It provides a simple yet compelling way to motivate and focus audience behavior while giving event organizers a more active audience and livelier event. In a way, gamifying the event experience can be seen as the proverbial dangling carrot, incentivizing engagement and maximizing audience participation of the attendees.

**C&IT**
Site Selection

World-class championship golf courses, where the regional headquarters of a property continues to upgrade and refresh their unique combination of golf experiences, which enhance net-erosion and get us going.” As the June 2014 meeting drew nearer, the planner said, “I called the PGA and said ‘I have

doing a facelift, adding a new color scheme, carpet, all new paint, new spa beds and zero gravity lounging pedicure chairs with hammered copper bowls.

Renaud Properties Are More Attractive

The renovations were an additional enticement. “We knew everything was going to be in great condition,” says Craven. “I asked them from time to time if they were on schedule. They were al-
ways right on the money in terms of building and keep people on top of the construction schedule. I visited the property three months before the meet-
ing and had a tour of everything as it was being worked on so I had a comfort-
able feeling. They were done a month before our event.”

Some groups are so enthralled with golf and spa resorts that they return year after year. In 2014, a major corporation held its fourth consecutive yearly meeting at the The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The resort is literally the company’s favorite prop-
erty. “We have a website that allows employees to register for the meeting and select from 15 different locations. The Broadmoor is usually the first one that shows up,” says the meeting plan-
ner who wishes to remain anonymous. Last July, the company held a three-
day meeting for 400 managers and ex-

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Playing to Win

Why Meeting at Golf and Spa Resorts Is Back in Vogue

Golf and spa resorts have always been popular choices for plan-
ers but they took a big hit during the recession. Boasting glori-
ous green spaces and sumptuous spas, these luxurious properties are back in vogue and are not resting on their laurels. From coast to coast, these properties continue to upgrade and refresh their unique combination of world-class championship golf courses, specialty spas, grand guest rooms and ample meeting space. That’s good news for planners who turn to these resorts not only for mem-
orable meetings and incentives, but also for golf experiences, which enhance net-
working and relaxing spa treatments, which recharge and pamper attendees.

Planners find all of the above in prop-
erties such as the 379-room AAA Four Diamond PGA National Resort & Spa in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. That’s where the regional headquarters of a large company held meetings in 2013 and has another meeting set for June 2014. The company, which elected to remain anonymous, selected the resort after some of its South Florida branch-

mlion renovation. The project included refurbishment of all 200 Spa Tower rooms and a redesign of the indoor pool and main lobby. Serenity by the sea Spa also received a facelift, adding a new color scheme, carpet, all new paint, new spa beds and zero gravity lounging pedicure chairs with hammered copper bowls.

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day meeting for 400 managers and ex-
ecutives at The Broadmoor following its $57 million expansion and make-over. Attendees were impressed by the redesign of all guest rooms and suites. The Broadmoor’s two new restaurants — Ristorante del Lago, an Italian eatery, and Natural Epicurean, which serves natural and organic food, were well-received by the group.

Attendees also got their fill of golf. “It’s always a huge hit with the executives. We didn’t have any golf tournaments, we just let them play,” she says.

The group enjoyed The Broadmoor’s three courses — the East Course; the West Course, a challenging course that combines the original 1918 design with the 1964 redesign of Robert Trent Jones Sr.; and the Mountain Course featuring renovations by Nicklaus Designs, which appeals to a range of skill levels and handicaps. All three courses offered attendees gorgeous views of the Rocky Mountains.

Most of all, the group soaked up The Broadmoor’s relaxing environment. “Once you get there, you basically forget about the rest of the world,” says the planner. “You don’t have to go off property because they have everything there, even a bowling alley. They always love the pool and spa. They always love the food as well.”

Service is always a major calling card of golf and spa resorts, and especially so with The Broadmoor. “I have been in this industry over 30 years and, nationally, I have to say it’s one of the highest-service-level properties I have ever worked with,” observes the planner. “They make the guests and those who work the program feel like family.”

The Broadmoor’s superb service stood out when executives requested space for last-minute meetings they needed. “Generally, we take up over 80 percent of The Broadmoor’s meeting space,” says the planner. “One evening, our executives said they needed to have a meeting from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, and they told us at 8 a.m. The staff found the room, turned it around and had it ready by 9 a.m. When I say they turned it around, I mean the setup, food and beverages, and AV.”

In addition, the resort caters to the smallest needs, including special diets. “We have people with food allergies,” says the planner. “They even go so far as to have the chef sit with them and go menu by menu what they can and can’t eat, and provide them with specific menus to meet their needs.”

The Broadmoor’s meeting space was made to order for the company’s black-tie banquet. “We held our banquet in the International Center Meeting Room, which we turned around in about four hours after a day of meetings,” says the planner. “People couldn’t believe they were in the same room. The International Center has two sections to it. At one end, we made our cocktail reception. On the other side was the banquet area. The centerpieces and table settings were over-and-above beautiful. We covered the walls in sheer beige draperies with up-lighting. We had 8- to 10-foot-tall, see-through cylinders with floating candles inside them and a live band.”

Golf and Spa Resort News

Groups who book stays at PGA National Resort & Spa before September 31, 2014 will be eligible for the property’s “Free Golf/FREE Spa” meeting incentive. Groups that book at least 100 room nights, each occupied on a peak night, can choose a complimentary round of golf or a 50-minute Swedish or facial massage at the 40,000-sf Spa at PGA National.

The AAA Five Diamond, 250-room Ponte Vedra Inn & Club, located on Florida’s northeast coast, reopened its Beach House in March after a thorough renovation. The Beach House’s 20 oceanfront rooms and suites received new king and queen beds, oversized windows, designer furniture, custom artwork and carpet and draperies. The Lodge & Club’s new swimming pool also reopened in March. The resort’s Ocean Course, which opened in 1928, offers golf-related group functions such as “closest-to-the-pin cocktail receptions” and “putting green coffee breaks.” The Inn & Club offers 17,000 sf of meeting space and the Lodge & Club provides 13,000 sf of function space and seven meeting rooms.

The Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa near Fort Lauderdale has opened Corporate groups have the best of both worlds at Ponte Vedra Inn & Club: championship golf and spa. WELCOME TO THE NEW RIVIERA

The spirit of glamorous servility is reawakening with an incentive unlike any other in the world. An exquisite new playground awaits to reward your team, from a breathtaking Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course to the Caribbean’s most complete spa experiences at ESPA at Baha Mar. To learn more, call 242.677.9000 or visit BahaMar.com. Premiering December 2014. Nassau, The Bahamas.
In addition to The Resort at Pelican Hill and the Island Hotel, the Irvine Company Resort Properties owns and manages Hotel Irvine Jamboree Center, an independently owned lifestyle hotel; the Oak Creek Golf Club in Irvine, featuring a challenging, Tom Fazio-designed public golf course; and several marinas in Newport Harbor and Northern California.

As part of an earlier $57 million expansion and makeover, The Broadmoor’s 6,300-sf Cheyenne Lodge features a new exterior design with split logs and timbers. The makeover also includes a new look for the Golden Bee restaurant and bar, a new activity center in Broadmoor West, and the redesigned and expanded West Lobby Bar.

The Westin La Cantera Hill Country Resort in San Antonio, Texas, debuted its new Westin Workout Fitness Studio. The facility features fluorescent lighting technology to help energize guests’ workouts. The resort opened Henrietta’s, a grab-and-go restaurant, and is adding the San Xavier room, a new meeting space.

The historic, 483-room Tulalip Resort Casino, located in Hot Springs, Virginia, offers leg- endary golfing at its Old Course, built in 1892 and boasts the oldest first continuously used tee in the nation. The Omni’s Cascades Course, host to several PGA Tour contests and USGA championships, features stunning views of the Allegheny Mountains. The property offers 72,000 sf of meeting space and activities such as archery, falconry, kayaking and carriage rides for the romantic.

Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando features the Shingle Creek Golf Club with an 18-hole course and five sets of tees. The club’s custom- ized website helps groups plan and track golf tournaments. In addition, a GPS system helps organizations spot golf sponsors and pass out tournament notes. Golfweek named the Shingle Creek course “One of America’s Top 40 New Courses.” The course was designed by David Harman and features fairways and waterways stretching along Shingle Creek. Golf lessons are available from the Brad Brewer Golf Academy. Rosen Shingle Creek features 490,000 sf of function space.

