

A www.TheMeetingMagazines.com **ASSOCIATION** **CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES**

APRIL/MAY
2015

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT



Value Destinations

**Detroit Leads a List of Great
Destinations That Deliver
the Total Package**
PAGE 26

**CLICK HERE TO
DOWNLOAD/VIEW
TABLET VERSION**

The Comeback City
Detroit's GM
Renaissance Center
and the People
Mover — a quick
and easy way to get
around downtown.

FOR YOUR NEXT MEETING, EXPECT:



HIGH CHANCE
OF POWERFUL
BRAINSTORMS



100% CHANCE OF
BUDGET-FRIENDLY
SOLUTIONS



BLUE SKIES
AND BRIGHT
IDEAS



In San Diego, sunny skies, unique meeting venues, friendly locals and an optimistic outlook come together to create an ideal climate for meeting success, regardless of the budget. What's in the forecast for your next meeting? Find out at sandiego.org/valuemeetings

FORECAST:
SUCCESS

San Diego

TOURISM AUTHORITY

Sponsored by the San Diego Tourism Authority, funded in part by the San Diego Tourism Marketing District Corporation with City of San Diego Tourism Marketing District assessment funds.

ISSN 21628831

USPS 003500

A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

www.TheMeetingMagazines.com
ASSOCIATION
CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

April / May 2015

Volume 8 • Number 2

Departments

4 Publisher's Page

6 News & Notes

7 Snapshots

50 Career Track

50 Reader Services

ViewPoint

8 The New Face of Meetings

5 Trends From the Event Service
Manager's Perspective
By Denise Suttle, CMP

10 Planners, Build Your
Personal Brand!

Make a Jump! Take a Risk! Be a Game-changer!
By Monica N. Simons, CMP

Destinations

38 Las Vegas

The Exciting, Ever-changing Destination
Always Garner High Marks From Attendees
By John Buchanan

Features

14 Wow'ing 'Em on the
Trade Show Floor

'Experience Design' Gives Attendees
a Reason to Stay and Explore
By Patrick Simms

20 Capital Ideas

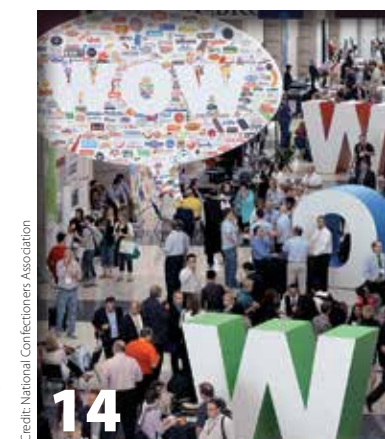
Input From Planners Is the Key to Successful
Convention Center Improvement Projects
By Patrick Simms

26 The Price Is Right...
but What Is the Rest
of the Story?

Planners Must Evaluate a City's
Total Value Proposition
By Derek Reveron

32 The Power of
Inspiration: Priceless!

How to Find the Right Speaker or
Entertainment — Even on a Budget
By Christine Loomis



Credit: National Convention Association



Peter Sheehan, Founder/CEO of Changelabs, Credit: Gary Wildman/National Speakers Bureau



Credit: The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino

Association Conventions & Facilities is published bi-monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$13.00 U.S.A. only. Yearly subscription price is \$65.00 in the U.S.A. Canada and foreign is \$135.00. Back copies \$14.00 plus shipping and handling, U.S.A. only. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send Form 3579 address changes to Association Conventions & Facilities, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Association Conventions & Facilities), and the publication disclaims any liability with respect to the use of or reliance on any such information. The information contained in this publication is in no way to be construed as a recommendation by AC&F of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted by or to be binding upon any advertiser or subscriber. Reproduction of any portion of this publication by any means is strictly forbidden. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited photographs or manuscripts. Subscribers: Send subscription inquiries and address changes to: Circulation Department, Association Conventions & Facilities, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Provide old and new addresses including zip code. Enclose address label from most recent issue and please allow five weeks for the change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2015.

Detroit: The Comeback City

I am looking forward to rediscovering Detroit this August when I attend ASAE's Annual Meeting & Exposition. The event's estimated 6,000 delegates will witness firsthand the city's remarkable resurgence as they step into the new Cobo Center, which is fresh off a \$279 million renovation; and as some of them step into the city's largest convention hotel, The Detroit Marriott at Renaissance Center, which just completed a \$30 million makeover. They will experience the Motor City's roots during the opening night festivities at The Henry Ford Museum; and pay tribute to the birthplace of Motown music at ASAE Foundation's: The Classic, which will be held at the historic Fox Theatre where Lionel Richie will perform. The closing celebration will take place in Hart Plaza, which overlooks the Detroit River, for more music and a display of hot rods, muscle cars, a Model T and the latest models from the "Big Three."

There is no city more quintessentially American than Detroit, which has proven its blue collar spirit and determination through new and ongoing development: The M-1 commuter rail will link downtown to midtown when complete in 2016; a new hockey arena and 45-block Detroit District entertainment area in the heart of downtown is scheduled to open in 2016; and Dan Gilbert, the founder of Quicken Loans, has spent \$1 billion to purchase and renovate 60 skyscrapers and renovate Greektown Casino.

All of which goes to explain why convention bookings are projected to increase 140 percent from 2014 to 2021.

The allure for convention groups is also dependent on great customer service, a hallmark of other so-called value destinations sought by planners (see our feature on page 26). Detroit recently launched its "One Team, One Dream" program designed to rally the hospitality community and local residents in welcoming convention groups. "Providing great customer service in our region is more important than ever since the story of Detroit as a comeback city is resonating," said Larry Alexander, president and CEO of the Detroit Metro CVB. "Convention planners who may not have considered the city or region before are committing to bringing meetings here, and this is our chance to welcome them...(and) to encourage repeat visits." The city is banking on some great returns from ASAE: Alexander told Oates Business Tourism IQ, "History shows that up to 20 percent of ASAE attendees book meetings in the host destination over the five years following the convention."

ASAE President and CEO John H. Graham, IV, FASAE, CAE, told us, "The city has a great story to tell, and we look forward to our attendees seeing it firsthand. Detroit will do a fabulous job hosting our event in August, and we hope to see you there."



Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

www.TheMeetingMagazines.com
ASSOCIATION
CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES
THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT
A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Harvey Grotsky
harvey.grotsky@themeetingmagazines.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Mitch D. Miller
mitch.miller@themeetingmagazines.com

MANAGING EDITORS
Susan W. Fell
susan.fell@themeetingmagazines.com

Susan S. Gregg
sue.gregg@themeetingmagazines.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Karen Brost
John Buchanan
Sara Churchville
Christine Loomis
Derek Reveron
Patrick Simms

PRESIDENT & CEO
Harvey Grotsky

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS
David A. Middlebrook
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES
2700 N. Military Trail, Suite 120
Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394
561-989-0600 Fax: 561-989-9509
advertising@themeetingmagazines.com

CT, DC, DE, MA, MD, ME
NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VA, VT
David Middlebrook
561-989-0600, ext. 109 • Fax: 561-989-9509
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

FLORIDA/CARIBBEAN/BAHAMAS
David Middlebrook
561-989-0600, ext. 109 • Fax: 561-989-9509
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

AL, GA, MS, NC, OK, SC
David Middlebrook
561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

AR, IA, IL, IN, KS, KY, MI, MN, MO
ND, NE, OH, SD, WI, WV
David Middlebrook
561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

CO, LA, TN, TX
David Middlebrook
561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

AZ, CA, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY
Marshall Rubin
818-888-2407 • Fax: 818-888-4907
marshall.rubin@themeetingmagazines.com

ALASKA/CANADA/MEXICO/INTERNATIONAL
David Middlebrook
561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com



DISTINCTIVE
by design



Imagine your next meeting in a place where unforgettable surroundings *inspire creativity*.

Newly designed guest rooms and state-of-the-art facilities provide the perfect backdrop

for meetings from 15 to 15,000. With two decades of *service expertise*

backed by *award-winning* accommodations and dining, this is the world

you'll experience at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort.

800.524.4939 • www.swandolphinmeetings.com



Mike Waterman Named President of Greater Houston CVB



Waterman

HOUSTON, TX — Mike Waterman, a hospitality veteran with more than 26 years in the industry, has been named the president of the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau (GHCVB) and executive vice president of Houston First Corp (HFC). He officially joins the GHCVB/HFC on May 11. A major focus of Waterman's responsibility will be to promote the Houston region to the local, state, regional, national and international meetings and leisure markets.

"We set out to find the strongest person available to lead the GHCVB in an unprecedented period in our organization's history," said Nick Massad Jr., chairman of the GHCVB. "Houston is experiencing incredible growth in many arenas, particularly hospitality, and we know that with the Final Four in 2016 and Super Bowl in 2017, that will only get better in the months and years to come. After an extensive search, we are confident that Mike is the leader the GHCVB needs." www.houstonfirst.com, www.visithouston.com

Mandalay Bay Convention Center Expansion on Track

LAS VEGAS, NV — Construction is booming on the Mandalay Bay Convention Center expansion, adding 350,000 sf of exhibit space, more carpeted ballroom space and 900 underground parking spaces for a total of more than 2 million sf. The foundation has been laid and the underground garage, construction footings and columns all have been completed.

The \$66 million project is on schedule to welcome its first attendees in August, with the anticipated completion of the entire expansion and renovation in January 2016.

With the Mandalay Bay Convention Center expansion, Mandalay Bay can accommodate growing trade shows as well as attract new shows with more than 900,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space. The added carpeted space will allow for more corporate groups and associations. The project represents the continued commitment Mandalay Bay is making to the meetings and convention industry and to Las Vegas, the No. 1 trade show destination. www.mgmresorts.com

Mohegan Sun Unveils Plans for a Second Hotel

UNCASVILLE, CT — At a recent press conference, Mohegan Sun executives shared details on a second hotel being added to the flagship property. The seven-floor, 400-room Earth Hotel will allow for an opportunity to recapture the almost 500,000 room nights turned away in 2014.

Mitchell Etes, CEO for the Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority (MTGA) said, "The Earth Hotel could not come at a better time as we position ourselves for the increased regional competition and ensure that we continue to be the premier entertainment and gaming destination on the East Coast. Many team members here have been working tirelessly on this project for a long time. It's exciting to see their efforts come to fruition."

Modeled after the existing Sky Hotel design, the Earth Hotel reflects the Tribe's sensitivity to the natural landscape in that it pays homage to the geological and natural forms present on the property's riverfront site. www.mohegansun.com

San Diego Convention Center Environmental Efforts Set New Record

SAN DIEGO, CA — Building on years of work to reduce the environmental impact of meetings and conventions held at the San Diego Convention Center, the San Diego Convention Center Corporation has announced that the facility set a new record in 2014, diverting nearly 60 percent of all event waste (approximately 1,120 tons) from local landfills. The convention center pledged to continue to do their part to help the city of San Diego reach 75 percent diversion by 2020 and zero waste by 2040.

"We are proud of our ongoing success minimizing the environmental impact of meetings in our facility, and our team is committed to building on our strong record," said Carol Wallace, president and CEO of the San Diego Convention Center Corporation.

Initial recycling efforts at the convention center began in 1990 with the placement of clearly marked bins to help attendees keep recyclables out of the waste stream. In 2011, the convention center achieved LEED-EBOM Silver Certification for the successful efforts by the corporation and its staff to reduce waste, conserve water and improve energy efficiency at the 2.6-million-sf facility.

For more information, see the Green Meeting Fact Sheet: visitsandiego.com/sites/default/files/SDCCC_GreenMeetings_2015.pdf



1 The ASAE Great Ideas in Association Management Conference, Asia-Pacific was held earlier this year in Hong Kong. In attendance were (l to r) Amy Ledoux, S.V.P., Meetings, Expositions & Events, ASAE; Francesco Leboffe, conventions manager, Meetings & Exhibitions and Phoebe Shing, manager, Business Development, Meetings & Exhibitions, both for the Hong Kong Tourism Board; Greta Kotler, chief global development officer, ASAE; Susan Neely, chair of ASAE and president and CEO of American Beverage Association; Irene Law, senior manager, Business Development, Meetings & Exhibitions of the Hong Kong Tourism Board; John Graham, president and CEO of ASAE and Anne Blouin, chief learning officer of ASAE. **2** ASAE presented Congressman Dave Joyce (l) and Congressman Kevin Brady (r) with ASAE Sentinel Awards in Washington, DC, as part of ASAE's annual Legislative Fly-in. The honorees were flanked by Susan Neely and John Graham. **3** Attendees enjoy refreshments at ASAE's DC Fly-in. **4** Attendees at the recent ASAE Great Ideas Conference in Orlando. **5, 6** These participants joined nearly 3,000 other meeting and industry professionals at ASAE's Springtime Expo, April 8-9 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in DC. **7** The 35th Annual Conference of the Association of Collegiate Conference and Events Directors-International was held in March in Chicago.

The New Face of Meetings

Denise Suttle, CMP



5 Trends From the Event Service Manager's Perspective

The event service manager is on the frontline of events, with the benefit of a broad view as direct liaison with the meeting planner, representing a variety of meeting types and all other departments involved in the event, including catering, facility operations and audio-visual. A fluid partnership between an event service manager and a meeting planner creates an undeniable synergy that ultimately yields a successful and memorable event.

By the nature of our role, event service managers work with a number of meeting planners, groups and events each day, exposing us to new ideas and trends. Here are five trends to watch this year from the perspective of an event service manager.

1 Change it up! Incorporate a mix of seating styles in your general session so that attendees can choose what best reflects their learning style. At the Event Service Professionals Association's (ESPA) Annual Conference this year, we included traditional classroom seating, rounds, theater seating, highboys and pods of six in the main general session room. The setup enabled interaction and collaboration among attendees and encouraged attendee mobility. If budget allows, soft seating such as couches and chairs also add a great element to this format.

Groups also are rethinking their traditional breakfast and lunch space. Instead of rounds of 10 and a buffet, consider having a mix of seating styles with stations located throughout the room for better networking and incorporate interactive activities to help attendees move around. It's not just for receptions anymore. At the Annual Conference, we incorporated a dance floor and music in the middle of lunch. Attendees were able to network, move around and, best of all, have some fun in the middle of a day of learning.

2 Engage your audience. This is a big trend in the industry right now as groups continue to look for

the best ways to keep attendees engaged and help foster relationships. More groups are incorporating interactive polling into their sessions and there are a variety of mobile applications that enable this type of activity. Polling gives attendees the opportunity to interact with the speaker and immediately weigh in on and share their thoughts and opinions on specific topics.

Teambuilding exercises can incorporate new technology or can be a bit more playful. For example, RSN, an audio-visual group, gave attendees a set of tools that included tinker toys, fabric, string and foil. Attendees were challenged to work as a team to create an impromptu AV production set. Each team presented their works of art while an iPad projected the image on-screen for everyone to see. The result of this experiment was a session brimming with creative group collaboration.