A prominent Northwest Native American-owned resort is the 370-room Tulalip Resort Casino, located just a 30-minute drive from Seattle. The AAA Four Diamond property, operated by the Tulalip Tribes, features several tribal touches including 25-foot house posts hand carved from a 1,000-year-old red cedar tree. Meeting space totals 30,000 sf and includes the 15,000-sf Orca Ballroom and several breakout spaces. All meeting rooms include Wi-Fi, LCD projectors and drop-down screens. The Oasis Pool is located next to the meeting areas and serves as a unique function space.
Château Élan, located in Braselton, Georgia, north of Atlanta, is a popular meeting destination that offers championship golf, a full-production winery and a European health spa.

The 3,500-acre conference destination, where French provincial and Southern hospitality combine, features a golf course designed around three lakes and two winding streams. There are also villas within walking distance of the Château Élan clubhouse where the pro shop and golf grille are located.

Golf options include three short course options, tournament hosting, hourly golf lessons, a Dave Pelz golf仅堂赛事，annual golf tournaments, and the resort open in December 2014.

Recently, golf legend and course designer Jack Nicklaus made one of the last in a series of scheduled visits to the resort to inspect final details. During his recent visit, Nicklaus inspected final details on the golf course, which has been grassed with saltwater-tolerant Platinum T8 seashore Paspalum grass and is now in the grow-in phase. The 18-hole, par-72 championship golf course at Baha Mar boasts ocean views and a picturesque peninsula green. The golf course is designed to offer "two courses in one," with the front nine holes providing dramatic play, while the back nine holes wind through inland forest and native habitat.

"I feel blessed that golfers around the world have shown an affinity for our course designs, and Baha Mar should perpetuate that," Nicklaus said.

Designed by golf legend Greg Norman, the award-winning course at Sandals Emerald Reef Golf Club is recognized as one of the most scenic oceanside golf courses in the Caribbean and renowned for its challenging fairways. A golfer’s paradise, prevailing tradewinds promise new experiences with each game.

Sandals offers all-inclusive Caribbean golf resorts on some of the most challenging and prestigious golf courses in the world.

"Travelers are going to come to Baha Mar for the casino, the world-class hotels and the beautiful water. We also believe that they are going to enjoy the golf experience that we will provide. While most of the golf courses in The Bahamas are designed on smaller pieces of land and, as a result, are fairly tight, there is plenty of room to play golf on this course, and it will appeal to golfers of every level. Better golfers will appreciate the strategy and the shot values, but every golfer should love the playability and aesthetics of the course."

The Radisson Fort McDowell Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona, will rebrand as the We-Ko-Pa Resort & Conference Center, effective September 30, 2014. Honored as one of the best golf facilities in the country by Golfweek, the resort features two award-winning 18-hole courses designed by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw (Saguaro) and Scott Miller (Cholla).

The new We-Ko-Pa Resort & Conference Center features 246 guest rooms and suites, and luxurious spa treatments at the Amethyst Spa. Designed by golf legend Greg Norman, the award-winning course at Sandals Emerald Reef Golf Club is recognized as one of the most scenic oceanside golf courses in the Caribbean and renowned for its challenging fairways. A golfer’s paradise, prevailing tradewinds promise new experiences with each game.

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A famous philosopher (OK, it was Jimmy Buffett) once said, “If there’s a heaven for me, I’m sure it has a beach attached to it.” Considering the popularity of beach destinations for meetings and incentives, there are plenty of meeting planners who just may share that same philosophy.

Mike Farmer, vice president of group travel business development for Meridian Enterprises in Hazelwood, Missouri, has been in the incentive travel industry for more than 25 years. He listed the factors that make the Caribbean a popular beach destination for groups. “Most of the incentive programs and award trips go in the spring when everybody wants to get away from the snow. The Caribbean offers a chance to get into the warmth. Generally speaking, you don’t have to go too far to get to the islands, and that is certainly attractive compared to European destinations. And, of course, there are the beaches. The opportunity to get out and play in the sun is probably the biggest reason that it’s such an attraction.”

The Bahamas

Last September, Farmer attended the Caribbean Meeting & Incentive Travel Exchange hosted by The Cove Atlantis in The Bahamas in partnership with Site. “It’s definitely one of my favorite Caribbean destinations,” he explains. “It’s a little expensive, on the higher end of the Caribbean hotels from a price perspective, but the Atlantis resort has everything you could ever want in a group travel destination. At The Cove, you’ve got the great suite product with nice, high-end service. You also have signature, name-brand restaurants... Bobby Flay, Chef Nobu, things like that. You’ve got that wonderful water playground that they have. There’s nothing else like that in the world. In addition, you’ve got a beautiful beach and shopping in downtown Nassau. It’s a complete destination in one small area, and it’s got great golf.”

Atlantis, Paradise Island is an ocean-themed resort offering 3,400 guest rooms including The Cove, a resort within a resort that features 600 oceanview suites. Atlantis is also known for having the largest open-air marine habitat in the world. Its 141-acre waterscape contains more than 20 million gallons of fresh and saltwater lagoons, pools and habitats that house more than 50,000 marine animals. But it’s not all play and no work. The conference center can accommodate up to 4,000 attendees and includes the 50,000-sf Imperial Ballroom, 40,000 sf of prefunction space, 30 breakout rooms, and three boardrooms. There are 21 outdoor event spaces — totaling 300,000 sf — that take advantage of tropical settings including, of course, the beaches, lagoon, waterscapes, marine habitats and more.

Another major player soon will be entering the market in Nassau. A new $3.5 billion development called Baha Mar is scheduled to open later this year. Being promoted as “The Bahamian Riviera,” the complex will include these upscale hotels: The Baha Mar Casino & Hotel, which will contain 1,000 rooms, the 200-room Rosewood at Baha Mar, the 300-room SLS at Baha Mar and a 700-room convention hotel, Grand Hyatt at Baha Mar. Following extensive renovations, the 694-room Meliá will join Baha Mar. The complex also will include a Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course, the 30,000-sf ESPA spa, the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas and Waterside Place, a shopping and dining complex. The Convention Center at Baha Mar will offer more than 200,000 sf of meeting and event space along with a 2,000-seat performing arts center.

Also of special interest to planners, thanks to the Tax Information Exchange Agreement the Bahamian government signed with the United States, The Bahamas is a tax-deductible destination for American companies.

The Numbers Game

Lorie Thomas, CMP, CMM, director, events and trade shows for Concur, Bellevue, WA

“The beach access (at Aulani) is awesome. A lot of properties don’t have their own private lagoon.”

Sandals Resorts’ Luxury Meetings & Incentives Collection includes 15 resort locations in Jamaica, St. Lucia, The Bahamas, Antigua, Granada, Barbados and Turks & Caicos.
166-room Caneel Bay Resort, an even Washington, had to get creative when she would stay at the overflow property. She notes, “so nobody could expectations, it’s fun. Now I look on it as I can on any challenge!”

**Hawaii**

Thomas recently attended a FAM trip sponsored by Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa, which is set on 21 acres on the leeward coast of Oahu. The resort, which opened in 2011, contains 351 hotel rooms and 481 two-bedroom vacation villas in its two towers, along with more than 50,000 sq of indoor and outdoor event space, including a crescent-shaped beach that fronts the resort’s tranquil lagoon.

What makes Aulani unique among Disney resorts (and other resorts, for that matter) is that Disney uses its legendary storytelling skills to showcase the state’s history and culture throughout the resort. Everything, from the building's architecture to the artwork, music and guest activities, authentically reflect the Hawaiian culture to help guests feel a true sense of place and embrace the island’s aloha spirit. "The beach access is awesome," Thomas describes. "A lot of properties don’t have their own private lagoon. The kids’ club (Aunty’s Beach House) is amazing. We’re very family-oriented, and at most properties you have to pay extra for the kids’ program. If you’re an adult or a couple who wants to have your own private time, there's plenty of space where you can go off to a private location.”

Thomas also praised the quality of Aulani’s Laniwai Spa, noting how important it is for properties to have a spacious spa to meet the expectations of today’s integrals to take guests back and forth between the properties, and all group events were held at The Westin. Also, as guests were shuttled back and forth, they were able to see more of the island’s natural land preserves than they would have by staying at one property, so that turned out to be another plus. Three-quarters of the island is a national park.