Using technology such as mobile applications can help build attendee engagement and interactivity, but don't lose sight of the traditional tools that can be used, too. Bulletin boards where attendees can post things they have learned throughout the event, takeaway reminder notecards to jot down ideas that attendees would like to implement when they return home, and bowls on each table filled with topics to spark conversation during breaks and lunches, are all traditional tools that help create a sense of engagement and interaction.

3 Cater to your attendees. The design of food and beverage menus is critical, and more meeting planners are looking to the venue's chefs for custom menus versus a facility's published selections. The ability to incorporate more options into the menu that are local, vegetarian, vegan, health-conscious and protein-packed is

a hot topic, as not all published menus offer as much variety. A fellow ESPA board member from a Starwood hotel relayed to me that their chef is currently restructuring its menu offerings and looking to cover these types of requests into their standard buffet menus while also making available a selection of vegetarian plated options for meeting planners to select from in advance.

There also is a more proactive and organized approach in learning and fulfilling attendees' special meal requests. Planners are collecting that information upfront, communicating im-

Using technology such as mobile applications can help build attendee engagement and interactivity, but don't lose sight of the traditional tools that can be used, too.

mediately with the venue and assigning special cards or seating to accurately identify guests with special meal requests or dietary restrictions. Chefs are becoming more creative with preparing foods that meet various dietary restrictions such as gluten-free and various allergies. Starting the food and beverage conversations early in the planning process and ensuring your chef is connected with the meeting planner from the start helps to achieve everyone's food and beverage goals.

4 Health and well-being. In addition to menu design, groups are more attentive to attendees' work and personal balance. More and more

groups are incorporating exercise programs into their events, such as yoga, Pilates and Zumba classes, to promote wellness and help attendees relax, loosen up their minds and bodies, and refocus their energy for the remainder of the meeting.

5 Corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR no longer only means going offsite to community venues. Groups now can bring their CSR activity into the hotel or convention center's space making it more accessible and widely supported. Consider activities such as assembling personal hygiene kits for residents of homeless shelters, filling weekend backpacks with protein snacks and packaged foods for children, writing personalized notes to service men and women overseas, creating get-well cards for those battling illnesses at local hospitals and assembling bicycles for children from an underserved part of the community. Set up a room at the venue where attendees can stop in at any time throughout the duration of the meeting to contribute to these types of activities. To create an even bigger sense of camaraderie, schedule certain times throughout the event for attendees to participate in these activities as a group.

These five trends illustrate just a few new elements to incorporate into your meetings. Event service managers and meeting planners should collaborate to create enhanced learning environments and memorable events. AC&F

Denise Suttle, CMP, is president of the Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA) and the assistant director of convention services at the Albuquerque CVB. Suttle has been at the Albuquerque CVB since moving to New Mexico from Oklahoma in 1991. At the CVB, she works with citywide conventions that utilize the Albuquerque Convention Center and multiple hotels, sporting events and hotel meetings of all kinds. A member of PCMA since 1996 and ESPA since 2000, she has served on the ESPA board of directors and is past chair of the marketing & communications committee, 2015 Annual Conference committee and code of ethics ad hoc committee. www.espaonline.org

Planners, Build Your Personal Brand!

Monica N. Simons, CMP

Make a Jump! Take a Risk! Be a Game-changer!

The event planning industry is saturated with mega talent and big personalities who are famed for their work producing everything from weddings to funerals — and everything in between. Take these noted, wildly successful event planners for example:

David Tutera — two television shows, seven books, clothing line, private jet.

Preston Bailey — masterclass series, numerous books, on Oprah's speed dial.

Kevin Lee — Michael Jackson's AND Frank Sinatra's funerals (enough said!).

Speak your name from the moment they start requesting your services.

ASSOCIATION PLANNERS, TOO

If you are a corporate or association planner, you aren't excluded from the equation. We are all building our personal brand. Your next position or promotion is already waiting for you to submit your resumé! Wouldn't it be great if you made sure that a prospective employer is more familiar with your work than who you worked for? When I was last in the job market, the CEO and interviewer had what seemed to

In everything, even in the aspects of planning that you're comfortable with, make sure there is a challenge involved. You will win or you will learn, but you will not lose.

It's increasingly difficult to stand tall amongst giants. So how do you get your name on the "go to" list of event planners? Simple! Every choice you make — from connections to contracting and design — must accomplish these three things:

- Reinforce your position as a thought leader.
- Heighten brand and name awareness.
- Enhance business relationships.

If your work isn't accomplishing any of these goals in a measurable way, time for a change.

Self-promotion is key. And you do that best through the work you produce. As varied as our favorite event planners are in skill and portfolio, David Tutera events, Kevin Lee Productions and Preston Bailey have one thing in common: You can't request their services without saying their name. If you're looking to branch out on your own, don't stress yourself about elaborate logos and quirky names for your company. Put your signature on the event from the beginning! Have current and prospective clients

be an odd request. He asked for pictures of my events. At first, I was thrown off. I wondered why he would need to see actual pictures. It's because he knew. Our work is to create an environment, an experience for the attendees. You can't get that from a list of job duties. He wanted to experience my work, not my resumé. He wanted to know my aesthetic; my personal brand.

A PORTFOLIO OF EVENTS

It's becoming increasingly important to companies that they hire someone whose work can elevate their image, which they can't determine from a resumé. Your personal brand is the one thing that sets you apart from other planners. Before you enter the market, choose some of the best photos from your events and, with your employer's permission, have the photographer put your name, company and the date in the bottom corner. Submit these with your resumé as examples of the environments you create. Make sure your name is visible as the contact on the event websites for



OMNI UNDERSTANDS

Spectacular

In a city full of lights and luxury,
no other event shines brighter.

Congratulations to the Omni Dallas Hotel, winner of *Corporate & Incentive Travel's* Award of Excellence for 2014. Voted by event professionals, this award honors hotels that offer the world's best venues, amenities and service. Discover our standard of excellence by booking an event today.

Download the
Omni LIVE app* to
watch this ad come to
life and unlock special
meeting offers.

Call for special offers.
800-788-6664 • omniunderstands.com/dallas

OMNI HOTELS & RESORTS
dallas

*Omni LIVE available for iPhone, iPad and Android devices.
©2013 Omni Hotels & Resorts

the company for which you provide services. Also, motivate others in your company to share your name with anyone who has questions regarding the event.

Now that they know your name, make it count.

OPPORTUNITY OVERLOAD

"Jump as quickly at opportunities as you do at conclusions." — Benjamin Franklin

Our field is complex, and there are many avenues to take. As an association planner, I tackled membership, had to rebuild one company's budget and sponsor branding, started green planning programs and had to oversee database implementation. Opportunity overload! And I'm grateful. I wasn't sure I could do any of it. I was worried I would lose billions of company dollars and get laughed out of the boardroom along the way. While there were a few moments of laughter, mostly I learned from those opportunities. My contribution can take a company from functioning in the red to operating in the black...and keep it there. My resumé details it all. Those are the things you can't see from the pictures. The risks I took. The responsibility I embraced. The times I jumped.

TAKING RISKS

"Living at risk is jumping off the cliff and building your wings on the way down." — Ray Bradbury

Now that you've jumped out there and accepted these new duties, you are going to have to take some heavy risks. Just as you do with your designs and program formats, you will need to adjust your portfolio and stretch your skill set to fit the needs of your next employer or client. When adding to your portfolio, you risk exhausting your bandwidth and company or client time and money, not to mention the self-doubt.

In my need to stretch my skills, I've made some interesting choices. I can look back and say they made me better at what I do, more knowledgeable in my contribution and richer in my experience (which always goes on my resumé), and I was criticized and doubted at every turn. You will be, too. Run the risk. As this is a new venture, you will undoubtedly have to call on other experi-

enced planners along the way. You will enhance your relationships, add another skill to your resumé, and when you succeed, reinforce your position as a thought leader. You will build your wings along the way.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

"If it doesn't challenge you, it doesn't change you."

— Fred DeVito

If you want to reach the next level in your career, you have to do more than get your name out there, jump into a new skill and take a few risks. You must allow for growth. Your design, contracting and output shouldn't look the same three years from now. The risks you took and the responsibilities you embraced beyond your expected duties should change the way you approach your events. If they don't, you didn't jump high enough or take large enough risks. In everything, even in the aspects of planning that you're comfortable with, make sure there is a challenge involved. You will win or you will learn, but you will not lose.

Roll with the punches, but throw a few, too. Get knocked down and get back up. You will build your portfolio and stand out amongst your peers as the one to beat. You will be a game-changer because you've allowed every opportunity to change you.

AC&F

Monica N. Simons, CMP, is an award-winning event planner, a motivational speaker and the Creative Executive Officer of Unforgettable M.E. by Monica Nicole, an event planning and design firm in the Washington, DC, metro area. The 13-year association planner and 2014 Meeting Professional of the Year (ESPA) also serves as the Director of Meetings and Events for the Intelligence & National Security Alliance and is listed as one of the Top 40 Under 40 by Connect Magazine. Ms. Simons is a proud member of the National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners and serves on several councils and boards.



INSPIRATION WITH EVERY CRASHING WAVE.

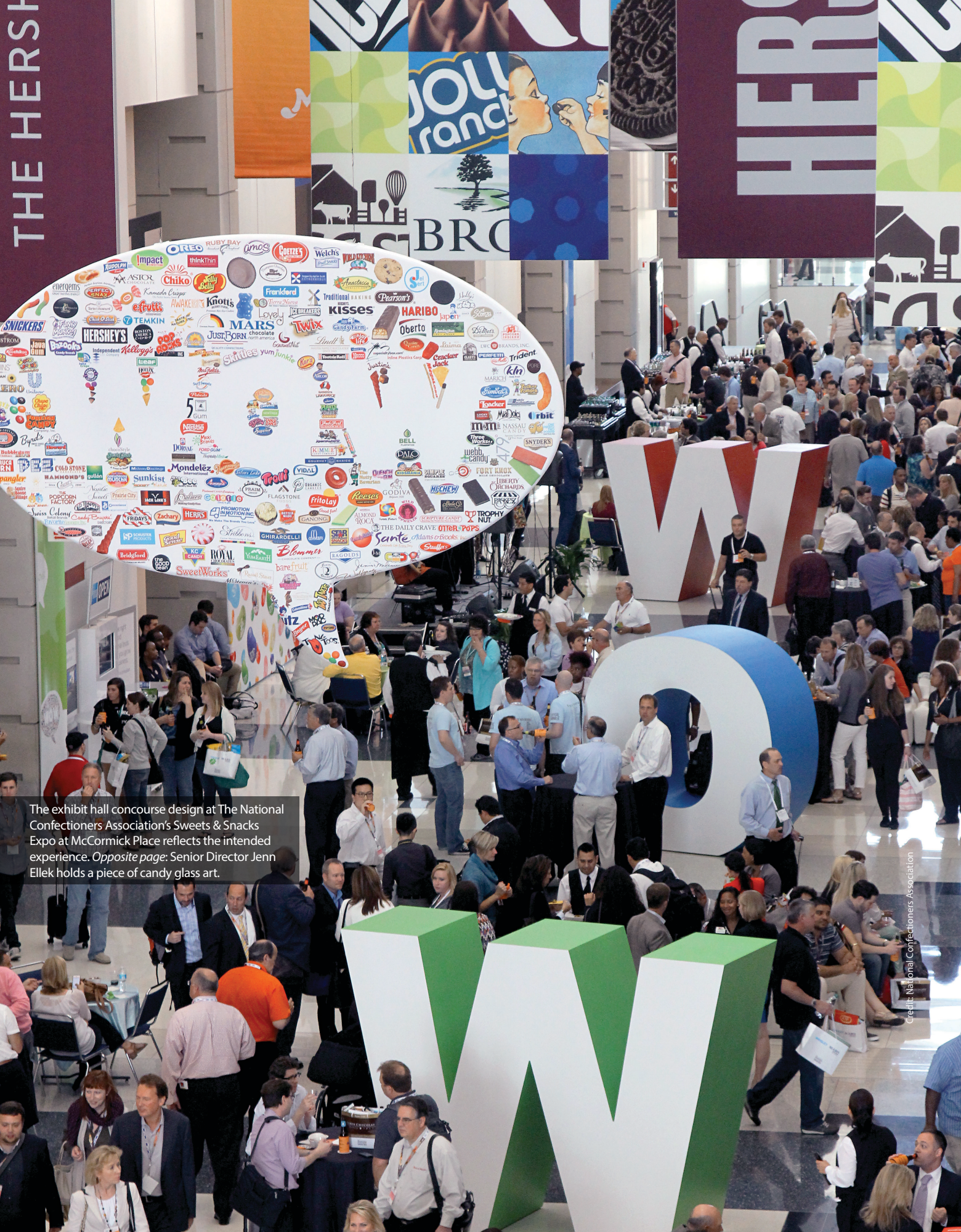
Incredible meetings start with incredible locations. Monterey's unparalleled natural beauty and memorable meeting venues provide the perfect backdrop for an inspirational event. Our team of destination experts provides the resources and assistance to ensure your event is a success. Monterey is the perfect place to inspire new ways of thinking and gear up for the next challenge.

MONTEREY
Inspired moments in meetings.™

For more information or to submit an RFP, please contact us at 800-555-6290 or Sales@SeeMonterey.com.

MeetInMonterey.com

BIG SUR | CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA | CARMEL VALLEY | DEL REY OAKS | MARINA | MONTEREY | MOSS LANDING
PACIFIC GROVE | PEBBLE BEACH | SALINAS | SALINAS VALLEY | SAND CITY | SEASIDE



The exhibit hall concourse design at The National Confectioners Association's Sweets & Snacks Expo at McCormick Place reflects the intended experience. Opposite page: Senior Director Jenn Ellek holds a piece of candy glass art.

Credit: National Confectioners Association

Wowing 'Em on the Trade Show Floor

'Experience Design' Gives Attendees a Reason to Stay and Explore

By Patrick Simms

With a slew of exhibitors doing their best to attract attendees to their respective booths, event organizers need to find ways to make the show floor experience appealing at the very least and dazzlingly memorable at best. Ideally, buyers will not feel like they are merely trying to efficiently navigate a dizzying array of exhibits; rather, they will feel like they are in a place that is an extension of their everyday lives, reflecting their interests and lifestyles. Elements that accomplish that goal will support the efforts of individual exhibitors, as these engaged, comfortable attendees will tend to stay longer on the floor and explore more of it.

CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE AND CONTENT

David Gauthreaux, executive vice president of global sales, corporate events with FreemanXP in Seattle, notes that the company's trade show clients have been increasingly focused on "experience design" in recent years. And the design is driven by the nature of modern life. Gauthreaux cites data suggesting that by 2050, "over 85 percent of the developed world population will live in urban environments," and these "me-centric" milieus are replete with opportunities for people to get the social connections and content they want, at the time they desire. "You want to be able to go and sit in a space and connect with people, and



"When we're putting on our trade event there's a balance between getting business done and having fun doing it, because of the (product) categories we represent."

Jenn Ellek
Senior Director, Trade Marketing & Communications
National Confectioners Association
Washington, DC

connect with content either passively or actively. But you want to do it at your leisure," he explains. Thus the motivation to include social hubs on the show floor, personalized content delivered to attendees' smartphones by "beacons," fluid content provide by digital signage and other tools of engagement.

And with the need to be constantly connected, "even something as rudimentary as power outlets to charge our devices has influenced the show floor, either in the form of furniture with plugs, different types of charging stations and then cordless charging technology," Gauthreaux explains.

The engaging elements of a show floor need not be technological, of course. Peter MacGillivray, vice president of commu-



David Gauthreaux
Executive Vice President of
Global Sales, Corporate Events
FreemanXP
Seattle, WA

“You want to be able to go and sit in a space and connect with people, and connect with content either passively or actively. But you want to do it at your leisure.”

nications and events with SEMA - Specialty Equipment Market Association, cites a “low-tech” approach to wayfinding that has been very well received in recent years by attendees of the automotive specialty products trade show, taking place in November at the Las Vegas Convention Center.

“We found ourselves compromising the visceral feel of our industry by leaning too heavily on standard wayfinding. We saw an opportunity with the signs to design them in such a way that really hits this emotional chord with the industry, so attendees get this feeling that their trade association knows, values and understands them,” says MacGillivray. SEMA commissioned an artist who does popular work in the automotive industry. “We’re seeing a really interesting emotional response and energy that we hadn’t seen before,” MacGillivray observes. “We had people wanting to buy our show signage because they’re works of art.” The artist also designed the entrance unit for the hall. “Every show needs to do an entrance unit describing what’s inside, but if you can make your entrance unit both informational and visually interesting, it has an impact on the attendees and people talk about the piece. It really does tie back to this obligation that we have as show producers to amplify the energy that the exhibitors bring.”

SHOWCASE THEATERS

Most important, exhibitors bring new and innovative products to the show, and organizers can amplify their efforts to showcase these products with a well-designed and branded theater on the floor. For instance, the National Confectioners Association’s (NCA) Sweets & Snacks Expo, held at Chicago’s McCormick Place for the last 18 years, features the Sweet Insights Theater on the show floor, and “it’s been standing room only the last two years,” says Jenn Ellek, senior director, trade marketing and communications with the NCA. “We’ve been very deliberate about bringing in new products; it’s a great place for candy and snack manufacturers to launch their products. So a lot of buyers want

to be there to see what’s new, the innovations that are going to keep their customers coming back, and that’s what we offer.”

The Sweet Insights Theater is located toward the back of the hall to encourage traffic flow to that area, and is just one example of how engaging venues on the floor can be created to optimize that flow.

CREATING HOT SPOTS

The SEMA Show occupies the entire Las Vegas Convention Center, utilizing just over 1 million sf. “We had a growing obligation to make sure that the traffic was going to all corners of the show,” says MacGillivray. “So we try to create hotspots that people would gravitate to.” One of those hotspots is the drifting demo (drifting is an “extreme” motorsport where the driver oversteers to cause loss of traction in the tires). Not only do the demos serve as draws to less-frequented areas of the show, but they also “create a new way for our industry participants to get a little bit of the media



The SEMA Show, which uses all of the Las Vegas Convention Center, seeks to “amplify the energy that the exhibitors bring,” says Peter MacGillivray, V.P. of communications and events.



Credits: SEMA

spotlight and attendee interest,” he explains. “They have wildly interesting and innovative products that can make vehicles do really cool things, but that’s kind of hard for an exhibitor to fully demonstrate on the floor of a

trade show. So if we’ve got a driving demonstration area, it’s a way for them to bring their products and innovations to life.”

KEEPING PEOPLE ON THE FLOOR

Attendees of the Remodeling Show | DeckExpo | JLC LIVE, whose 25th Anniversary installment will be held at Chicago’s Navy Pier in October, can browse through innovative outdoor living products with complimentary drinks from a beer garden

on the show floor. “It’s been a pretty good way to keep people on the floor,” remarks Rana Schultz, senior operations manager, Informa Exhibitions U.S., Construction and Real Estate.

Booth visitation is also promoted through a “Hall Crawl,” where attendees go to participating exhibitors to collect a stamp or to download the show app. The exhibitor then gives them a code so they can enter into a drawing to win \$500. Apart from the beer garden, the floor boasts about nine clinics and four exhibitor demonstrations, held hourly. “We try not to have them all at the same time, and scatter them throughout so our sponsors can be around the actual clinic, too,” Schultz explains. In addition, the show features award presentations right on the floor, including the Trade Person of the Year and the Best Booth Awards. “We try to keep everyone on the floor as busy as possible,” she says.

In the spirit of creating the “urban environment” on the show floor that Gauthreaux describes, organizers can feature F&B outlets such as the Remodeling Show’s beer garden. The idea is to answer to as many of attendees’ everyday needs as possible. Says Ellek, “We are owned by an association and run by a committee. It’s very important for them to keep people on the show floor. We have food options right on the floor, including a nice lounge, so nobody has to go off the floor to eat.”

MEASURING ENGAGEMENT

The average amount of time attendees spend at the show is among the metrics that can indicate how engaging the experience is. “We’re always above average for the number of hours our average attendee spends at the show: 2.1–2.4 days and 17–18 hours,” notes Jim Wulfekuhle, vice president of sales and marketing for the International Woodworking Fair (IWF), which brought more than 23,000 attendees and 960 exhibitors to the Georgia World Congress Center last year. If the average amount of time increases following the addition of a new component to the floor, such as a clinic, product theater or attraction, it can be inferred that the new feature contributed to the increase, and was therefore successful. Post-event delegate surveys, of course, also can gauge the level of interest in such features.

The IWF’s show floor also benefits from survey questions on business interests and as a result has been including more pavilions geared toward specific aspects of the woodworking industry, such as cabinets/closets (new in 2016) and wood flooring. “We’re getting more targeted, and we can grow within the segments that we see as growth patterns for our show based upon our surveys,” Wulfekuhle explains.



The 2014 Remodeling Show | DeckExpo | JLC LIVE at the Baltimore Convention Center featured clinics (left photo) and an appearance by DIY network host Chris Grundy (far left) and the MyFixitUpLife cast.

Credits: Oscar and Associates



EXHIBITOR NETWORKING

Another initiative is to support networking among exhibitors. “We know our exhibitors do a lot of buying from other exhibitors, but the next step is the ‘matchmaking’ between, for example, the cabinetry guy that’s attending the show and the countertop fabricator that’s attending, who may want to do business with each other. We’re looking to do that with some kiosks where they can get information (on potential business partners in attendance) and two new pavilions,” he says. And while it’s important to promote networking on the show floor among both exhibitors and attendees, it should be recognized that a busy floor may not be the best environment for focused interaction. Accordingly, “we also arrange ‘meetups’ at the building’s bars and restaurants by sending out email blasts: Meet here for \$3 drinks or appetizers, for example,” Wulfekuhle says. “We want to keep them continually communicating with each other. Some of the best information is gathered in a more one-to-one environment. (On the floor) you have machines running, people moving around, cell phones buzzing, etc.” The October 2015 Remodeling Show | DeckExpo | JLC LIVE at Navy Pier in Chicago cleverly emphasizes the networking value proposition with the slogan “Peer to Pier.”

“We’ve invested in strategies to amplify and create our own sizzle that all the exhibitors can benefit from. ...We have bought into the importance of the show being an experience in addition to the business relationships.”



Peter MacGillivray
Vice President of
Communications and Events
SEMA
Diamond Bar, CA



Rana Schultz
Senior Operations Manager
Informa Exhibitions U.S.
Construction and Real Estate
Irving, TX

“We try not to have (clinics and demonstrations) all at the same time, and scatter them throughout so our sponsors can be around the actual clinic, too.”

KEEPING UP WITH TRENDS

Creating a show floor that adds value for attendees and exhibitors requires calculated investments, and not every host organization will find it worthwhile to make their floor reflect the latest trends. For example, “some shows are still considering social media walls, and other clients have already moved beyond that,” observes Gauthreaux, who has been in the trade show business for 25 years and has seen many such trends arise. “We all know there are a basic few things that drive budget: You’ve got to get the attendance, and there has to be an engagement level that ultimately drives sales or some sort of interaction with the products. And so if that’s happening at scale in a certain vertical, then those clients may not move as readily (to invest in the latest show floor features) as those who are well aware that unless they start responding to millennials and the future decision-makers, then the future of their business is at risk.”

For a show’s success to be sustainable, Gauthreaux suggests host organizations “have to think ahead to what is the demographic of the attendee 10 years from now,” and the kind of floor experience those buyers will find engaging. Yet some features, he notes, “are no longer negotiable. For example, you have to have robust wireless infrastructure at your event because everyone, almost without exception, wants content delivered wirelessly. And that was negotiable some years ago. You also have to have the ability to respond to the attendee’s need to be able to charge their device.”

A show floor that reflects the Information Age, with numerous opportunities for attendees to engage with content, might raise the concern among organizers that buyers will become distracted from the booths. But in Gauthreaux’s experience, there is no distraction effect “if the content is managed properly, and if you’re smart about it you can ensure that the content the attendee has access to advances your cause.” That is, kiosks, beacons, digital displays, show apps can all serve, in part, to further booth visitation with information and messaging; even a simple announcement that there will be a clinic at a certain time on the floor can lead attendees to peruse booths in that area which they otherwise would not have visited.

Exhibitors themselves are seeing the value of robust digital content at their own booths. “They’re understanding that they need to have relevant content and that the content needs to be user-driven. A table with brochures, which I’ve seen for many years in my career

and it still happens every day of the week, is going to be more static and left to chance.” And given our highly connected lifestyles, there should be little concern that attendees will feel overloaded with digital communications from both the show organizers and the exhibitors. “There was a time when it was unimaginable that I would manage 300–500 e-mails a day, and that I could at any moment stop what I’m doing, look at my device and learn about anything I want,” Gauthreaux points out. Now these abilities are commonplace and unchallenging for most people.

THE WOW EXPERIENCE

In general, exhibitors will thrive simply by being part of a show floor with engaging elements, whether high tech, social, educational and so on. And that takes some of the pressure off exhibitors to invest in lavish booths to draw buyers onto the floor. “Our constituents are for the most part small, privately held domestic manufacturers,” says MacGillivray. “They don’t have the means to do these huge, multimillion-dollar displays that you see at other big shows. So we’ve invested in strategies to amplify and create our own sizzle that all the exhibitors can benefit from. We don’t want to assume that everyone is going to come to our show year in and year

“We also arrange ‘meetups’ at the building’s bars and restaurants. ...We want to keep them continually communicating with each other. Some of the best information is gathered in a more one-to-one environment.”



Jim Wulfekuhle
Vice President of Sales and Marketing
International Woodworking Fair
Atlanta, GA

out, and we have bought into the importance of the show being an experience in addition to the business relationships.”

Attending a large trade show can indeed be a marathon for buyers, “so if we can make it an emotional one, hopefully hitting on all the good emotions, it’s all the more valuable and brings buyers back year after year.”

Ellek sees a similar value in augmenting the floor with positive emotional elements, a practice that can be seen at any successful retail store (e.g., energetic background music). “When we’re putting on our trade event there’s a balance between getting business done and having fun doing it, because of the (product) categories we represent.” Professionals in the confectionary industry are naturally given to lighthearted moments, and on the Sweets & Snacks Expo’s exhibit hall concourse there are 12-foot high letters that second-guess their reaction to the show: “WOW!”

AC&F



THE NEW Tropicana
LAS VEGAS
A DOUBLETREE BY HILTON

SEE US IN A WHOLE NEW VIEW.

After more than \$200 million in South Beach-inspired transformations, The New Tropicana Las Vegas - a DoubleTree by Hilton provides an entirely unique experience for conference attendees. From luxurious rooms and top-ranked restaurants to over 100,000 square feet of flexible meeting and exhibition space, unconventional meeting settings including the Havana Room and the Tropicana Theater, and outdoor events surrounded by our lush pool gardens, come see why so many meeting planners are rediscovering and choosing The New Tropicana Las Vegas - a DoubleTree by Hilton!

TropLV.com | 3801 Las Vegas Blvd. South | 1.800.GO2.TROP | 702.739.2222

Facebook.com/TropLV @TropLV @TropLV



HILTON HHONORS

We’re Expanding Our Meeting Space! Coming March 2015 THE TRINIDAD PAVILION



Input from Planners Is the Key to Successful Convention Center Improvement Projects

By Patrick Simms

Convention center improvement projects are often major investments that have the potential to boost group business along with the local economy. The best way to realize that potential is to ensure the improvements meet the needs of a center's biggest clients or those the city is trying to attract.

Soliciting feedback on renovations and expansions from the planners representing these groups is thus a best practice for many convention centers, including the Orlando Orange County Convention Center (OCCC), whose ongoing \$187 million Capital Improvement Plan benefited from Customer Advisory Board input. The nation's second largest convention center behind Chicago's McCormick

Place, the OCCC hosted the National Association of Homebuilders' (NAHB) International Builders' Show in 2012 and will welcome back the show in 2017 and 2018, along with the co-located Kitchen and Bath Industry Show and International Window Coverings Expo.

The event is expected to attract more than 80,000 attendees, certainly qualifying the NAHB as a major client and Geoff Cassidy, senior vice president of exhibitions and meetings for the DC-based NAHB, as a valued member of the Customer Advisory Board for both Visit Orlando and the OCCC.

"They've been really outstanding in terms of engaging their customers with the thoughts and plans they have for the future, very inclusive in that process," Cassidy comments.

The Capital Improvement Plan has been focused mainly on the West Building, where several projects will be completed by August:

the addition of the new Hamlin boardrooms, the refurbished W340 Sunburst signature meeting room with adjoining Sunburst outdoor hospitality terrace, and the transformation of West Hall F into the repurposed, multifunctional 50,000-sf Tangerine Ballroom.

"My understanding is that Hall F, to be a multipurpose ballroom, can still be utilized for exhibit space, and we may very well go ahead and use it that way," says Cassidy. "We've done a variety of things down at that end of the West Building, including exhibits and what we call the Finance Forum. There were certain limits associated with using that space as it had been. It was off at the end of the action, like an afterthought."

Early this year the OCCC reopened the renovated Gary Sain Café and completed the installation of 60 digital message and wayfinding signs, among other upgrades. The facility partners with Smart City Networks (*see page 22*) for its digital signage networks, as does the Las Vegas Convention Center, where the International Builders' Show is being held this year and the following.