Thomas faced a few other challenges, such as a tent that collapsed right before an evening event and having to ferry golfers to the nearby island of St. Thomas. But in the end, everything turned out very well. “What I’ve learned is that you just have to be really creative with your solutions and your problem-solving. It’s fun. Now I look on it as I can take on any challenge!”

**California**

In January, The Resort at Pelican Hill earned Newport Beach’s only Forbes Travel Guide Five Star award for the second year in a row. Set on 504 acres overlooking the Pacific, the luxury resort features 128 villas, 204 bungalow guest rooms and 36 holes of Tom Fazio-designed golf, most of which offer ocean views. In addition, The Spa at Pelican Hill, which has a private treatment rooms, earned its fifth consecutive Forbes Five Star award.

One fun way that meeting and incentive attendees can enjoy the beach while they’re staying at Pelican Hill is to take a bike tour that departs from the resort. It takes bikers along the beautiful coastal bluff and stops for a tour of Crystal Cove, a historic seaside colony that was popular in the ’30s and ’40s. The colony’s colorful homes are still standing, and many have been restored to reflect their former glory. As an interesting bit of trivia, many movies were filmed at Crystal Cove, including “Treasure Island” (in 1918 and again in 1934) and the 1988 film “Beaches,” released in 1988.

**Florida**

For a lively beach destination with an art deco vibe, planners may want to consider the 790-room Loews Miami Beach Hotel set in the heart of South Beach. The hotel features a 900-foot beach, and offers views of Atlantic Ocean St. Tropez-inspired cabana deck along with 65,000 sq of indoor and outdoor event space. Whenever attendees pull themselves away from the beach and pool, there are seven restaurants and bars to eat.

Last May, the Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort, located on 1,350 acres in Northeast Florida, completed its grand reopening after an $85 million renovation. The 404-room resort offers panoramic views of the Atlantic and access to 3.5 miles of pristine beach. It also features 54 holes of championship golf, 23 Har-Tru tennis courts and multiple pools, including an adults-only infinity-edge pool, a family-friendly pool and the Splash Park water playground. The amount of event space the resort offers is extensive, with 80,000 sq of indoor and outdoor venues to choose from. The 175 tourism districts in Palm Beach County, commonly referred to as The Palm Beaches, are experiencing a building boom. More than 1,000 hotel rooms are projected to be added to the area’s inventory by the end of 2014, and an additional 800 rooms are in development.

The 179-room Wyndham Grand Jupiter is scheduled to open in September. Located on the Intracoastal Waterway, the upscale, full-service hotel will include 15,000 sq of meeting space, including the rooftop Mangrove Deck, which will offer more than 4,000 sq for events. The 403-room Palm Beach County Convention Center Hilton Hotel is expected to be completed in 2016. It will be connected to the 350,000-sq Palm Beach County Convention Center.

**Puerto Rico**

Meet Puerto Rico recently launched a new branding and image campaign titled “On a tropical island. In the Caribbean.” It’s designed to lure groups business with images of the island’s beautiful beaches, rainforests, underwater life and golf courses. Puerto Rico offers 1.2 million sq of meeting space, 14,000 hotel rooms and hundreds of non-stop flights. It offers other advantages, as well. Since Puerto Rico is a U.S. commonwealth, the U.S. dollar is the official currency, and U.S. citizens don’t need a passport to enter the destination.

For planners who can’t decide between the Caribbean and the Atlantic, E.
Conquistador Resort, a Waldorf Astoria Resort on the island’s northeastern tip, offers the best of both worlds. It is perched on 500 acres on a cliff top overlooking the spot where the waters of the Caribbean and the Atlantic converge.

The resort’s spacious 750 guest rooms and suites are allocated among five “villages,” and to arrange one of the resort’s more unique beach experiences, planners can book an excursion to Palomino Island, a private, 100-acre getaway.

Interest in All-Inclusives Grows

All-inclusive resorts, which are commonly found in beach destinations such as the Caribbean and Mexico, continue to grow in popularity with planners because meals, beverages and, in some cases, activities are included in the per-person rate, which can make the budgeting process easier and much more predictable.

“If you would have asked me five years ago, I would have told you that all-inclusives were on the downside of their popularity,” Farmer notes. “But as usual, I was wrong,” he laughs. “They just continue to grow, and companies are expanding their portfolios. The all-inclusives are a great product, quite honestly. The challenge is that you have to know what the good product is from the bad product.”

Program Patterns

Farmer says that the most common pattern he sees for beach-oriented incentives is to do a four-night event. “If you’re doing an all-inclusive, you’re going to have maybe a welcome poolside event, two days of sponsored sightseeing activities and on the final night, generally a beach party. Although you do save on the budget with an all-inclusive product, one of the challenges is that you kind of feel obligated to have all of your meals in the hotel. I have had clients that have said, ‘OK, even though we’re saving overall, let’s take the final night of property and do something unique on the island.’”

Giving Back at the Beach

The fact that beach programs may be more laidback than others doesn’t mean that they can’t be used to support a good cause. Scrub Island Resort, Spa & Marina in Tortola, British Virgin Islands, recently partnered with Pack for a Purpose, an organization whose mission is to positively impact communities around the world by helping travelers make meaningful contributions for the destinations they visit. Scrub Island has chosen to support the BVI Autism Centre through Pack with a Purpose. To participate, guests simply need to allocate part of their luggage allowance (as little as five pounds) to bring supplies requested by the Autism Centre, such as books, toys, art supplies and other items. The resort will ensure that the organization receives them. Scrub Island offers 52 guest rooms and a collection of villas, and is a member of Marriott’s Autograph Collection.

Back to the Beach

There are many ways to gauge the success of a meeting or incentive program held at a beachfront location. Maybe it’s the smiles on attendees’ faces or their relaxed demeanor. Or, it could be the ultimate testimonial—the kind of response that Harvey noted. “Several of the attendees made plans to return to The Kahala on their own at a later date.” We can only imagine that Jimmy Buffett would approve.
In the last 10 years, the meeting planning industry has undergone significant changes, many of which we could never have seen coming. The recession has both reined in budgets and caused planners to focus increasingly on ROI. Certifications have brought increased professionalism to the field, and planners bring higher and more specialized education backgrounds to their work. Furthermore, the recovering economy has put hotels in a strong bargaining position, giving planners less wiggle room and more work to find appropriate venues within budget.

But what will things look like 10 years from now? Or even five?

We asked planners and people in various functions throughout the meeting planning and incentive industry to break out their crystal ball and tell us what they see as the future of the meeting industry.

**Technology Will Continue to Be an Asset to Planners**

One of the larger perceived threats to the meeting planning industry in recent years has been the rise of technology enabling attendees to “meet” remotely. While many companies and key industry organizations have clearly announced that virtual meetings will never replace the value created by face-to-face meetings, planners have learned on the ground where technology can be an asset — and even more so as it continues to evolve to suit meeting planners’ needs — and where it detracts from the value of the event.

According to Casey Carignan, meetings and events coordinator for Wood Dale, Illinois-based lia sophia, a jewelry multi-level marketing company, and an inaugural member of the Professional Convention Management Association’s “20 in their twenties,” “Younger planners are definitely bringing tech savvy and weaving it into meetings. With conferences, you often do the same agenda, and you keep going the same way year after year, but now with the different opportunities speakers have, such as using pictures and video, the statements they make are more meaningful. Technology has really enhanced the industry.”

For Megan D. Tate, manager of event, meeting and travel management for San Diego, California-based Petco Animal Supplies Stores Inc. and another inaugural member of PCMA’s “20 in their twenties,” technology in meetings has a clear and growing place. “Obviously technology has completely revolutionized meetings,” she says. “You can’t put on a conference and not have multiple forms of technology going on, and in the future, even more technology we haven’t even seen yet will be incorporated.

“I don’t think (technology) is going to take away from face-to-face meetings, because, at least for us, we’ve tried (virtual meetings), and we’re actually stepping away.”

Megan D. Tate, Manager of Event, Meeting and Travel Management, Petco Animal Supplies Stores Inc., San Diego, CA
There’s also an app that does trade shows. They’re going all over the place, and we will become paramount; the norm and the air,” she says. “As a planner, I work just for staff. ‘There’s a lot more balls in the air,” Tate explains. “We did a leadership meeting with one leader and corporate staff in one location and broadcast it out to locations all over the place. For people in remote locations, even though they’re seeing what’s going on, they’re not involved in the conversation or ask questions. They’re very passive participants, and it leaves a bitter taste because they’re not being valued as much as the colleagues who are onsite.”