"We've begun to engage in a really meaningful way with the (digital signage) system in Las Vegas, and we intend and expect to do the same in Orlando," Cassidy adds.

The Las Vegas Convention Center is moving ahead with its own improvement project, a \$2.3 billion expansion and renovation.

The first phase will focus on the recently acquired, 26-acre site of the Riviera Hotel & Casino and will include 750,000 sf of new exhibit space and 187,500 sf of supporting meeting space as part of the new 1.8-million-sf expansion.

Phase two will renovate the existing convention center, adding a 100,000-sf general session space and another 100,000 sf of meeting space.

Overall, the LVCC's current total footprint of 3.2 million sf will increase to nearly 5.7 million sf. The entire project is expected to take five to eight years to complete after construction begins, and will be part of the new Las Vegas Global Business District that also will feature a centralized transportation hub.

Such a major expansion would "open up all kinds of opportunities for us," says Kay Granath, CAE, CMP, director of meetings and conventions for the Chicago, Illinois-based Association Management Center, which currently partners with 18 clients on their annual meetings.

The last meeting the AMC managed at the LVCC was the Awards and Recognition Association's trade show in 2012. "It's an old convention center and the technology was dated. We have been big advocates of the new space because that would give a place for a smaller show as well as a big show," Granath says.

The ARA's International Awards Market brings in about 3,000–5,000 attendees and is currently at the Rio All-Suite Hotel and Casino where "it's working fine, but the show is growing and the concern is always that we will outgrow the hotel," Granath comments.

Access to variously sized convention facilities always benefits groups vying for space in a competitive market. Granath notes that her Boston-bound groups were always competing against larger groups for the John B. Hynes Veterans Memorial Convention Center



Orlando will welcome back the National Association of Homebuilders' International Builders' Show and co-located expos in 2017 and 2018.

Convention Centers Get 'Smarter' About Technology

Mark Haley, president of Las Vegas-based Smart City Networks, certainly has an eagle's eye view of the strides that convention centers are making on the technology front. A utilities, technology and telecommunications services provider for the meetings industry, Smart City currently partners with 31 convention centers across the country.

"The No. 1 overall trend is mobile technologies; most meeting planners are looking to integrate their mobile applications. The centers are having to upgrade their infrastructure to make those mobile apps more reliable," Haley observes.

And that is also extending to location-based services, where your phone ties-in to the network through the mobile app and can do a plethora of things, such as notify you of events going on and tell you where you are on the show floor."

Mobile apps also can integrate with "beacons," which some centers are in-



The Phoenix Convention Center recently installed a Smart City distributed antennae system for improved cellular service.

Credit: The Phoenix Convention Center

stalling. These are small devices placed throughout the facility that transmit a signal to attendees' smartphones when they

pass by, enabling the convention center or show app to provide information about features of the specific area of the venue.

"Distributed antennae systems are also becoming much more common in convention centers," says Haley. "You have one antennae system in the facility for all the cellular carriers. It enables your mobile device to either tie-in to the Wi-Fi system or to your cellular network. So it's going to give you a much better cellular signal."

Most recently, Smart City installed this system at the Phoenix Convention Center.

While investing in beacons or distributed antennae systems is not quite de rigueur, centers do need to invest in upgrading and maintaining their fiber-optic infrastructure to ensure it can deliver the desired gigabit speeds.

"It's like a plumbing system: If you don't have big enough pipes you can't move the data through those pipes as fast as you need to," Haley explains.

A center also has to determine how expansive to make the network, how many wireless access points to put in.



Mark Haley
President, Smart City Networks, Las Vegas, NV

"And that depends on what events they want to attract, or just making the network able to handle the business that they have now," he says, adding that all of Smart City's contract renewals last year included either a total upgrade of the center's wireless system or an overhaul of the network.

"Once the network is updated, the management of the network is a critical factor that a lot of buildings work very hard at," says Haley. "The challenge is that when you've got tens of thousands of devices coming onto the trade show

"The challenge is that when you've got tens of thousands of devices coming onto the trade show floor, how do you manage that density of devices and the interference that's caused by it?"

floor, how do you manage that density of devices and the interference that's caused by it? So we're working with different trade associations, IAVM, IAEE and CIC, on trying to develop some commonsense principles on how the facilities and the shows can work together (on that initiative).

"We'll share some basic rules for how our network will work best for them, and they try to make sure that people know to turn off their Wi-Fi if they're not going to use it; it's one less device trying to attach to the network."

— PS



Geoff Cassidy
Senior V.P. of Exhibitions and Meetings
National Association of Homebuilders
Washington, DC

"They (Visit Orlando and the OCCC) have been really outstanding in terms of engaging their customers with the thoughts and plans they have for the future, very inclusive in that process."

tional 36,000 sf of exhibit space and more than 10,000 sf of two-level meeting space. Other features include the new 800-space Goodale Garage scheduled to open in October; upgrades to meeting rooms, ballrooms and public spaces at the GCCC and at the connected Hyatt Regency Columbus; new connectivity stations and public art and foliage; an executive boardroom; nursing mother's room; second-level exhibit hall VIP show offices and concierge spaces; and reimaged Food Court & Shops.

Another second-tier convention center on the move is the Albuquerque Convention Center (ACC). Last October the center completed phase two of its \$22 million renovation with a new 5,600-sf addition consisting of a new large entrance vestibule, small retail space and outdoor deck. The center also added new floor, wall and ceiling finishes, new LED lighting and a gas fireplace in the atrium area. In addition, Third Street between Tijeras and Marquette was reconstructed.

The National Association of Health Underwriters, which typically meets in hotels, will hold its 2016 Annual Convention at the ACC in 2016, bringing in 800–1,000 attendees. The renovation and expansion "was one of the things that influenced the decision," remarks Kathleen Cochran, CAE, CMP, vice president of meetings with the DC-based association. "I'm sure that if I had seen it and it had not been renovated, it may not have jumped to the forefront."

Cochran highlights numerous features of the new and improved

until the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center (BCEC) opened in 2004 and the larger groups began using that facility. Last summer, plans were approved to move forward with a 1.3-million-sf expansion of the BCEC that includes a second, larger ballroom and new public space in the South Boston Waterfront.

EXPANSIONS IN SECOND-TIER CITIES

In the Midwest, planners will find a convention center expansion project in one of the country's great second-tier cities: Columbus, Ohio. The Greater Columbus Convention Center's (GCCC) \$125 million expansion and full renovation will begin around September 2015 and conclude in July 2017. Groups will be able to utilize an addi-

ACC that will benefit the convention. "The floor plan of the renovated center is very open, airy and spacious, and there's very good flow between the (2,300-seat) Kiva Auditorium and the exhibit hall and the areas that are on the lower level. We'll be using the auditorium for our general session. Also, the very lowest level, which is where the breakout space is, has really wonderful networking space, anchored by a big, beautiful Southwestern-style fireplace. There is plenty of lounge seating, workstations and tables for six to eight people so you can have a small meeting."

WEST COAST PROJECTS

Several convention center projects can be found in California, two of the latest in Los Angeles and Anaheim, respectively. The Los Angeles Convention Center's \$10 million renovation is set to be completed May 1 and includes a new solar-ready "cool roof" on the South Hall and Concourse Hall; new carpet throughout the Concourse Hall, Concourse Walkway and hall lobby areas; overhauled parking systems; a remodeling of the 299-seat Theater; upgraded air walls, IT infrastructure and lighting systems; an elevator and escalator modernization; and more.

Between October and early 2017, the Anaheim Convention Center will be adding 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space on two levels, with 100,000 sf of column-free space on the top level. The addition will be complemented by dedicated loading docks, 1,400

parking spots, and a climate-controlled pedestrian bridge connecting to the second floor of the existing facility.

In the Northwest, planners can now take advantage of a more expansive Spokane Convention Center with 91,000 additional sf. The \$55 million project resulted in a 120,000-sf exhibit hall, an additional ballroom and new meeting space for a total of 32 meeting rooms. And, attendees can enjoy new floor-to-ceiling windows affording panoramic views of the Spokane River.

"We were the first major group to use the expansion, and it was beautifully done," remarks Bruce Caldwell, executive director with the Washington Music Educators Association. Caldwell manages

"In a smaller center it looks like it's really crowded and there's a buzz. That has a huge impact on the perception that people have of the meeting they went to."



Kay Granath, CAE, CMP
Director of Meetings and Conventions
Association Management Center
Chicago, IL



Kathleen Cochran, CAE, CMP
Vice President of Meetings
National Association of
Health Underwriters
Washington, DC

“The (Albuquerque Convention Center) is very open, airy and spacious, and there’s very good flow. The very lowest level has really wonderful networking space, anchored by a big, beautiful Southwestern-style fireplace.”

the National Association for Music Education’s (NAfME) Biennial Northwest Division Conference, which was held at the Spokane Convention Center in 2009 and again this year, bringing in around 1,800 attendees plus exhibitors.

“I was not anxious to go back to Spokane because the first time through it was difficult,” Caldwell recalls. “But this time it was absolutely spectacular. Before there weren’t enough meeting spaces; we actually had to use the Davenport Hotel, which is a 10-minute bus ride away, because they didn’t have enough meeting space (at the convention center). This time we got everything under one roof, using the attached DoubleTree as our headquarters hotel.” The service the second time around for the NAfME group also was exceptional. “I’ve had 23 conventions of this type, and I’ve never seen a staff work so hard to please people,” Caldwell says. “When you walked down the hall every 50 or 60 feet there would be a staff person asking if you needed help. They even knew our schedule and kept up with it every hour. Even without being solicited, attendees, as well as office staff and board members, said how wonderful the staff was.”

The NAfME had contracted the Spokane Convention Center six years ago, knowing that it would be expanded. “Our biggest concern was that we actually did not see the ballroom and did not have any idea it would be as good acoustically as the ballroom at the Davenport we had been using, until one month before when we did a site visit,” Caldwell explains. “We put on hard hats because they were still building, walked through it and felt more comfortable that it would work.”

The San Jose McEnery Convention Center expansion was completed in 2013. The public artwork of Idea Tree provides an iconic, artistic, interactive and technology-driven element to the main convention center entrance. Additional features include: revamped lobby with sit steps where convention attendees can plug in and network between sessions; new networking lounge; more break-out rooms; additional flexible meeting spaces; event spaces with beautiful bright California colors including reclaimed redwood ceilings; modern high-tech feel — with the state-of-the-art Silicon Valley infrastructure to back it up; and a new open plaza entrance facing Downtown San Jose, perfect for networking and outdoor event hosting.

Today the center provides more than 425,000 sf of space for conventions and events. Its flexible configuration offers 143,000 sf of divisible, column-free prime exhibit space, a large ballroom, up to 30 meeting rooms with up to 2,400 theater-style seats and banquet facilities for up to 5,000 persons. In addition, the center has 30-foot-high finished ceilings, 12 loading bays with drive-on access to the exhibit hall floors, recessed utility boxes with electricity, water and drainage capabilities, complete audio-visual, sound and lighting services, cellular, standard and ISDN telephony services, and fiber-optic and copper cabling throughout the facility with DS-3 high-speed Internet access.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Planners who book a convention center that is set to be renovated/expanded by the meeting dates are sometimes concerned that the project may not be finished on time. But a contract clause can be implemented that provides the group the option of penalty-free cancellation in case the project is not finished. In addition, “incremental dates” can be established, says Granath. “Let’s put some milestones in to see how the project is going, and if it’s not happening, then we

“This time (at the Spokane Convention Center) we got everything under one roof. The service...also was exceptional. I’ve had 23 conventions of this type, and I’ve never seen a staff work so hard to please people.”



Bruce Caldwell
Executive Director
Washington Music
Educators Association
Lynnwood, WA

can consider what to do. But today everybody is more cognizant of making deadlines, as well as not booking events too close in (to projected completion dates). In the building boom in the ‘80s, they weren’t so much.”

While the recent boom in convention center expansions creates more opportunities for groups, it remains important to book a facility or function space that is the right size for the attendance numbers: not too big or small. “For some of our groups, a small center is really perfect,” Granath notes. “For example, in Boston we use the Hynes Convention Center because it’s a perfect size for us. The BCEC is beautiful, but it’s huge. When you have a crowd of people standing in this huge convention center, it looks like you don’t have as many; in a smaller center it looks like it’s really crowded and there’s a buzz. That has a huge impact on the perception that people have of the meeting they went to.”

AC&F



The Best Is HERE

Everyone wants to be the next Silicon Valley, but no one can replace the original. As the Capital of Silicon Valley, San Jose now offers Wickedly Fast Free Wi-Fi beginning at the Mineta San Jose International Airport, within Downtown and throughout the Convention Center with technology born HERE.

Purpose built for speed and powered by multi-gigabit internet connectivity, designed to support multiple devices per attendee allowing thousands of attendees to stream simultaneously without interruption. Get your group’s Geek on with the nation’s best FREE Wi-Fi experience and no fine print. Really. It’s HERE.

Meet HERE. Book a meeting today!
sanjose.org
800.SAN.JOSE

SanJose
Innovation starts here

The Price Is Right...



The Detroit International Riverfront has been completely revitalized, now with nearly four miles of RiverWalk, plazas, pavilions, water features, a state park, fishing areas, beach volleyball and more.

Credit: Vito Palmisano

But What Is the Rest of the Story? Planners Must Evaluate a City's Total Value Proposition to Ensure It Meets the Needs of the Conference

By Derek Reveron

Destinations know they must offer incredible value to attract meeting groups to their city. The competition is fierce, especially among third- and second-tier cities that want to move up the ladder a peg. Destinations large and small enhance their value by building new hotels, convention centers and meeting venues while refreshing existing ones. New attractions and entertainment districts often follow. The efforts are succeeding in many destinations, which are attracting more meetings and posting higher hotel occupancy rates and revenue rates.

However, the ultimate decision is still in the hands of the meeting planner who must determine whether a destination offers the total value proposition appropriate for their particular conference.

Planners determine value by looking at several practical, bottom-line criteria. These include rates for hotels, meeting spaces and unique venues; food and beverage costs; hotel, CVB and convention center concessions and services; and vendor prices to name a few. A planner's checklist also addresses accessibility, airlift, cultural activities, walkability and a host of other items.

Because everyone can use a little help now and then, especially when considering a never-used-before destination, planners need to know well in advance that the destination's convention and visitors bureau has a solid reputation as a willing and reliable partner.

Here are a few destinations with new stories for meeting planners.

Atlantic City

As Atlantic City diversifies from a casino-centered destination to one that includes year-round non-casino attractions, meeting and convention business is on the upswing. During the fourth quarter of 2014, the city wrote 33 percent more conventions than during the fourth quarter of 2013. Attendee spending rose 12.3 percent.

Atlantic City hopes to attract even more groups as it renovates and adds new attractions. On the famous Boardwalk, the iconic Steel Pier is undergoing a three-phase makeover that will transform the historic landmark into a year-round attraction by the end of this year. The project includes new dining options, an arcade area, a museum, retail entertainment space and a reimagined Marine Ballroom with 2,000 removable seats

and a stage. The highlight of the makeover is New Jersey's first Observation Wheel.

The Steel Pier's president, Anthony Catanoso, recently traveled to Italy to conduct the first of three inspections of the 200-foot Observation Wheel, which is expected to open in 2015.

"This is literally one the first legs of the new foundation for Atlantic City," said Catanoso. "This Observation Wheel is truly a metaphor for how far we can go when it comes to building non-gaming venues in Atlantic City. The wheel, along with the Pier's extensive renovation, are just some of the many exciting revitalization efforts going on right now at Atlantic City."

Atlantic City's meeting space capacity also will get a big boost when the Harrah's Resort Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center opens in August. The 100,000-sf facility will connect to the 2,500-room Harrah's Atlantic City and overlook the Atlantic Ocean and the harbor. Harrah's new Waterfront Conference Center is the largest, most technologically advanced meeting facility from Baltimore to Boston. The flexible meeting space can be reconfigured into as many as 63 individual meeting rooms including two 50,000-sf pillarless ballrooms that can accommodate up to 5,000 guests.

On the Boardwalk, the Tropicana Casino & Resort is undergoing a \$35 million renovation that includes North Tower hotel room makeovers and a new fitness center. Light show entertainment will be added to Tropicana's boardwalk façade. The project is scheduled for completion by the end of this year.

Glenn Straub, who successfully bid on purchasing the Revel Casino Hotel, has proposed various plans for the complex including the addition of a large waterpark, a smaller casino floor, high-speed ferry transportation from Manhattan as well as a new tower that would house an educational institution.

Birmingham

The Greater Birmingham Convention & Visitors Bureau (GBCVB) claims to be "The most affordable city in the South," according to their website.

SportsEvents Media Group named the GBCVB as one of its 2015 Readers' Choice Award winners because of its quality service and valuable deals for planners. For example, the CVB will provide one registration information person onsite for four consecutive hours for every 100 room nights a group books.



Simone Smith
Meetings Manager
American Dental Education
Association
Washington, DC

“We have more flexibility with the smaller programs to go to a second-tier city because of their size. That’s beneficial to our members.”

Birmingham’s value helps to attract more groups, including the 2021 World Games featuring more than 4,000 athletes from more than 100 countries. It will be the first time the United States has hosted the 11-day event since the first one in 1981 in Santa Clara, California.

The heart of Birmingham’s meetings and conventions is the Birmingham Jefferson Convention Complex, which offers more than 220,000 sf of exhibit space and 100,000 sf of meeting space, including two ballrooms seating up to 2,000 guests.

Cleveland

The new Cleveland Convention Center (CCC) and the Global Center for Health Innovation, which opened last year, are attracting more meetings and conventions to the city. The LEED-Gold certified CCC features 30-foot-high ceilings, more than 20 meeting rooms and a 32,000-sf Grand Ballroom. The adjacent Global Center for Health Innovation — the only facility in the world that displays the future of health and health care presented on four themed floors — has an 11,000-sf, column-free junior ballroom.

Cleveland is pumping billions of dollars into private and public developments and improvements as the city prepares to host the 2016 Republican National Convention (RNC) in mid-July.

By the time the RNC kicks off, Cleveland expects to have online 5,000 rooms among 19 hotels within a 20-minute walk of the CCC. The Hilton Cleveland Downtown, Convention Center Hotel, will connect via an underground walkway to the Cleveland Convention Center, the Global Center for Health Innovation and the downtown mall.

Recently opened hotels include the 156-room Metropolitan Hotel, The Cleveland Kimpton Hotel (122 rooms), the 150-room Aloft Hotel Downtown and the 484-room Westin..

Detroit

Detroit — the comeback city — is today in an enviable position to give lessons on how to turn lemons into lemonade as substantial success stories replace dire tales of bankruptcy and neglect. In August, the city will receive a much-needed boost as they host approximately 6,000 delegates who are slated to attend

the 2015 ASAE Annual Meeting & Exposition. Thousands of association meeting planners will get a firsthand look at the new and exciting value proposition offered by the rebounding Motor City. According to past history, many of these attendees will book conventions there for years to come.

“ASAE is very excited about this year’s Annual Meeting & Exposition in Detroit,” says ASAE president and CEO John H. Graham, IV, FASAE, CAE. “From the newly renovated Cobo Center to the wide range and varied nature of venues, it makes Detroit uniquely different and a great location to hold meetings. The city has a great story to tell, and we look forward to our attendees seeing it firsthand. Detroit will do a fabulous job hosting our event in August.”

The transformation and renovation of the Cobo Center factored into the decision to select Detroit as the annual meeting site, according to an ASAE spokesperson. Cobo boasts new space, a stellar ballroom and additional meeting rooms. ASAE seeks cities that are accessible and affordable to their members, and Detroit is centrally located, allowing business to reach U.S. and international locations with ease. In addition, ASAE notes that the overall hotel package is very good as to quality and value, especially the room rates that are near the convention center.

Finally, the Detroit CVB has been a longtime supporter of ASAE and the association community, and it’s important that ASAE gives back and supports Detroit in promoting the great meeting package they can offer associations.

The Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau (DMCVB) recently announced new convention bookings such as the US For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) Championships in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

“We are proud to be chosen as one of the two host cities for FIRST Championships in 2018–2020,” said Larry Alexander, DMCVB president and CEO. “The timing couldn’t be better; renovations at Cobo Center will be complete and new development continues throughout the city, including the new M-1 Rail and District Detroit, which will both be up and running when FIRST is in Detroit. Also significant are the knowledgeable experts and resources in the STEM field located right here in Detroit.”

Several other major groups recently booked Detroit including the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) International. This year marks 82 years that SAE has hosted its event in Detroit and the group recently committed to a six-year deal through 2020.

The National Association of Letter Carriers expects 9,000 attendees for its convention in Detroit in July 2018. NALC has met in Detroit four times over the years, but has not come back to Detroit since 1966.

Detroit is on a winning streak hosting more conventions than ever. This year alone convention business is bringing in 200,000 new visitors and an estimated \$214 million in direct spending to the region. Major conventions in addition to ASAE coming to

town in the coming months include: USA Volleyball, May 2015, attendance 10,000; National Baptist Christian Convention USA, Inc., June 2015, attendance 25,000; the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, July 2015, attendance 36,000; National Medical Association, July 2015, attendance 2,000; and Youmacon, October 2015, attendance 10,000.

The city’s largest convention hotel, The Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center, completed a massive, one-year renovation project that has transformed 1,298 guest rooms and 100,000 sf of meeting space. Located on the riverfront in the heart of downtown Detroit, the hotel’s guest rooms offer some of the most spectacular views of Detroit with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the city skyline, the Detroit River and Canada.

Houston

The fourth-largest city in the nation offers an attractive blend of big-city glitz and homespun Southern styles. Houston is hot, hot, hot say three notable publications. *Travel + Leisure*, *Condé Nast Traveler* and *The Boston Globe* all named Houston in their roundups of “must visit” global destinations in 2015.

It’s also why Houston continues to attract large groups, including the Texas Municipal League (TML), which held its Annual Conference for 4,500 attendees at the Hilton Americas last year. The TML chose Houston for several reasons, including value, says Christina Corrigan, director of communications and programs for the Austin, Texas-based TML. “Houston is an excellent destination for the TML Annual Conference due to the location, number of hotels within walking distance, the quality of the hotels and reasonable room rates,” she says. “Our conference hotels offered affordable rates and concessions that included VIP room upgrades and discounted staff rooms. TML consistently fills its annual conference room block and requires overflow hotels to meet our room needs so attrition is not an issue.”

The Greater Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau and George R. Brown

Convention Center (GBCC) contributed to the value that the TML received. “The convention center offered free Wi-Fi in common areas, worked within our budget and provided excellent service,” says Corrigan. “The Greater Houston CVB was our partner in planning. They provided expert service, hosted our planning trip to the convention center one year out, scheduled site inspections, provided marketing materials, hosted an onsite table pro-



SAM KENNEDY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
TECHWEEK

DETROIT IS REINVENTING ITSELF, AND WE WANT IN ON IT.

Be part of The D’s comeback at ASAE 2015
Detroit is growing, and its thriving technology sector is leading the way. Nestled among the newly revitalized downtown and other cities involved in metro Detroit’s comeback, dozens of new tech-oriented and start-up businesses have taken root and found a successful home here in The D. Detroit is keeping itself on the cutting edge of today’s technology, which is the reason why Techweek, one of the country’s leading technology conventions, came to Detroit in 2014. It was so successful, Techweek is coming back again this year. And in August, ASAE attendees will discover Detroit’s revitalization for themselves when they explore a walkable downtown including enticing restaurants, luxurious hotels and other amazing attractions waiting around every corner. **Discover Detroit, America’s great comeback city. Learn more at asae2015Detroit.com/sam or download the Visit Detroit app.**

ID
meet.DETROIT®

AMERICA’S GREAT COMEBACK CITY.
Cars | Culture | Gaming | Music | Sports

asae annual meeting & exposition
detroit | august 6-11, 2015

Photo Credits: middle: ©Ruby Wallau/The Michigan Daily; right: ©Leonard Beck

moting local restaurants and attractions, and were proactive in ensuring our planning team had what was needed to deliver a stellar conference, including connecting us to vendors for shuttle services, offsite events and other needs.”

Looking to attract more conventions and preparing to host the 2017 Super Bowl, Houston is investing more than \$1.5 billion in downtown improvements,

The investment also includes development of the new 1,000-room Marriott Marquis Hotel scheduled for completion in fall 2016. The property will be connected to the GBCC and boast 100,000 sf of meeting space including a 39,000-sf ballroom, the city’s largest. The 325-room Hyatt Regency Houston Galleria is scheduled to open in the fall with 12,000 sf of meeting space. In November, the 328-room JW Marriott Houston Downtown opened with 16,000 sf of meeting space.

Corrigan says that Houston’s investment in convention district improvements shows that the city is committed to enriching the conference experience for associations. “The added retail space and parking, Discovery Park, new restaurants, extended light rail line, and large number of high quality downtown hotels all make Houston a very attractive destination for conferences,” says Corrigan. “It is one of the TML’s preferred destinations because of the location, convention center layout, quality hotels, pricing and support from the CVB and city staff.”

Jacksonville

Jacksonville’s popularity has a great deal to do with its formidable hotel product. The 510-room Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra Beach has refurbished 56,000 sf of meeting space and opened two new restaurants. Another property, the 72-suite Four Points by Sheraton Jacksonville Beachfront, has completed a \$2 million renovation. A former independent hotel, the 201-room DoubleTree by Hilton Jacksonville Airport, opened earlier this year following a multimillion-dollar makeover. The renovation included the property’s 11,000 sf of meeting space, a redesigned lobby and a restaurant.

The linchpin of Jacksonville’s convention business, the Prime F. Osborn III Convention Center, offers 78,000 sf of exhibit space and 22 meeting rooms. The Schultz Center for teaching and leadership, provides 50,000 sf of banquet and training space as well as 16 meeting rooms. Popular convention hotels include the 963-room Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, with 110,000 sf of meeting space, including a 27,894-sf ballroom.

Milwaukee

Located along scenic Lake Michigan, Milwaukee, Wisconsin,

offers everything planners could want in a destination especially when it comes to price points. “The daily cost of lodging and meals in Milwaukee is one of the lowest among the top 70 cities,” according to Visit Milwaukee.

Abundant meeting and hotel space is another plus. Nearly 3,000 hotel rooms are located within walking distance of the Wisconsin Center (WC), which features 189,000 sf of exhibit space and 80,000 sf of meeting space. The WC is connected via skywalks to the 729-room Hilton Milwaukee City Center and the 481-room Hyatt Regency Milwaukee.

In October 2013, the WC and its attached hotels hosted the four-day Annual Meeting of the Milwaukee-based American Academy for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine (AACPDM). The WC was a perfect fit for the meeting, says Tracy Burr, executive director. “We like smaller convention centers because our group isn’t big,” says Burr. “We have housed our meeting in one hotel, but our meeting has grown big enough to where it made sense to go with a convention center, especially since Milwaukee gave us excellent meeting room and sleeping



The Texas Municipal League held their 2014 Annual Conference and Exhibition in Houston at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

room rates. Plus we were able to have almost all of the sleeping rooms in one location.”

In addition, the layout of the WC fit the AACPDM’s needs. “Our meeting has up to 12 breakouts a day,” says Burr. “The flow of the meeting and ease of finding rooms are important because our meeting is jam-packed with educational sessions from morning to night. We don’t like to house our meeting over multiple levels, and the Milwaukee center is more of an intimate setting where everything is in proximity.”

Offsite venues also were a draw. “We held our welcome reception at the art museum on the lakefront,” says Burr. “That was well-received by our attendees. We held our celebration dinner

at the Harley-Davidson Museum. They were both reasonably priced.” The popular Harley-Davidson Museum can accommodate association groups from 20 to 1,000 delegates.

Minneapolis

Meet Minneapolis president and CEO Melvin Tennant called 2014 the city’s “Best. Year. Ever.” as it posted all-time records. In 2014, Minneapolis hosted 534 conventions and meetings, posted a 72 percent hotel occupancy rate, and recorded average daily room rate (ADR) of \$148, according to Meet Minneapolis, the city’s CVB. Meanwhile, revenue per available room was \$107.

The Minneapolis Convention Center (MCC), the largest convention center in the Upper Midwest, is a key part of the success. The MCC received the Venue Excellence Award for Convention Centers at the Annual Conference of the International Association of Venue Managers. The MCC isn’t resting on its laurels. The facility is installing new carpets in all meeting rooms, broadening Wi-Fi bandwidth, painting interior lobbies and adding new seating and charging stations in the main lobby.

The MCC is a main reason why the Orlando-based International Association for Identification (IAI) held its six-day annual convention for 1,200 attendees in Minneapolis in August 2014. Attendees stayed at the Hyatt Regency Minneapolis and Millennium Hotel Minneapolis, both connected to the MCC via walkway. “The convention space in Minneapolis was ideal,” says Candy Murray, conference planner for the IAI. “The proximity of meeting rooms to our exhibits and to the space where we had events and networking was very convenient. I could keep everything close together. Often, when you go to a first-tier city, the convention centers are so massive that it’s difficult to have meeting spaces close to each other.”

Murray’s group was the only one at the MCC. Being “the only game in town” has value, says Murray. “It helps us get value at offsite venues, restaurants and entertainment venues because we are bringing a fair amount of people into the downtown area, and we are the only group in town at that time,” she adds.