“I think the use of cloud-based systems will only continue to rise, and Wheaton continues: “I manage anywhere from seven to 10 planners in the department during the year, and they’re going to be more mobile, and we need one place where everything lives.”

Jenn Wheaton, this year’s winner of the MPI RISE Award for Young Incentive Travel Coordinator for Sacramento, California-Association of Boutique & Breakfast Inns, Sacramento, CA.

“We did a ‘know before you go’ email to our attendees, and the feedback was amazing. We saw a 300 percent increase in the download rate. If you approach it correctly, there shouldn’t be much push back. (For more information on mobile apps, see the article on page 32.) “It needs to be user-friendly, with the generational gap,” she continues. “This means user-friendly for everyone, no matter his or her level of tech savvy. You’ll have younger people and people who are more experienced that buy in quicker, but diary created by technology grows more and more ingrained, planners will face new challenges.

“In thinking about how technology impacts our events, the key difference that I see now is attendees expecting to have an immediate voice in what they’re experiencing and a forum to share that on,” says Tate. “They don’t wait until two weeks after the event to say what they think, so you must incorporate into the architecture and design of the meetings that you’re providing and giving the tools to do it.”

Some larger events now incorporate a screen showing live video feed of the event. Twitter hashtag on stage behind speakers so that the conversation becomes a central part of the event. But in a corporate climate, the where and how of attendees’ social media contributions and real-time interactions often need to be negotiated.

“My clients,很大的 corporate, and ‘they’re required to attend events, but they don’t have company-issued smartphones, so we have to provide devices or have them using personal devices,” she explains. “We haven’t provided devices onsite in the past, but we’re looking into it. We obviously supplement with paper in some cases, but 90 percent of our clients are on the cloud and the cloud is key for the future of meetings and not just for staff. ‘There’s a lot more balls in the air,” she says. “As a planner, I work with the Event app for registration. You can get a snapshot of how many attendees have shown up and who’s attending. There’s also an app that does trade show floor plan, but they’re expensive, can be great, and I’ve seen an increase in CVBs helping set up apps and customized websites for events. For the hotel and lodging association, we had an app for our large hotelier conference with all the speaker bios and all the supplier names, and it was great for us because I knew what room everyone was in one touch. But it’s also mobile.”

“While bandwidth availability is increasing, smartphone and mobile device usage will only continue to rise, and Wheaton continues to gain ground as a top shopping, resort and dining destination, it may begin trend to as an ideal incentive and meeting location for companies looking to provide a top-notch destination experience with a more reasonable airfare and lodging price tag. “Otherwise, the Caribbean is always popular and very well received. Only this year, Hinton continues. “However you define that region south of the border, it has a lot to offer, with Mexico remaining strong and Panama growing in interest.”

“We did a ‘know before you go’ email to our attendees, and the feedback was amazing. We saw a 300 percent increase in the download rate.”

Casey Carignan, Meetings and Events Coordinator lia sophia, Wood Dale, IL

of Chicago-based Site International Foundation, is finding that, “Specifically in incentive travel, business has gotten a lot more savvy. People and demand factors, prices have gone up in some factors, and the biggest issue we see is in airline fares,” he says. “Professional events are sold to a client 18–24 months out, and because that’s when the budget is put together, and you budget for X airfare, but now that they’ve qualified the names it’s Y, they’re spending more on airfare, which makes it hard to get some other things,” Hinton explains. “You see airlines decide that they no longer want to do group sales, but others, like Emirates, are looking to expand. I envision that some day I might have to fly to Dubai to get to Europe because those airlines are investing immensely in this marketplace and the group space.”

Emirates has already made headway into Europe, with its new New York to Milan offering, though that route is facing appeals in court after The Lazio Regional Administrative Court in Rome ruled the service breaches terms of the Italy-United Arab Emirates bilateral air service agreement. Even if they lose the route, their competitor, Alitalia, is in a partnership with Alitalia. In the coming years, as Middle Eastern airports are set to become the world’s busiest and Dubai continues to grow and as a top shopping, resort and dining destination, it may begin trend to as an ideal incentive and meeting location for companies looking to provide a top-notch destination experience with a more reasonable airfare and lodging price tag. “Otherwise, the Caribbean is always popular and very well received. Only this year, Hinton continues. “However you define that region south of the border, it has a lot to offer, with Mexico remaining strong and Panama growing in interest.”

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Cities wouldn’t have been looked at for incentive travel before, but I live in Chicago, and I think it’s a phenomenal opportunity. Major cities are great if positioned correctly,” adds Hinton.

The Shifting Role of the Planner

While strategic meeting management has quickly become an industry buzzword, it’s only the first step. “Planners by definition must take care of the logistics, but then they also have to think: What does this do for our clients or company and why are we doing it,” says Hinton. “If you have the right people in the room, but it’s cold or the AV doesn’t work or the attendees can’t hear the speaker, it’s not a successful meeting.” Logistics are always the foundation, but, at the same time, there’s this realization that meetings are for business. “They’re not luxury stuff. They’re a necessity — how we sell things or know what our clients are facing,” Hinton continues. “There has been a lot of pullback during the recession, but there has also been a re-alization of the critical nature of events,” Hinton continues. “If it’s an important deal, you don’t do it on conference call or with some kind of technology. It’s time to get our story straight, we have the Meetings Mean Business campaign, but we need to do more as an industry.”

Amanda Cecil, Ph.D., CMP® professor in the department of tourism, conventions and event management at Indiana University in Indianapolis, has shifted her involvement in the meetings industry from the trenches to teaching, shaping the future of the industry. In the coming years, she foresees “a move to a really business savvy professional. There’s a need to be much more forward thinking, and much more strategic in terms of their thought processes,” says Cecil. “For senior planners, that means there has to be an executive type of training, including more of an event marketing kind of look moving toward a business approach.

“As we watch business structures change post-recession, it changes where meetings are housed,” Cecil explains. “Some are shifting to global operations, and especially with planners who are multinational, that has to happen. As companies look at a more global approach, events and meetings should as well.”

Cecil says the university program, now includes a study abroad component “to give students a more global mindset because some of these positions are reporting through a global reporting structure. Reporting through finance and HR I think will make a difference in how planners approach the philosophy of the meeting,” she continues. “They’ll have to be accounting- and finance-savvy and better understand both the procurement process and how to measure the intangibles, like attendee satisfaction,” she adds. “I think the role of the planner has become more and difficult in terms of both qualitative and quantitative measurement. To prepare for this, we have added a business focus, and we’ve partnered with business schools. That’s been very well received. Students are looking for ROI on their degrees,” Cecil says.

Stand Up for Yourself and Take Ownership of Your Future

Most of all, Hinton is convinced that planners are in a unique place to show the value of their profession and reap greater — particularly in financial terms — rewards for their work. “I know people in this industry work hard. It’s not a traditional profession, but you get to see the world, and you attract the best and brightest. While the rewards aren’t necessarily financial...you don’t need to be underpaid, you can make a lot of money, but you need to plan for that.”

Kevin M. Hinton, Chief Staff Officer
Site International Foundation, Chicago, IL

“When you have a meeting or incentive, tell people why they’re there and say, ‘Yes, you might be enjoying that dinner and that bottle of wine and this amazing place, but ultimately you made a big impact on our organizations or you sold a lot of stuff, and we’re here to build a stronger community and a shared vision. Tell the story of why we are doing this. You have to advocate for yourself, stand up and take ownership for your own future.”

“Incentive travel, business has gotten better, but because of supply and demand factors, prices have gone up...and the biggest issue we are facing is airline fares.”
Mobile apps have become one of the hottest topics in the meetings industry. Innovative mobile apps are not only popping up at a breathtaking pace but, in many cases, they are utterly transforming the process of planning and attending a meeting or event.

In May, at IMEX Frankfurt in Germany, IMEX Group, in partnership with mobile app technology innovator and market leader QuickMobile, released a groundbreaking research study that shed light on just who is doing what.

Although 60 percent of planners have used a mobile app in the past two years, the study found, most are only using them for a few events, such as major annual meetings. Key reasons for such reluctance are budget concerns and the perceived amount of time it takes to create a customized app designed to deliver a set of precise capabilities.