The CVB’s assistance also translated into value. “It was huge,” says Murray. “They did so much upfront work for me like determining the hotels most suitable for room blocks. They also connected me with DMCs that helped with tours and offsite events. They made appointments with vendors. That’s huge because it saves me time, and time is money.”

Murray ended up using a DMC that was included in the list provided by the CVB. “The DMC helped us with a large mid-week event at Nicollet Island Pavilion (a popular event space),” says Murray. “They bused attendees there and helped provide dinner, entertainment, games and displays. They made a trout pond and brought in fish. There was a display of birds native to the area. We had interactive carnival-type games and strolling musicians.”

Oklahoma City

Oklahoma City touts its considerable affordability. “We certainly are affordable and stack up well against cities of similar size,” boasts the Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau website.

Simone Smith, meetings manager of the DC-based American Dental Education Association, agrees with the CVB. Smith planned a meeting for 350 attendees that was held in late 2013

“The CVB was our partner in planning. They provided expert service...and were proactive in ensuring our planning team had what was needed to deliver a stellar conference, including connecting us to vendors for shuttle services, offsite events and other needs.”

Christina Corrigan

Director, Communications and Programs, Texas Municipal League, Austin, Texas

at the Sheraton Oklahoma City Downtown Hotel. “The cost was good in terms of meeting space and sleeping rooms, which were \$20 or \$30 per night, less expensive than some other hotels we have used at other destinations,” says Smith. “We had concessions in our contract. They gave us things like suite upgrades, good rates for staff to help with our registration and programs, and complimentary VIP ground transfers to and from the airport.”

According to Smith, Oklahoma City’s value compares favorably to many first-tier destinations. “In a first-tier city you might not get the kind or rates we are seeking for these small education programs,” says Smith. “Our big meetings go to more first-tier cities than second-tier cities. We have more flexibility with the smaller programs to go to a second-tier city because of their size. That’s beneficial to our members.”

Affordability is among the notes that Oklahoma strikes in a new reimagining campaign that the city kicked off in August. The campaign includes new advertising as well as a new logo and hashtag. The effort also portrays Oklahoma City as a premier destination for meetings and conventions. The logo and tagline “OKC-ing is Believing” appears in all their branding including the CVB website and social media. The hashtag, #SeeOKC, encourages people to share photos, videos and other content via social media.

In addition, Oklahoma City expects to attract and retain larger conventions by building the Downtown Convention Center, which will replace the aging Cox Convention Center. The new center will boast approximately 235,000 sf of sellable space, including exhibition halls, meeting rooms and ballrooms. Construction is planned to begin in 2016.

The Power of Inspiration

Priceless!

How to Find the Right Speaker or Entertainment — Even on a Budget

By Christine Loomis

Educate. Motivate. Bond. Enlighten. Entertain. Amuse. Inform. Encourage. Inspire. These are all things speakers and entertainers can do at a meeting. They also can fuel change and growth, spur attendees to action, and they can clarify an organization's brand and mission. There's no question that the right speaker or entertainer can boost meeting attendance, and thus the meeting's bottom line, which is why they are often big-ticket items in the meeting budget.

Speakers and entertainers are critical to a convention's success on many levels. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. A poor keynote speaker, in particular, can get a meet-

Credit: Joey Tichener

ing off to a bad start from which it might not fully recover, meaning attendees won't be as engaged, won't get the right message and ultimately won't be inspired to take the association or their work or their ideas to the next level.

That explains why John Truran, senior vice president with Keppler Speakers Bureau, says that booking the wrong speaker or a poor speaker can cost a planner his or her job. "Finding and booking the right speaker is a very important decision for meeting planners," Truran says.

CUT COSTS, NOT QUALITY

But is the best speaker for a meeting the most expensive speaker? For such a critical role, planners may feel they have to bite the bullet and pay top dollar, hoping they can cut costs elsewhere. Happily, that isn't necessarily the case. "One of the biggest misconceptions is that any good speaker will cost \$50,000," Truran says, noting that there are very good speakers available from \$7,500 to \$10,000. "There are people in that price range who have inspirational stories and who can absolutely inspire business groups."

There are, in fact, many ways planners can save money on speakers that don't require compromising quality. Ashley H. Pencak, CMP, manager, event services with SmithBucklin in Washington, DC, says it's often about leveraging and depends on specific goals and needs.

"If the goal is to keep your audience together and entertained after dinner," Pencak says, "then find an emcee to host the event and also serve as entertainment. For example, instead of hiring a professional speaker, a client in the steel distribution business saved money by leveraging a known emcee, Richard Laible. He helped connect the dots during the event and provided interesting and comedic updates at the dinner."

She adds that planners can try to cover the emcee's fees through a sponsorship or by having the emcee appear at a sponsor's booth if the event is a trade show. "Again, it's leveraging someone for multiple purposes at a lower price," she says.

Working with a speakers bureau also can help planners who book many meetings or who have multiple clients. "When I was working for a manufacturing nonprofit association, we needed a motivational speaker," Pencak says. "I had previously seen Jamie Clarke, an adventurer who had spoken at several other SmithBucklin client events. Even though I worried we wouldn't

A client of the National Speakers Bureau, Mike Rayburn, "The World's Funniest Guitar Virtuoso," is a Hall of Fame international keynote speaker, author, comedian and world-class guitarist who inspires peak performance.



Keppler Speakers Bureau notes that great speakers often can come at a great price, such as (clockwise from top) celebrity chef Jeff Henderson; Global Soap Project founder Derreck Kayongo; and nationally recognized STEM educator Fredi Lajvardi, all in the \$7,500–\$10,000 range.

be able to afford him, I contacted the bureau and told them the group's budget. The bureau considered my request (to be) repeat business given SmithBucklin's volume purchasing and that we'd used Jamie in the past for other clients. We received a discount on the fees, which helped me meet our budget. Clarke was fantastic, engaging and kept the audience focused (not looking at their phones), and the client was thrilled."

SOURCING FROM WITHIN

Pencak also suggests looking inward. "To find an entertainer or speaker who understands your limited budget, start by asking your membership; you'd be surprised how many multitasking people are active in your group. They aren't just surgeons or architects or manufacturers; they also could play in a band, excel in amateur photography or perform magic. They might know people just starting in the industry who are willing to charge less to help out a colleague or friend. We've seen this work well when we assembled a jam session for one of our clients. Individuals brought their instruments to the event, had one practice session and then played during the evening. We combined this with low-cost karaoke, and the attendees had a blast."

Turning inward also can mean looking to board members. "For PSDA (Print Services and Distribution Association)," Pencak says, "we leveraged a board member from SmithBucklin who is also a faculty director of the Johnson Leadership Fellows program at



Credit: Liz Holby/SmithBucklin

Hello Jimmy performs on the exhibit hall floor during an event for the International Avaya Users Group. As the house band, they provided entertainment throughout the weeklong conference, including the commencement dinner.

Cornell. She has spoken at several clients' events at a discount and covers topics such as effective team leadership, leading organizational culture change, critical thinking and problem solving, and persuasion and influence. She gets rave reviews each time." Associations and societies have board members, too, and many are distinguished experts in their fields.

MINING LOCAL TALENT

Some organizations are able to leverage connections in their specific industries to find speakers and entertainment, and/or leverage contacts in the communities where the meeting is taking place. The Society of American Travel Writers (SATW) does both.

Annette Thompson, SATW president, says the society's convention organizers work with local tourism and convention organizations to find professional-development speakers and entertainment during conventions. "For instance, in Iceland, site of our

2014 convention, we worked with Iceland Travel to find experts on the culture and geology of Iceland for our professional-development sessions," she says. "Without that help, we'd spend much more time and money trying to find the right people on our own. As we are planning our next convention in downtown Las Vegas, we are searching out individuals who are invested professionally and emotionally in seeing downtown succeed. We are also looking for folks tied to the history of tourism development in Las Vegas, a town built on tourism."

SATW leverages those same local resources when it comes to entertainment, and the result is not only cost-effective but also a way to connect attendees to the local community and culture, a primary goal of the conventions. Entertainment has ranged from "the Blue Man Group in Las Vegas 10 years ago, to a Maori welcome ceremony and a Haka dance exhibition in Wellington, New Zealand, to bringing in an all-male chorus to serenade convention-goers at a dinner in Reykjavik," Thompson says.

Musicians from local schools also performed the Icelandic national anthem for the group in Reykjavik. "By having the local culture interact with our convention-goers," Thompson says, "we broaden the connection between the convention location and the journalist members of SATW."

ONGOING NEEDS

Not every group is looking for an annual speaker. Many small associations hold monthly meetings for which they have to find speakers who provide education and professional development for members. These programs also help attract and retain members, so quality and expertise are key even on a budget.

Assessing Speakers

There's no substitute for being in the room. Speaker videos are a tool, but, cautions Susan Masters, V.P., National Speakers Bureau, they're just "one moment in time," and you don't know what instructions the speaker received. When you're in the room, you also see, hear and feel the audience reactions and the emotion generated — or not. "We like to see an 'aha,' a takeaway idea or an audience response — laughter or wipe away a tear — about every three minutes," Masters says.

Remember that a speaker's personality and attitude are important. Call references. Ask around. How easy is this person to work with? How willing is he to take direction? Will she take time to research your audience, to tailor the presentation to your group? Is he willing to do something extra to add value to his fee?

Consider the limitations of TED and YouTube. These are great resources, and many planners use them to assess speakers. But TED presentations are about 15 minutes, YouTube videos even shorter. Keynote slots are typically 45 minutes to an hour. As John Truran, senior V.P., Keppler Speakers Bureau, says, "Not everyone who shines at 15 minutes can fill the time you need for your event."

Take testimonials with a grain of salt. Notes Masters, "Testimonials can be helpful, but sometimes they are written from a sense of obligation so read them carefully."

Don't assume all celebrities are effective speakers. Just having a recognizable name does not mean that person is either a good speaker or right for your group.

Know your needs. What do you want the speaker to convey? Inspiration? Motivation? Comic relief? Deep experience? Do you want your audience to take action? You can't find the right speaker if you don't know exactly what you're looking for.

— CL

Author Lee Foster is on the board of the Bay Area Independent Publishers Association (BAIPA), which hires industry speakers for its monthly meetings in the San Francisco area. The association has a formula that's proven successful, which includes a morning session and an afternoon workshop.

"Each month is meant to pay for itself," Foster says. "We pay the speaker \$100 for the morning session and we split the gate for the afternoon workshops. Some speakers earn \$500 or more from our workshops. We have a meeting-room expense of \$550 per monthly meeting, so with membership fees, drop-ins fees and workshop fees, we try to keep ahead. We generally break even on an annualized basis, but we must be careful."

The makeup of BAIPA helps lure speakers even if the guaranteed fee is small. Many of the members are authors who may well need the services speakers provide. "We don't cover air transport or other costs," Foster notes. "We've had speakers from New York and other distant places, partly because they want their message to get before our influential BAIPA group. Their publicity goes out to our 180 members and to about 900 on our mailing list. For service providers, this is an important potential customer base."



Annette Thompson
President
Society of American Travel Writers
Birmingham, AL

"By having the local culture interact with our convention-goers, we broaden the connection between the convention location and the journalist members of SATW."

That can be a draw even for well-established speakers who command a higher fee elsewhere. "I developed programs on e-books with Mark Coker of Smashwords, the biggest independent e-book seller in the world, and on WordPress with Chris Christensen, a WordPress expert. These were some of our most successful recent programs, helping our authors," Foster says.

In addition to putting potential clients in front of speakers, BAIPA also allows speakers to sell their books and products at the meetings and to actively advertise their publishing services. The speakers keep 100 percent of those sales.

BOOKING BIG NAMES FOR LESS

But what about groups that do want the big names? Can you possibly book them at a discount? Yes...and no. You're not going to book Colin Powell or Hillary Clinton at a discount, but there are ways to get other name speakers for less.

Susan Masters, vice president with the National Speakers

"To find an entertainer or speaker who understands your limited budget, start by asking your membership; you'd be surprised how many multit talented people are active in your group."



Ashley H. Pencak, CMP
Manager, Event Services
SmithBucklin
Washington, DC

Bureau, says finding a speaker based in the meeting location helps save on travel costs and even fees, because some speakers have reduced fees for local events. But there are caveats. "It's important to recognize that the more flexible you are on the topic, the better this works. If you're looking for a specific expertise, it's much harder to find someone local who is also a great speaker," she says. Of course, if your meeting is in New York, Chicago, L.A. or DC, your odds of finding a good match go up.

Going local can work for entertainment, too. "Find out what entertainment might already be booked into a location and negotiate with them," Pencak says. They could well agree to a reduced rate because they don't have to travel or move equipment."

Pencak says planners can save in other ways, too, such as purchasing certain items to reuse over multiple meetings and across multiple clients. "For example, I purchased a corn-hole game, painted on a generic design and divided the cost between three clients, all of whom wanted to have a game-night-themed event."

Reusing entertainment, décor, staging and lighting from a previous group also can cut costs. "I always ask the AV company what other groups are doing during that same time period so they can repurpose materials," Pencak adds. "Repurposing your general-session stage set for evening entertainment also helps save on labor, rigging, etc."

ADDED VALUE

It's not just about dollar amounts. It's also about value. It may be that a speaker won't discount a fee but will add more value to the proposition. Some speakers, for example, will provide a video of a session that's free for attendees to download for a certain amount of time and perhaps can be used by the association for members unable to attend the meeting. Others will autograph copies of their books at a convention and agree to be interviewed or write for an association publication or website. Some will make appearances at an exhibitor booth or meet with a small group of attendees.

Planners should consider what added value a group can offer speakers and entertainers. A few days in an exotic location, with hotel and air paid for? Products or services that the association has access to and the speaker can use? It doesn't hurt to ask.

5 Reasons to Use a Speakers Bureau

1. Speakers bureaus are a no-cost resource for planners. The speakers themselves pay the bureau's fee.
2. Speakers bureaus save planners time and money. Bureaus have access to hundreds, even thousands, of speakers. They know where they are, their expertise and their fees. "Speakers bureaus are a great resource," says Ashley H. Pencak, CMP, manager, event services, SmithBucklin. "The key is to provide them with enough detail and align expectations in advance to ensure a successful process."
3. Speakers bureaus are tapped into the up-and-coming speakers, the ones who are good but not yet commanding top-tier fees.
4. Speakers bureaus prove their value in the event of cancellations or delays. "A speakers bureau is a meeting planner's insurance policy," says John Truran, senior vice president, Keppler Speakers Bureau. "Speakers get sick, there are flight cancellations and delays, and if news breaks, reporters and politicians may have to leave at the last minute. A bureau will find and secure a suitable replacement as fast as is possible. A planner on his or her own most likely will not have the depth of resources to do that."
5. Speakers bureau staff members know the questions to ask before the agreement is signed. If, for example, the presentation is after lunch, a speaker may prefer flying in the day of the meeting. "This puts planners at the mercy of weather and other delays," says Susan Masters, V.P., National Speakers Bureau. "If having the speaker arrive the night before is important, assess the willingness of the speaker to do so — and include it in the offer."