Some that surprisingly, the survey found, only 24 percent of planners typically include the costs of a mobile app in their budgets, while 42 percent said they never include such expenses.

And despite the ever-growing list of things a mobile app can do, 91 percent of planners reported that the primary motivation for using one is planner-to-attendee communication and the sharing of information such as meeting agendas and program notes. A large majority, 79 percent, also said they viewed the ability to facilitate communication among attendees as a key benefit, with 75 percent saying they wanted to get the interactive conversations started before the meeting and 78 percent noting they want to continue the conversations after the event.

The biggest and most important of the first-of-its-kind survey, says Patrick Payne, CEO of Vancouver, Canada-based QuickMobile, is that “while more planners are using mobile apps and seeing the benefits of mobile technology, there are the things that people are most interested in, you can actually make adjustments on day two, as opposed to in the past when your only real option was to review the whole meeting management platform and its functionality.”

And there’s a simple reason for that, says QuickMobile’s Payne. The most essential impact of mobile technology is the critical difference between real-time information and information that is old, even if by a day, which tends to render it as anecdotal rather than spontaneous, he says. “The question is if you have real time information, what advantage does that give you? And I would say that after day one of a three-day conference, if you can say, ‘This seems to be the hot topic out there, these are the things that people are most interested in, you can actually make adjustments on day two, as opposed to in the past when your only real option was to review the whole meeting management platform and its functionality.’”

Bonnie Boisner, a user of the Cvent meeting management platform and its CrowdCompass mobile app, as well as QuickMobile, agrees that attendee engagement is the single most important benefit of mobile technology. “The

"Gamification is the hot new thing out there. It’s a great way to drive results and get the specific outcome you want.”

Bonnie Boisner
Vice President of Event Management
Aimia
Plymouth, MN

McDonald’s attendees check mobile devices in the Engagement Center with the social media mosaic LED wall in the background.
Hotel Brands Step Up Their Mobile Game

Although most of the chatter about the emergence of mobile technology has focused on how it can enhance the attendee experience, it also can make life easier for planners. And to exploit that reality to their advantage, a number of major hotel brands have developed planner-friendly apps for planners on the run — which they almost always are.

Such innovative hotel-based apps are designed to reduce the amount of back-and-forth communication required in order for planners to change menus, adjust meeting room seating charts or arrange audio-visual presentations. Additional features include the ability to specify room temperature settings in meeting rooms.

In an ever more competitive meeting arena, hotel brands share a common motive for trying to make life simpler and easier for planners. By doing so, they have some brand leverage when it comes to getting the business. And hotels stop meetings are not intended to replace or eliminate the role of human assistance from a sales manager or other staff member, but just to provide planners with more modern options for accomplishing certain time-consum ing and often annoying tasks.

A year ago, Marriott Hotels launched its Red Coat Direct app at 350 Marriott-branded properties and then expanded it to most of its properties worldwide.

“We are rethinking all aspects of meetings from the physical space to the experience questions for both attendees and planners, and looking for ways to enable and inspire people to do their best work,” stated Peggy Roe, vice president, global operations services for Marriott Hotels. “Red Coat Direct’s technology allows planners to continually adjust requests without missing a minute of their meeting or keeping other professionals waiting.”

The app is personalized to the planner’s specific meeting. Requests can be made up to three days before the meeting and then throughout the meeting. Once the request is made, it is routed to the event manager and the department that can fulfill the request.

“Kimpot Hotels & Restaurants tout a new suite of technology solutions designed to help customers book any time of day or night with their one-stop-shop online booking tool and sales app. Christine Lawson, senior vice president, sales and catering for Kimpot Hotels & Restaurants, stated, “Our new tools make the guest experience of planning and booking a group or meeting a simple and hassle-free experience.”

The Kimpot iPad sales app shows photos, floor plans, menus and various point of information, and real-time discussion. The new app walks guests through Kimpot’s meeting and events philosophy, look and feel of all hotels, meeting space, adjacent restaurants and catering menus.

Additionally, the brand also launched Kimpot Instant Meetings (K.I.M.) — an easy-to-use online booking tool that provides anyone the ability to book a group or meeting quickly and easily in as little as five days out from their desired event. Ideally set for groups staying up to seven nights, accommodating six to 25 guest rooms and meetings for six to 50 guests, K.I.M. users are able to self-select their group and meeting needs, from dates and locations to catering and audio-visual needs.

Last fall, Starwood Hotels & Resorts introduced its eVent Portfolio app, which empowers planners to create F&B menus and set up audio-visual tools in real time on both iPhone and Android mobile platforms. The company expects to have 575 Starwood properties set up with the app by year’s end, according to a report in Travel Weekly. Mark Maris, Starwood’s divisional director of group sales in North America, stated, “eVent Portfolio is helping us communicate with our customers the way they want to communicate — digitally.”

Very recently, the brand announced the SPG app for Google Glass, according to a report in Luxury Daily.

“Innovation didn’t stop with the release of the smartphone or the tablet,” stated Chris Holdren, senior vice president for SPG and digital at Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, New York. “Glass complements our digital offerings from apps to mobile Web.

“The new app illustrates Starwood’s commitment to explore new technology and learn,” he said. “Glass lets us in on the ground floor of the new wearable technology movement.”

The Google Glass version of the app allows guests to search and book rooms at Starwood’s nearly 1,200 properties by destination or airport code; view photos of hotels and nearby areas; and get turn-by-turn directions to properties. Starwood will make improvements to the app, which is now in beta mode, as consumers make suggestions and Google Glass adds more features.

“Our guests are by definition in motion so they need their mobile devices to stay connected during their travels,” said Holdren. “Being the first in the hospitality industry to introduce an app for Google Glass illustrates our larger strategy to be the industry leader in digital innovation.” — JB
Any time you can create something (gamification) that helps people participate more in your meeting, that becomes a best practice.

Kelley Butler, Director of Meetings and Events

McDonald’s Corporation, Oak Brook, IL

identified the first year and did a lot more of this year.

For example, Scharton says, “For this year’s meeting, attendees could use the app to build their own profile and then put that up so other folks could see it and connect with them electronically.”

Gamification

One of the fastest growing and most talked about capabilities of mobile technology is gamification, which means steering and rewarding specific kinds of behavior, such as on-time attendance at particular sessions, retention of educational content, or interaction with sponsors or exhibitors. Response mechanisms such as scanned QR codes are used to monitor and tally results. (See more on gamification on page 10.)

Butler used gamification for the first time last year at the McDonald’s U.S. owner-operator conference, which drew a total of 15,000 attendees to three Las Vegas events.

Butler chose to use gamification because the major event is tailored toward education. “So there was a desire from the planning team and the operator community to be able to engage those particular attendees in a different kind of way and also make the event fun and interactive,” she says. “We also wanted to allow people to compete because we are a very competitive brand by nature. And we also like to have fun at our meetings.”

As a result, Butler and her team created a game that attendees played by region, based on how they participated in educational sessions and what they did on the exhibit floor. “And based on those things, they could earn points that led to them being the winning region,” Butler says. “And what they were playing for was to make a donation to the Ronald McDonald charity in their region.”

As a result of the success they had, they now consider gamification a go-to tool for attendee engagement and have deployed it for this year’s meeting. “Any time you can create something that helps people participate more in your meeting, that becomes a best practice,” Butler says.

Boisner is increasingly using gamification as a way of getting attendees excited about a meeting. “Gamification is the hot new thing out there,” she says. “It’s a great way to drive results and get the specific outcome you want.”

She uses the gamification capability within Cvent, as well as QuickMobile. She agrees that QuickMobile is currently the clear innovator and dominant brand in meeting-related mobile apps, largely because it can be customized and configured based on exactly what a client wants to do or accomplish. “We do a lot more gamification with QuickMobile,” she says.

Cvent is now preparing to investigate gamification. “I know our marketing team would like to look more into that,” she says. “They’re interested in going even further in improving upon how people interact at our meetings onsite. So gamification is something that we’ll be looking at for next year’s meeting.”

New Frontiers

Although truly wide adoption of mobile apps is still a way off, according to the IMEX/QuickMobile survey, technology providers are betting on the premise that the sky’s the limit for new apps.

In April, Chicago-based startup Social Q&A introduced a new browser-based mobile app that enhances audience response by allowing attendees to participate in question-and-answer sessions from their smartphone, tablet or laptop. Attendees submit questions that in turn can be up-voted by other attendees, giving speakers or moderators real time insight into which questions are deemed most important by the audience.

BusyEvent, from The Meeting Pool, ups the ante when it comes to meeting-related business intelligence that helps meeting hosts and planners generate revenue. It allows the tracking of attendee activities such as personal agenda building, clicked links in digital meeting materials, one-to-one meeting requests with sponsors, exhibitors or vendors and more.

Another new tool is the business card reader for iPhones by ABBYY, which automatically transfers and saves contact information from business cards — in 21 different languages — to iPhone contacts or the app’s own digital storage capability.

And now that Apple has revealed that iOS 8 is on its way, the opportunity horizon for new app development is greater than ever.

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Forging Optimal Relationships Requires Real Partnership and Communication

The relationship between meeting planners and hoteliers is complex. Both groups want many of the same things, including a strong economy and a thriving meetings industry, to attract attendees and make each meeting memorable and successful. But they have differences, too. Planners must stay within budgets and get the most in return for dollars they spend. Given that perspective, planners and hoteliers should be adversaries. But that’s far from the truth and hardly optimal.

“The relationship between hotels and meeting planners is crucial to both parties’ success,” says Kimberly Miles, CMP, CMH, vice president, industry relations for the American Hotel & Lodging Association. "AHL&A is a strong supporter of the Meetings Mean Business campaign, which showcases the importance of the meetings industry to hotels and the U.S. economy. The hotel industry values the strong partnership with the meeting planner community to create the most successful events and experiences for its attendees.”

We asked corporate meeting planners to give us their take on the positives and pitfalls of the planner-hotel relationship, which, as Miles points out, is a relationship that drives business for the U.S. economy, so getting it right is critical. What do these planners want from hotels? What are their pet peeves? How can the relationship be improved? Some of their insights echo those reported in STR’s “DestinationMap 2013” survey, highlights of which were published in January in Hotel News Now, a division of STR (Smith Travel Research). (See box below.)

But there were some very individual perspectives, too. And while having hotels meet basic meeting requirements is fundamental, the consensus on forging optimal relationships came down to two essential elements: partnerships and communication.

The Basics
Like any relationship, this one is a two-way street. Planners bring meetings to hotels, hotels provide necessities for those meetings. Terri Crowley, vice president of event management at Photizo Group, a Kentucky-based consulting and marketing intelligence firm that organizes conferences domestically and abroad, puts it succinctly: “I want great service, updated meeting space, willingness to work with a planner, good catering services, and a friendly and knowledgeable staff.”

Blue Janis, an Ohio-based national account manager with Experient, references staff, too. “Outsiders, I expect the event manager and banquet manager to try to anticipate needs rather than having to be asked when something has already run out. Of course, it’s much nicer when inventorying liquor or doing a room block audit to find that the hotel staff is helpful and agreeable.”

Edward Perotti, CMP, CMM, senior director global meetings, events and travel with VMware, a Palo Alto-based software company, adds cost transparency as an essential. “I know everyone needs to make money and hit goals, profit lines, etc. I just want to know what we are spending money on. For example, with regard to third parties, I want hotels to be 100 percent comfortable with sharing and/or providing invoices or documentation for me (the end client) to cross check/audit, and to document all charges and concessions related to my event.”

“Both parties need to look at the relationship as a true partnership,” Perotti says, “as the market flips from one seat of control to the other, the long-term vision is what is key to maintaining the relationship, the level of expectations and the service level.”

It helps when both parties have a shared vision of success. “I have always approached hotels with one simple, balanced win-win for both sides.” Miles says hotels must do the same. “Every event is different, and every hotel has its own approach to contracting,” she says. “When both parties negotiate with an appreciation of one another’s needs and goals, and with an understanding that they are entering into a mutual commitment to one another, they can create large third party and my job is to secure the best pricing for my client, I believe it’s very important to recognize that the hotel has fiscal goals and needs as well.”

Donna Patrick, CMP, CMM, associate director, global meetings and conventions for UnitedHealth Group in Minnetonka, Minnesota, has a similar perspective. She says planners need to see hoteliers “as true partners and go into discussions and negotiations with a balanced win-win for both sides.”

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a contract that is fair to both the group and the hotel.”

Cindy Wilson, president of San Francisco-based WilsonWest, a corporate event marketing firm that plans C-level meetings for such companies as Cisco, Chevron and Samsung as well as nonprofits, adds another element to the mix. “Establish a true partnership from the outset,” she says, “then communicate any changes along the way.”

Communication

No relationship can work in the absence of effective communication. “I believe that fundamentally, it comes down to communication,” Janis says. “The better each party understands the goals of the other, the more likely there will be a successful meeting and a happy client.”

Says Patrick, “Planners should maintain open and honest communication always and follow up. If the hotel knows why it did not win the business if it didn’t.”

Langford favors old-fashioned conversations between planners and hoteliers: “Up until recent history, our frustrations would rate pretty low on the meeting planner’s version of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. We wanted sanely priced AV or greater flexibility on attrition — simple and straightforward, monetarily defined items,” she says. “Though those things remain, the more pressing frustration is higher on the scale: lack of communication. Our RFPs have never had as many flat-out ‘no’ responses as we’ve seen in the last six months. One real concern is as to why or suggestions for alternatives. I think part of the problem is RFP spam, hoteliers are inundated with e-RFPs easily bulk-sent with a click of a button. The time to think about how to work with you just isn’t there.”

As a result, Langford has resurrected what she calls the ‘retro practice of phone conversations.’ This, she says, “goes back to my core belief that we both want this to work but need to strategize outside the box together. That doesn’t happen with short emails or choppy cell-phone conversations but with heavy, black, rotary-phone communication.”

Lisa Langford, Corporate Meeting Planner Management Consultants, Divide, CO

“We both want this to work but need to strategize outside the box together. That doesn’t happen with short emails or choppy cell-phone conversations but with heavy, black, rotary-phone communication.”

Edward Perotti, CMP CMM
Senior Director Global Meetings, Events & Travel, VMware Inc., Palo Alto, CA

If you know guest participation might be limited if the venue is not easily accessible for international travelers, you might rule out a property. If it’s a conference that is heavily reliant upon meeting space and technology, having access to multiple ballrooms with plenty of set-up time might be a deal-breaker.

Janis agrees. “I think the choice of location varies depending on the makeup of the organization,” he says. “One group may feel more comfort in a familiar location while another actually prefers offering something new to its attendees. I think it’s incumbent on the planner to avoid betting his or her personal bias get in the way of site selection.”

Perotti offers insight into why many planners do return to hotels they have booked before. “We have been going back to the Hilton San Francisco Union Square for years for certain programs,” he says, “due, in fact, to the frontline employees. They know our culture, people and expectations and are generally excited to have us back. The attendees feel that energy, and it helps the overall experience.”

Pet Peeves

As the survey found, planners do not like to be nicked and dimed, and Crowley pointed to a couple of areas where this is common. “I think hotels should update their Internet plans so that these are included in the price of the meeting space,” she says. “This is an increasingly important part of the relationship equation.

Hoteliers should let the process work, give your best offer and don’t get defensive if business isn’t won this time.”

Key Takeaways

Here’s a snapshot of what planners interviewed for this story had to say about the planner-hotelier relationship.

Basic ‘Wants’

• Great service, updated meeting space, willingness to work with a planner, good catering services, and a friendly and knowledgeable staff.
• Hotel staff that anticipates needs.
• Good transparency.
• Creative food experiences.

Partnerships

• Establish a true partnership from the outset and communicate changes along the way.
• Have a shared vision of success.
• The visions and goals that are not shared, are still understood and respected.
• Go into discussions and negotiations with a balanced win-win for both sides.

Communication

• Open, honest communication is key regardless of the outcome of negotiations.
• Old-fashioned telephone conversations between planners and hoteliers are an increasingly important part of the relationship equation.
• Staff turnover, which often requires starting over with the planning.
• Pet peeves:
  • Being nickedled and dimed: for example, not including Internet plans in the price of the meeting space.
  • Charging too much for AV services and charging a fee if the in-house company is not used.
  • Staff turnover, which often requires starting over with the planning.
  • Premature cut-off time: for example, hotels that expect a full room block 45–60 days out.