— CL



Lee Foster
Board Member, Author
Bay Area Independent
Publishers Association
Berkeley, CA

"We don't cover air transport or other costs. We've had speakers from New York and other distant places, partly because they want their message to get before our influential BAIPA group."

But how do entertainers and speakers view the budget dilemma? David Wilk, president and founding member of Four Day Weekend, an improv group that performs more than 300 dates each year, says he's no stranger to the phrase, "Sorry, that's out of our budget."

He understands, but he agrees with Truran that speakers and entertainment can impact far more than a meeting's bottom line. "Quality speakers and entertainment are not cheap," he says. "They are, however, a value. If a client is concerned that we are too expensive, our philosophy is, 'Do you know what is really expensive? Ruining your meeting by hiring a subpar act or speaker because they're cheaper. That's expensive.'"

But Wilk believes in finding solutions. Often, he says, a planner's idea of what will work does not. "We have been offered the carrot of 'We do a lot of meetings and this would get your foot in the door.' Yes, that's true, but it's been our experience that discounted gigs only lead to more discounted gigs. We've also heard the phrase 'This would be great exposure' more times than we can count. After someone tells us the exposure line, internally we always say to each other, 'People die from exposure.'"

Planners often think that cutting the performance time will lower costs, but that's not the case. "Our real costs are not in the amount of time we're on stage," Wilk says. "It's in the booking out for the day. If we're working for you that day, we can't work for someone else. Once we're onsite, the difference between 45 minutes or an hour is nominal."

"The next suggestion is 'What if you brought fewer people?' Yes, that will bring the cost down; however, you're hiring us because you liked what you saw when you saw us perform with everyone. I'm not saying no to this suggestion, but I do want to manage expectations."

Wilk is on board with bartering, as long as what's offered comes with a real value. "If your budget doesn't quite meet the speaker/entertainer's fee, find other non-monetary perks to offer," he says. "Assuming the act is well-received, value a letter of recommendation at a certain price, value allowing a follow-up email to attendees at a certain fee, include services your company provides to the speaker and value those at a certain fee. This way, the speaker feels OK with lowering the fee and you meet your budget."

"Many times, if we're out of a group's budget, we'll offer up additional value adds while we're there," he continues. "As I said, our real cost is not in the time we're on stage but in the time we're traveling and not available for other gigs. So as long as we are there, we have no problem hosting a panel or emceeding to up our value in the eyes of the client."

Wilk says planners should ask speakers and entertainers for their thoughts. Some might be able to offer a condensed program or bring fewer people or they may be willing to take part of their fee in trade for service or perks, he says. "My recommendation is to always go back to them and ask 'What can we do to make this amount work?'"

Chances are, a solution will present itself.

AC&F

After a Productive Day, Enjoy the Fruits of Your Labor.



The M Resort service team is there from start to finish and creatively delivers the maximum experience on time and on budget, but there are more reasons why you'll choose this Forbes Four Star resort.

After the mixing, mingling, negotiating and hand-shaking, celebrate your day in a dynamic environment that works hard for you by day and lets you unwind by night.



Here are just a few reasons you'll be confident that M Resort is the right place to host your meeting AND impress your guests!

- More than 92,000 sf of dynamic and flexible spaces including a 25,000 sf pavilion
- Built with environmental sustainability
- Built-in business to business atmosphere
- Exceptionally appointed guest rooms
- Innovative dining choices
- Forbes Four Star Resort, Spa & Conference Facilities
- Non-exclusive in house audio visual offerings
- Shuttle transportation
- No resort fees



12300 Las Vegas Blvd. South, 10 minutes from McCarran International Airport.

SPEAK TO AN M RESORT SALES PROFESSIONAL 1-866-551-1540

LAS VEGAS
www.theMresort.com



A rendering of the Las Vegas Global Business District.

The Exciting, Ever-changing Destination Always Garner High Marks From Attendees

By John Buchanan

It's no accident that Las Vegas is the top dog on the preferred lists of U.S. destinations for many association meeting planners and their attendees. For decades, Las Vegas has expanded and refined its meeting-related infrastructure. And since the recession of 2008–09, the city has staged a remarkable recovery from the downturn that brought it to the brink of disaster.

Today, it's better than ever — and constantly improving itself.

Las Vegas was again named the No. 1 trade show destination for the 21st consecutive year, according to the Trade Show News Network's "2014 TSNN Top 250 Trade Shows in the United States" list. Las Vegas hosted 60 of the largest shows held in the country last year, up from the 53 it hosted the year before.

What's more, the new \$2.3 billion Las Vegas Global Business District project is the largest economic development initiative the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority has undertaken since the Las Vegas Convention Center was originally built in the late 1950s. Phase one of the two-phase project includes 750,000 sf of new exhibit space and 187,500 sf of supporting meeting space as part of the new 1.8-million-sf expansion. Phase two focuses on renovating the existing convention center and includes a 100,000-sf general session space and another 100,000 sf of meeting space. Including public areas and service areas, the expansion and renovation increases the facility from its current total footprint of 3.2 million sf to nearly 5.7 million sf.

Over and above that, the Las Vegas Global Business District is

a visionary project that includes developing a district concept in the neighborhoods surrounding the center. The district would provide the opportunity for economic development related to the industry, including the development of a global business center that utilizes the facility's World Trade Center designation to attract corporations wanting to interact with the tens of thousands of businesses who visit the convention center each year.

"Las Vegas is clearly the No. 1 meeting and convention destination in the country and that's why we're there every year with one of the biggest shows the city attracts," says Chris Dolnack, senior vice president and chief marketing officer of the Newtown, Connecticut-based National Shooting Sport Foundation (NSSF), whose annual, four-day show every January draws more than 63,000 attendees, making it the city's fifth largest citywide meeting.

As his headquarters and convention facility since 2010, Dolnack has used the vast complex that includes The Venetian/Palazzo hotels and mammoth The Sands Expo and Convention Center.

He has a current contract in place through 2020.

"Las Vegas is the most exciting meeting destination in the country," Dolnack says. "It always generates a lot of excitement. In our post-show surveys, 80 percent of our attendees each year say they want to be back in Las Vegas the following January. And that helps us grow our attendance."

Jan Stieger, CMP, CAE, executive director of Sacramento,

California-based DBA International, an association of debt buyers, has held her annual four-day, three-night February meeting for 1,200 to 1,500 attendees at Aria Resort & Casino, an MGM Resorts

International property that anchors its sprawling CityCenter complex, every year since 2012. Before that, DBA International used The Mirage Hotel & Casino, another landmark MGM Resorts property, for nine consecutive years.

"Because we meet in February every year, Las Vegas is one of those relatively few destinations where you know you can count on the weather," Stieger says. "You can't always count on the weather anywhere, but at that time of year, Las Vegas has better odds than most other options. Another thing that is unique about Las Vegas is they can handle an unusually large number of VIPs. And many of our

The Main Club at the new Omnia Nightclub at Caesars Palace is also available for corporate event buyouts.



At Wynn Las Vegas, "Le Rêve – The Dream" marks its 10th anniversary with a new dénouement scene featuring high-powered fountains, LED lighting fixtures and fire-shooting devices.



Credit: Caesars Entertainment



Luanna Squerzi
Meetings Manager
American Society for Prosthetic
Plastic Surgery
Garden Grove, CA

“Las Vegas just has a lot to offer everyone, no matter what kinds of things they like to do. The main thing to us about Las Vegas is that there is literally something for everyone to do and enjoy.”

members want real VIP treatment, with things like big suites and limousine service. And Las Vegas is uniquely equipped to deliver those things at a very high level.”

The city’s unparalleled range of amenities, from high-end restaurants to exclusive shows and shopping, also are very popular with her attendees, Stieger says. As a result, Las Vegas has always been a great draw.

Steve Deel, in-house counsel at Airport Law Enforcement Agencies Network (ALEAN), headquartered in Flower Mound, Texas, has used Las Vegas every year for one of the organization’s big annual conferences. Since 2002, the fall meeting for about 100 airport law enforcement professionals has been at New York-New York Hotel & Casino, yet another member of the MGM Resorts portfolio.

“ALEAN is a very business-oriented association,” Deel says. “So, when we plan our meetings, they are not designed around entertainment value. They are designed for business purposes. And that’s actually the No. 1 reason we like Las Vegas so much.”

That’s also why Deel has been so loyal to the destination for so long. “As we grew over the years and after we stopped just using local airports for our meetings, we wanted to develop an independent site for our meetings that had good airport access from all over the country, that had good and a wide variety of hotels, good transportation, and also offered after-meeting entertainment value that our attendees could enjoy on their own, even though there is no entertainment component to our meetings themselves,” he says. “But we did want there to be a lot of things for our people to do after hours. And I was already going to Las Vegas for fun back in those days and I knew the hotels. So I knew that Las Vegas would be a good match for us.”

Because ALEAN’s attendees are primarily publicly employed executives at airports across the country, the most important single factor in Deel’s long-term loyalty to the city is because “we wanted a place we could all easily access and where we could get reasonable hotel rates so that our people would want to go there every year. And so we chose Las Vegas as our destination for business purposes, not because of fun and games.”

AIRLIFT AND HOTEL PRODUCT

For meeting planners, two factors that combine to give Las Vegas an almost unbeatable edge are its airlift and hotel product.

“Las Vegas has great airlift. People can get there easily from a wide variety of domestic and international locations,” says Luanna Squerzi, meetings manager at the American Society for Prosthetic Plastic Surgery in Garden Grove, California. She has used Las Vegas two or three times a year for the last four years and hosted one of her most important events, a three-night continuing medical education (CME) meeting for about 350 board-certified plastic surgeons each January at the legendary Bellagio, yet another MGM Resorts property. Next year will be her fourth consecutive year at Bellagio.

For Deel, not only is the formidable airlift Las Vegas features an important factor from a logistical perspective, but the location of McCarran International Airport — extraordinarily convenient to hotels located toward the southern end of The Strip — offers a unique benefit critically important to ALEAN’s attendees. In the post-9/11 era, he says, its airport law enforcement executive attendees must be prepared to go to the airport in an emergency and fly home. “And since we’ve always used hotels on the southern end of the strip, you can jump in a taxi and literally be at the airport in a matter of minutes. And that is very important to our attendees. You can’t find that kind of close proximity to the airport in many places.”

Likewise, the size and range of the exceptional hotel room inventory Las Vegas offers means there is a good fit, at the right price point, for virtually any type or size of meeting.

And to planners not already familiar with the destination, their usual first surprise is the value proposition and rates the city boasts.

BANG FOR THE BUCK

Because of all the amenities such as celebrity chef restaurants, shows, spas and shopping arcades offered by all of the major meeting hotels, they generate large revenues over and above room revenues, Squerzi says. “And then on top of that is the gaming, which is an additional revenue stream,” she adds. “As a result, they work to keep room rates very competitive with other major destinations as a key strategy for getting your group to Las Vegas.”

Dolnack, who must offer a broad-based room block at many different properties to accommodate his huge audience of attendees, agrees that the value proposition in Las Vegas is one of its most powerful selling propositions. “You can find hotels covering all the different price ranges,” he says. “That means you get value for your attendees, who can have a very good experience at a good price.”

Based on his experience, Deel says that Las Vegas hotels also are “easier to deal with” than in other destinations. “And that is especially true of New York-New York,” he says. “When I’m dealing with them, it’s not like it is at other hotels, where everything is black and white. In other places, you find that hotels that get a lot



FOR US,
BUSINESS WILL ALWAYS
BE PERSONAL.

Wynn | Encore
LAS VEGAS

866.770.7268
wynnmeetings.com





The 1,200-room Westgate Las Vegas is adjacent to the Las Vegas Convention Center and in the midst of a property-wide \$100 million renovation.

of meetings just kind of (state their terms) and say you can take it or leave it. And they know that for your group you might not have that many other real options for when you want to do your meeting. But because of the number of hotels in Las Vegas and the amount of business they do, they all know that if you're not happy with the deal, you can just take your business across the street and find a hotel that wants your business. You can't always find that in the center of other cities."

Again because most of his attendees are public employees, Deel finds another unique benefit in Las Vegas when it comes to hotel rates and room blocks. "Everybody is cost-conscious, especially government employees," he says. "And so, even though New York-New York gives us a room rate that we publish for our attendees, if one of them finds a cheaper rate on the Internet, New York-New York will honor that rate for that attendee as part of our room block, even though they don't get the same kind of room people do who pay the published group rate. That is a rare thing and something we really appreciate."

Like Deel, Squerzi says the price points for hotels and the value received by attendees are another key factor in her loyalty to Las Vegas and Bellagio. "And if you compare what you get in Las Vegas to other major meeting destinations, you find that you really do get better value for the same money."

The No. 1 thing she likes so much about Bellagio is the quality of its room product. "Their room product is really outstanding," she says. "The rooms are quite large. And they're always very clean. And the bathrooms are huge, especially for this day and age."

Bellagio's food and beverage service is also a cut above a number of its local competitors, Squerzi says. "It really stands out. And the service you get from the banquet staff is exceptional."

She uses Bellagio's banquet services for daily breakfasts and lunches. "And at every meeting we do at Bellagio, we always get very high marks from our attendees for the quality of the food and beverage we get and the quality of the service we get," she says. "Even though they're catered meals at a meeting, people are excited to find out what's for lunch each day because the food is so good. And you're not getting standard hotel catering fare. We get really good meals that are well presented."

Deel has a similarly satisfying experience at New York-New York every year. "The food is as good or better than at any catering facility I've ever been to or used as part of a meeting," he says. "But the key is it's also more reasonably priced. And although to most people a catering menu is a catering menu, in Las Vegas

that's not the case, especially for smaller groups like ours. We get great menus that not only give us great food, but food that our people can afford. That's another way we keep costs down. And from a service point of view, we get the same wait staff every year. They know us and we're on a first-name basis. And they give us everything we want. There's nothing we ever ask for that they can't do for us."

DINING OUT

The world-class dining scene in Las Vegas — unrivaled by no other city except New York and Paris — is yet another factor in its perennial popularity for so many meeting planners and attendees.

Celebrity chef restaurants also are very popular with her attendees, Squerzi says. "Our doctors are exceptionally well-traveled, and they like good food. And the food you get at the restaurants in Bellagio and the other major hotels in Las Vegas is just extraordinary. And the big hotels have so many restaurants that you can go have a great meal in a different place every night and never leave the hotel."