Contracts and RFP ‘Wants’

• Planners should be as detailed as possible with RFPs, and sales managers should respond with alternatives if specific concession requests cannot be met.
• More streamlined contracts; and sales reps who have a better understanding of the business.
• Standardized contracts.

CIT
“Most of my attendees haven’t even reg-
istered at this point.”

Contracts and RFPs
Contracts and RFPs are a challenge on both sides of the table, but there are solutions, including increased communi-
cation. “I try to be as detailed as possible with my RFPs,” Janis says, “and I appreci-
ate it when the sales manager responds with alternatives if he or she is unable to agree to a specific concession request.”

Perotti would like to see more stream-
lining of contracts and better understand-
ing of the big picture, especially

when hotels are dealing with companies that run many meetings in many parts of the country and the world. “We have streamlined our procurement process to keep in line with our internal process,” he says. “The bottleneck occurs when a hotel has not and is still operating in an an-
tiquated ways, for example, if the hotel does not look at the global relationship with a client but instead thinks of each event as a one-off vs. a true global part-
nership and buy.”

Langford would like standardized contracts. “I think many of us dream of a standardized contract. I’ve got four on my desk right now, all for like-meetings. The first hotel’s contract is four pages long, the next is five, then eight, and the fourth is 20 pages.”

Trends
Two trends apparent in the STR survey suggest that the industry is back on track. The first is an uptick in attendee numbers. “Our team manages in some form over 3,200 meetings and events globally. This number has been on the rise and as

our employee base increases, so do the event counts.”

Langford says her group has seen consistent growth of about 10 percent over the past few years, however, “Our events don’t fit the model the survey suggests. We have private member groups and expect (and get) near 100 percent attendance.”

That said, Janis cautions that there are many factors at play, and he sees varia-
tion in the numbers, a consideration pri-
marily for association meetings in which attendees must foot their own bill for the most part.

“The most important considerations are the ones that are unique to the client, the participants and the unique characteristics of the event, though service and relationship with the hotel sales and operations team are paramount.”

Cindy Wilson, President
Wilsonwest Inc., San Francisco, CA

Patrick believes the result is in part how meetings are managed. “I do think we’ve finally gotten past the 2008 finan-
cial crunch, and meetings are being man-
gaged with more strategic focus — mea-
surement of ROI, not canceling meetings but changing them to leverage costs bet-
ter,” she says.

Also trending is that corporations are exhibiting less reluctance to book luxury properties. While Wilson agrees with-
out qualification, Patrick and Langford say yes...and no.

“I believe (the reluctance) still ex-
ists and will always exist on some level,” Patrick says. “I feel companies are careful not to lose sight of it and have their meet-
ings looked at as boondoggles. I do agree there isn’t much paranoia about it as there was after the 2008 financial crisis. It also helps that many companies took the stand that an incentive trip is a reward for a job well done, and they should not be punished for rewarding employees.”

Langford thinks demographics impact this trend and that certain groups simply don’t want to book luxury properties. “For our existing core owner groups with a
demographic age 50-65, the luxury desti-
nation is still the priority value,” she says, “because of the high confidence in service and food levels — you get what you pay for, and they know that from experience. Our growth area, however, is with groups of a younger clientele who define the ex-
périence more by its community story: What did they do together after hours? For them, an evening of baseball with a great local craft beer can carry a higher story value than recharging on the beach at a luxury resort.”

Perotti also notes differences in de-
mographics and industries, and how luxury hotels themselves are responding. “In the tech world, there is less fear of luxury brands; however, the luxury brands need to step up the experi-
ence for the attendee and up-
date the experience for the new generation. Ritz-Carlton Hotels has done a great job of bridging from the retired upscale traveler to young, tech-savvy urbanites,” he says.

Call to Action
The return to more stable business and increased numbers speaks to the re-
silience of the meetings and hospitality industries. As they move out of survival mode, Langford hopes that planners will partner with hotels in even more pro-
found ways for the greater good.

“Personally, I am looking ahead to the meetings and hospitality industries be-
coming a powerful voice in the critical is-
sue of human trafficking, just as they have been for green meetings,” she says. “Hilton, for example, has adopted a corporate po-
sition on this, which all partners are sup-
posed to sign on to. They are also imple-
menting training to recognize (trafficking) on their properties and identifying how employees are required to respond.

“It’s at hotels where a lot of this happens, so raising awareness is a way planners can be influential. Add it into the contract pro-
cess by asking, ‘Do you practice human-
trafficking awareness with your staff?” Enough people asking the same question will bring about change, exactly the way it did with the green movement.”

C&IT

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An amazing setting can inspire attendees and elevate a meeting. Colorado has no lack of inspirational backdrops and can be as rustic-wilderness or sleekly urban as a group wants. Even in winter the sun is likely to be shining boldly, and that alone fosters an air of positivity. And the physical reality of those brilliant blue skies may inspire attendees into the figurative blue-sky style of thinking, defined as creative thinking unfettered by preconceptions and convention — in other words, brainstorming out of the box.

Denver

“Denver has come to symbolize a young, active, innovative and outdoor city, and those are themes that many corporations and incentive groups want to be associated with,” says Richard Scharf, president and CEO of Visit Denver, the convention and visitors bureau.

“Denver has become a popular city for events, and finding venues with the necessary meeting space coupled with adequate guest rooms can be a challenge. The convention center can provide more meeting space; however, there are finite hotel rooms available at any given time for those attending large gatherings. Planners need to encourage attendees to meet registration deadlines, thereby lessening the risk of some attendees having to book a hotel room less convenient to the event.”

While Denver’s walkability is an asset, so is the city’s bike-sharing program. Attendees can pick up a bike at any of 82 stations and then return it to any station after exploring and gaining a boost from the Mile High City’s palpable energy.

Colorado Springs

If the view from Pikes Peak could inspire Katharine Lee Bates to pen “America the Beautiful,” what might it inspire a corporate group to achieve?

Doug Price, president and CEO of the Colorado Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau, says meeting planners derive many benefits. “Colorado Springs is a vibrant metropolis. Attendees can experience a rich arts scene and 10 minutes later be exploring Pike National Forest. Our amazing blue skies, range of lodging, value pricing and extensive list of activities and attractions are just a few reasons the area entices so many planners year after year.”

Inherently inspiring attractions include the U.S. Olympic Training Center, Garden of the Gods Park, the new Cheyenne Mountain State Park Archery Range (perfect for teambuilding), and, of course, Pikes Peak.

Accommodations can be inspiring, too, especially the historic Broadmoor with its European-influenced elegance. For Laurie Barr, event director and corporate secretary for the Denver Gold Group, The Broadmoor is a perfect setting for the company’s Denver Gold Forum because “It is the best.”

“The group of 1,200 met at The Broadmoor in September 2011. Barr says the staff was proactive to the organization’s needs and everything was first class. “I have only good things to say about The Broadmoor,” she adds. “The food was marvelous, the hotel staff was delightful, the venue was superb, and everyone enjoyed it.”

While everyone appreciates The Broadmoor’s impeccable service and surroundings, Barr un-
Aspen

Audi of America has a long history with Aspen — an uber upscale enclave with mining roots — that includes sponsor-
skis and local youth programs. Its meeting being held this month, the Audi A8 Dealer Launch and Incentive Event, is ideally suited to the town.

“The location absolutely plays a part,” says Erin Keating, senior manager, events and experiential marketing. “For this particular meeting, we are focusing on the launch of the benchmark of ultimate success in our product lineup, the A8.

Each town has something different for groups in terms of attractions and internationally renowned art and culture right at the doorstep of their hotel. ”

Emswiller says the ranch engaged them all. “Everyone loved the location and had only good things to say about the ranch, the people at it and the food.”

Emsworth found the staff willing to help plan and facilitate everything — even some unusual requests. “We wanted to do fun things in addition to the meetings. We have some jestokers in our group so, for example, one of our owners rode into the first event on a donkey, dressed in a toga. We told the ranch staff what we wanted, and they made it happen.”

The retreat was a reward for employees and a way to bring the far-flung group together. “We have employees all over the U.S., and many have never been to the real Colorado,” Emswiller says. “We’re a very virtual company, and while our employees work together via computer, they don’t often interact in person.”

“While we are a luxury brand and expect to pay for premium experiences...there is definitely a premium price to pay for the privilege of hosting an event in Aspen.”

Erin Keating, Senior Manager, Events and Experiential Marketing, Audi of America, Herndon, VA

“Devil’s Thumb Ranch is the perfect location for us,” says Carrie Busteed, executive assistant to Water Pik’s CEO and planner for the event. “We also planned to have a four-day/three-night private hunting-and-sporting ranch in northern Colorado, allowing groups to be away from the city but not a four-hour drive into the moun-
tains. DTR is about two hours, so it’s away, yet accessible. The fact that it’s somewhat isolated is perfect. Everything we need-
ed was right there. Our employees weren’t driving anywhere or going off on their own instead of being present at the event. It was good for the company because it kept everyone interacting in a way that doesn’t always happen. The fireplaces, both inside and outside, seemed to pull people in and bring them together. It was wonderful.”

The group of 70 ranged in age from 23 to mid-60s, and Emsworth says the ranch engaged them all. “Everyone loved the location and had only good things to say about the ranch, the people at it and the food.”

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The first day was designed for fun and bonding. Company Olympics took place on the ranch lawn — a huge success to be repeated next year — and afterward employees tried fly-fishing, zip-lining or mountain biking with their workplace team or individually. Some chose simply to network around the fireside.

Networking occurred elsewhere too. “I liked that we had options in terms of how to accommodate everyone,” Emmswiller says. “Some stayed in cabins, some in the bunkhouse and some in the main lodge area — all wonderful. But the bunkhouse became a gathering spot, a very organic way of people from all parts of the company getting together, and that was beneficial to the whole experience.”

Two days of business included breakfast and lunch in the expansive meeting space and dinner in different locations, including a buyout of the main dining area and bar. But that first day set the stage for success. “Highlights for me included standing on that lawn and doing the Olympics, and afterward having so many employees come up to tell me how much they loved where we were and what we were doing,” Emmswiller says. “They were so happy and appreciative. That set the tone for the whole meeting.”

“We do profit-sharing, so this retreat was paid for by all of our employees. They were glad we did it even if they maybe could have used that money for something else. It was a success from every perspective.”

EATING OUT

Attendees find diverse cuisines and a sense of place in local restaurants. La Biblioteca, in Denver’s Riverfront Park neighborhood, serves Latin-American cuisine and a huge selection of tequilas. Private dining accommodates up to 40, a full buyout 60–100. Hard Rock Cafe reopens in Denver this June following major renovations and a reimagined menu. The Red Rocks function room accommodates up to 80; buyouts are for up to 600 indoors while Black Party galas accommodate 3,000.

In Colorado Springs, groups can try some of the 115–130 bourbon on hand at Bourbon Brothers Southern Kitchen, some crafted by Colorado small-batch distillers. Set high above Vail, Game Creek Restaurant is a stunning mountain chalet open only certain nights and accessible via the Eagle Bahn Gondola. Buyouts accommodate up to 120, private dining, depending on the room, 28–60.

“Some stayed in cabins, some in the bunkhouse and some in Emswiller says. “They were so happy and appreciative. That set the tone for the whole meeting.”

Prospect at Aspen’s beloved Hotel Jerome is a modern, three-meal American bistro. Private dinners can be booked for up to 25, buyouts for 75–90.

NEW & NOTeworthy

The big news in Denver is the July unveiling of historic Union Station. The new dining/retail venue also will house the elegant 120-room Crawford Hotel, which will share meeting space with its historic affiliate across the street, The Oxford Hotel.

The 230-room Renaissance Denver Downtown City Center opened in May in the historic Colorado National Bank Building, melding neo-classical architecture with a sophisticated contemporary aesthetic. The 6,000 sf of meeting space includes three of the original vaults. As part of its $28 million redesign, Grand Hyatt Denver transformed the 38th-floor Pinnacle Club into striking function space with horizon-to-horizon views. Upgrades also included refreshing the 516 guest rooms, a stylish new lobby and Fireside, the lobby bar with its dramatic wall fireplace. In March, Four Seasons Hotel Denver announced new sustainability measures including biodegradable room keys and biodegradable water bottles for meetings. The new Level 3 Salon within the spa is available for buyouts, a nice VIP treat.

Ritz-Carlton, Denver's signature steak house, The Ritz-Carlton, Denver’s signature steak house, The Biltmore, the Cloud Camp feels like a wilderness mountain getaway yet it’s just a shuttle ride away from hotel’s central location. The Gant, in Aspen, debuts a $5 million renovation and expansion of The Molly Campbell Conference Center this month. The conference center offers a panoramic rooftop terrace, a new specialty café, expanded flexible indoor and outdoor floor plans, and contemporary new furnishings and accessories. The hotel-wide renovation at DoubleTree by Hilton Broomfield in October included 208 guest rooms and 9,000 sf of function space. What’s new: an outdoor patio, and sound and lighting controlled via iPad. Construction on the 519-room The Westin Denver International Airport is slated for completion late 2015. It will include a 26,000 sf conference center with 12 meeting rooms and three ballrooms. Opened in May, Woolley’s Classic Suites, Denver Airport is business-ready with 9,000 sf of meeting space, complimentary Internet, free airport transportation and a Hertz Rent-a-Car kiosk with 24/7 vehicle availability. JW Marriott Denver Cherry Creek’s Fireside event space received a $1 million refresh. Accommodating 250, it features LED chandeliers with color enhancement and two walls of glass doors opening to a patio with two fire pits and lounge seating.

Cheyenne Mountain Resort in Colorado Springs invested $3.8 million in its championship golf course, which reopened in May. Renovations include rebuilt bunkers, elevated tee boxes and an additional 47 yards.

The Broadmoor’s Cloud Camp opens in August, offering a unique option for an executive retreat or small group booking. Perched 3,000 feet above The Broadmoor, the Cloud Camp feels like a wilderness mountain getaway yet it’s just a shuttle ride away from hotel’s central location. The Gant, in Aspen, debuts a $5 million renovation and expansion of The Molly Campbell Conference Center this month. The conference center offers a panoramic rooftop terrace, a new specialty café, expanded flexible indoor and outdoor floor plans, and contemporary new furnishings and accessories. The hotel-wide renovation at DoubleTree by Hilton Broomfield in October included 208 guest rooms and 9,000 sf of function space. What’s new: an outdoor patio, and sound and lighting controlled via iPad.

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Meghan Emmswiller, V.P. of Human Resources, The Ritz-Carlton, Denver.

Rendering of the Gant’s expanded Molly Campbell Conference Center in Aspen.

Meeting space and amenities. There are 11 one- and two-bedroom guest cabins, seven accommodations in the lodge, and best of all, 360-degree views of all the surrounding alpine wonder.

A new entertainment venue opens & Spa wrapped up in May, giving the Vail Valley its largest ballroom, which is bathed in natural light. Guest rooms were refreshed in November.

The Gant, by Destination Hotels & Resorts, in Aspen, debuts a $5 million renovation and expansion of The Molly Campbell Conference Center this month. The conference center offers a panoramic rooftop terrace, a new specialty café, expanded flexible indoor and outdoor floor plans, and contemporary new furnishings and accessories. The hotel-wide renovation at DoubleTree by Hilton Broomfield in October included 208 guest rooms and 9,000 sf of function space. What’s new: an outdoor patio, and sound and lighting controlled via iPad.

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Mandarin Oriental, Atlanta has named Kerry Dyer as director of sales and marketing. She was director of travel industry sales for the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts corporate office based in Atlanta, Georgia.

Karen Wall was named sales manager for Visit Winston-Salem responsible for conventions and meetings business within the Southeast regional markets. She most recently served in convention sales for the International Market Centers in High Point, North Carolina.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel, Orlando, Florida, has named Nick Anderson as group sales account director, responsible for the New York and New Jersey markets. He was senior account executive at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas.

The Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa & Marina, Cambridge, Maryland, has appointed Christopher Levine as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing at Hyatt Regency Sarasota, Florida.

The Westin Columbus in Columbus, Ohio, has named Nathan R. Wood as director of sales and marketing. He formerly served as director of sales and marketing at the Sheraton Omaha in Omaha, Nebraska.

Suzanne Shogren was named area director of sales and marketing for The Willard InterContinental, Washington, DC. She most recently served as regional director of sales and marketing for Polin/ Miller Hospitality Strategies Inc. in Washington, DC.
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