Dolnack says his attendees also appreciate the range of dining options. "You can find good restaurants across a range of prices," he says. "You can go to places where locals eat and have a very inexpensive meal, or you can go to a celebrity chef restaurant and have an amazing meal that you'll remember for a long time."

The restaurants in Aria have been a big draw for her attendees, Stieger says. "And they change them out and open new ones, so there's always something fresh and new even though we go back

WE MAKE IT EASY

From the RFP to the thank you letter, we value your time. Quick responses and great follow-up is our MO here at the South Point. One owner, one hotel makes it easy for you and us. Another value is we have very little turnover in sales... easy for you, repeat business for us. The South Point is a convention hotel that will offer your group enough amenities without the high prices and the crowds up the street.

Easy One Stop Shopping, We Are A Destination With:

- ◆ 2,163 Guest Rooms/Suites
- ◆ 75,000 sq. ft. Conference Center
- ◆ 80,000 sq. ft. Carpeted Column-Free Exhibit Hall
- ◆ 4,600 Seat Arena
- ◆ Spa Costa Del Sur & Fitness Center
- ◆ 11 Restaurants
- ◆ 7 Bars/Lounges
- ◆ 64-Lane Bowling Center
- ◆ Movie Theater with 16 Screens
- ◆ Lagoon Style Pool

Contact The Sales Department

702-797-8050

sales@southpointcasino.com

For a Full View of Our Amenities
Visit SouthPointMeetings.com

SOUTH POINT
Las Vegas





Chris Dolnack
Senior Vice President and Chief
Marketing Officer
National Shooting Sport Foundation
Newtown, CT

“Las Vegas is clearly the No. 1 meeting and convention destination in the country and that’s why we’re there every year with one of the biggest shows the city attracts.”

every year,” she says. “But the dining options there are always excellent. But there are also good cafés and buffets.”

AFTER-HOURS ENTERTAINMENT

Another thing Deel particularly likes about Las Vegas is that he does not have to act as a personal concierge for his attendees. “I don’t have to worry about what people want to do after hours,” he says. “Not only is there plenty to do, but it’s easy for them to make their own choices and do exactly what they want to do, with no help from me. I always said to people, ‘After the meeting is over for the day, if you can’t find a place to be entertained in Las Vegas, regardless of what you want to do, you probably just need to sit in your room and watch TV. But you shouldn’t have to ask me what to do.’”

Squerzi sees a similar benefit for her well-heeled and sophisticated attendees. “For a lot of our meetings, the doctors don’t travel alone,” she says. “They travel with their spouses. And Las Vegas just has a lot to offer everyone, no matter what kinds of things they like to do. The main thing to us about Las Vegas is that there is literally something for everyone to do and enjoy. And you don’t have to gamble. There are a lot of great restaurants, a great shopping scene, great shows and other entertainment.”

As a result, she says, her Las Vegas events typically rank among the association’s most well-attended meetings.

She adds that the city also can claim a singular kind of wow factor. “Another thing that makes Las Vegas different from most other destinations in my experience is that people are always excited about being there and they want to share the great things they did the night before,” she says. “And you don’t always find that in a destination. No matter what you choose to do in Las Vegas, versus other places, it’s always a conversation-starter and something interesting to talk about. It’s always sexy and intriguing. It’s never boring. And all of that is very exciting for our attendees.”

Because NSSF is working to grow its international attendance, that buzz also is vitally important to Dolnack. He works closely with the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority to promote more international attendance, which now represents about 10–

11 percent of total attendance, but from more than 100 countries. NSSF wants to double that to 20 percent over the next few years.

And based on the broad and universal appeal Las Vegas offers, that should be a realistic goal. One reason: Las Vegas is constantly evolving.

“Every time you go back, there’s always something new and different,” Squerzi says. “Las Vegas constantly reinvents itself, whether that’s a hot new restaurant or a new nightclub or a new show. And that means it’s always going to be exciting for attendees.”

TRADE SHOWS RETURN YEAR AFTER YEAR

Las Vegas will host a total of 12 new and returning conventions and trade shows attracting more than 10,000 delegates each in 2015. Combined, the shows will draw an estimated 242,000 attendees generating nearly \$315 million in local non-gaming economic impact. Nine of these shows will be held at the Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC). Current and future shows in 2015 include the following:

The American Academy of Ophthalmology’s annual conference (November 14–17) and Magic: The Gathering Tournament (May 28–31) are two new shows that are expected to bring an estimated 35,000 attendees generating \$46 million in local non-gaming economic impact.

The National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) returns November 17–19 with an expected 25,000 attendees and a non-gaming economic impact of \$33 million. NBAA is the leading organization for companies that rely on general aviation aircraft to help make their business more efficient, productive and successful.

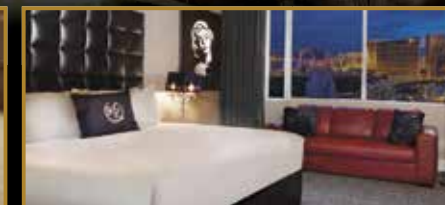
The Packaging Machinery Manufacturers Institute (PMMI) also rotates its Pack Expo back to Las Vegas September 28–30 bringing an estimated 43,000 attendees and a non-gaming economic impact of \$56.5 million dollars. NBAA and PMMI were both last in Las Vegas in 2013.

The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) Show, held in April in Las Vegas, is the world’s largest electronic media show covering the creation, management and delivery of content across all platforms. With more than 98,000 attendees from 150 countries and 1,700+ exhibitors, the NAB Show is the ultimate marketplace for digital media and entertainment. This year, the show floor was expanded to more than 1 million net sf of exhibit space at the Las Vegas Convention Center with 244 companies exhibiting for the first time. The exhibition features new products and next-generation technologies displayed through interactive exhibits, live demonstrations and technology-focused pavilions.

NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

The Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino, located one block off The Las Vegas Strip and adjacent to the Las Vegas Convention Center, is currently undergoing a property-wide \$100 million

WELCOME TO THE NEW **CENTER** OF LAS VEGAS



The **Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino**, a property deeply rooted in the history of Las Vegas, is now the new game in town. Over \$100 million in renovations and exciting plans for the future will make this THE place for meetings ... more than ever before.

- 200,000 Square feet of convention space will be renovated and reconfigured in 2015
- Over 1,000 newly renovated rooms with 60" ultra slim LED TVs
- New restaurants and bars including Sid’s Cafe, Edge Steakhouse and The International Bar
- Located directly adjacent to the Las Vegas Convention Center
- Decades of meetings and conventions service excellence
- Convenient stop on the Las Vegas Monorail
- World’s largest race & sports book - the SuperBook®

**THE NEW WESTGATE LAS VEGAS RESORT & CASINO...
WE MEAN BUSINESS**



WESTGATE LAS VEGAS
RESORT ♦ CASINO

800-367-7917 | DOS@wgresorts.com | westgatevegas.com

renovation. Upgrades to 1,200 signature guest rooms and the pool area have been completed. The ongoing renovation project will include enhancements to the convention areas and sports book. Two new restaurant concepts, including Sid's Café, are expected to open soon.

The Tropicana Las Vegas – a **DoubleTree by Hilton** now provides one of the fastest Internet services available in a Las Vegas hotel. The Internet access is available throughout the property's newly expanded convention space as well as in the resort's 1,467 guest rooms and suites.

The doors to the Trinidad Pavilion and Meeting Rooms, a 30,000-sf expansion of the convention area, are now officially open. The expansion brings the hotel's total meeting, event and exhibition space to more than 100,000 sf with 38 separate meeting rooms, which does not include the outdoor venues.

Delano Las Vegas opened last fall in the **Mandalay Bay** complex, bringing the chic style of its iconic sister property in South Beach to the Las Vegas Strip. The new smoke-free, luxury hotel features 1,100 suites, the Delano Beach Club, the Bathhouse Spa and Delia's Kitchen, a restaurant specializing in sustainable foods.

Among **MGM Grand's** 5,044 guest rooms is the 14th floor comprised of 171 **Stay Well** guest rooms, which feature vitamin C-infused shower water, advanced room lighting tailored to sleep/wake cycles, air purification systems, EMF protection and more.



A rendering of the new outdoor patio at Lago by Julian Serrano at Bellagio, his newly opened, Milan-inspired Italian restaurant with amazing views of the famous Fountains of Bellagio show.

Credit: Bellagio

The companion **Stay Well Meetings** incorporates healthful environments in meeting rooms and spaces, such as ergonomic seating, air purification, circadian lighting, virtual window lights, aromatherapy, healthful menu items and much more.

The **Mandalay Bay Convention Center** is adding 350,000 sf of exhibit space, more carpeted ballroom space and other amenities for a total of more than 2 million sf. The \$66 million project expects to welcome its first attendees in August, with the anticipated completion of the entire expansion and renovation in January 2016.

Caesars Entertainment's Linq Promenade offers a variety of restaurants, retail outlets and non-gaming entertainment options, many of which provide thousands of square feet of unique meeting venues.

For example, **The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority** joined leaders from across the Las Vegas meeting and convention industry to celebrate the inaugural North American Meetings Industry Day on April 16, 2015 at The Linq promenade. To celebrate, Chris Brown, executive vice president of conventions and business operations of National Association of Broadcasters, was presented with the Key to the Las Vegas Strip during a press event at The Linq. The NAB Show, which recently hosted nearly 100,000 attendees at the Las Vegas Convention Center, is just one of the more than 22,000 meetings, conventions and trade shows that happen in Las Vegas every year.

The newly branded and renovated **Linq Hotel & Casino** will open all new meeting space on May 1.

The **Venetian Resort Hotel Casino** recently renovated all standard guest suites, including desks fitted with a media "hub" system, providing USB charging capabilities.

The Encore Tower Suites and Encore Resort Tower at **Wynn Las Vegas** will undergo room renovations be-



The new South Point Bowling Plaza at South Point Hotel and Casino is a spacious 90,000-sf facility with 60 lanes and a 360-seat viewing area.

Credit: South Point Hotel and Casino

FACE TIME IS MONEY



Oxford Economics findings show that you are twice as likely to convert a prospect into a client with an in-person meeting.

Book your meeting at one of 40 venues in 20 destinations at **CaesarsMeansBusiness.com**

CAESARS

HORSESHOE

Harrah's



BALLY'S



THE CROMWELL



Flamingo



HARVEYS



THE LINQ





Jan Stieger, CMP, CAE
Executive Director
DBA International
Sacramento, CA

“Another thing that is unique about Las Vegas is they can handle an unusually large number of VIPs. And many of our members want real VIP treatment, with things like big suites and limousine service. And Las Vegas is uniquely equipped to deliver those things at a very high level.”

ginning this summer, which call for new furnishings, carpeting, technology and added USB plugs and electrical outlets.

The revitalization of **Monte Carlo Resort and Casino** and **New York-New York Hotel & Casino** will lead visitors to **The Park**, an immersive outdoor destination, and a new world-class 20,000-seat arena being developed by AEG and MGM Resorts International, is scheduled to open in 2016.

The Mob Museum, the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement, recently announced new special offerings for groups. The museum’s Speakers Bureau features members of the museum’s board of directors who include professionals from local and state government, law enforcement, the judicial system, media and the business community. For groups seeking teambuilding activities or simply to be active and entertained as part of the company gathering, Museum Scavenger Hunts provide a unique solution. The Mob Museum offers flexible space and can accommodate groups of from 10 to 400 people.

South Point Hotel and Casino’s new \$35 million bowling tournament facility, South Point Bowling Plaza, boasts a full schedule of tournament events. The South Point Bowling Plaza, a 90,000-sf facility, features 60 lanes with two parallel rows of 30 lanes, a 360-seat viewing area and a 720-unit locker room.

The Omnia Nightclub — the former Pure Nightclub — opened in March at **Caesars Palace** after a top-to-bottom makeover. The completely redeveloped 75,000-sf venue houses three distinct nightlife spaces: the Main Club including the Balcony level, Heart of Omnia; the sleek ultra-lounge; and the Terrace offering sweeping views of the Las Vegas Strip. Omnia is available for corporate event buyouts for groups of 200–4,000 people.

Award-winning chef Michael Mina opened **Bardot Brasserie** at **Aria Resort & Casino** in January. Offering a modern and sexy take on the traditional French brasserie experience, Bardot will present an exquisite array of Parisian cuisine, transporting guests on a culinary journey through The City of Light. Located on the second floor of Aria, Bardot is open from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. daily and offers group options.

Bellagio debuted **Lago by Julian Serrano** — a contemporary, Milan-inspired Italian restaurant concept.

“I remember when I was approached about opening my first Bellagio restaurant, Picasso, in front of some ‘wild fountain.’ It was unheard of at the time, but the potential was undeniable,” said Serrano. “Lago is a continuation of what Jean-Georges (Vongerichten), Sirio (Maccioni), Todd (English) and I started here — executing exceptional, thought-provoking cuisine in a setting you can’t find anywhere else in the world.”

Boasting a new outdoor patio with spectacular views of the world-famous fountains, Lago’s cutting-edge space is inspired by Italian Futurism — the sweeping artistic and cultural movement of early 20th century Italy.

The space includes a bold 1,500-sf mosaic map of Milan at its entrance and a sleek marble mixology counter. The dining room features large arched windows maximizing views of the scenic fountains to ensure every table is the best seat in the house.

Wynn Las Vegas introduced a new multimillion-dollar show element to “**Le Rêve – The Dream**” to mark the 10th anniversary of the aquatic production show. The new “dénouement” scene is situated as the penultimate act in the 75-minute production. More than 18 months in the making, the “dénouement” includes 172 high-powered fountains, 120 individual LED lighting fixtures and 16 fire-shooting devices.

“Over the past 4,500 shows, we’ve continued to introduce new elements, costumes, music and scenes to “Le Rêve – The Dream.” The ‘dénouement’ stands as one of the greatest advancements in the show’s history,” said Rick Gray, general manager of entertainment operations for Wynn Las Vegas. “We do this for our guests. As no two dreams are ever truly the same, neither is our show — and we take pride in that.

NUMBERS TELL THE STORY

According to the Las Vegas Visitor Profile 2014 Annual Report, the popularity of visiting Las Vegas continues to grow in both the leisure and business categories.

For example, convention visitors were asked if holding a convention in Las Vegas made them more or less interested in attending the convention — or if it made no difference. In 2014, 59 percent said having the convention in Las Vegas made them more interested in attending.

On the other hand, 96 percent of visitors said they were “very” satisfied with their visit to Las Vegas in 2014 (up significantly from 94 percent each in 2010 and 2012, 92 percent in 2011 and 89 percent last year), while 4 percent were “somewhat” satisfied (down from 7 percent in 2011 and 10 percent in 2013).

No doubt, association meeting attendees are among the “very satisfied” visitors who look forward to returning to Las Vegas year after year for their annual conference.

AC&F



We make events more eventful.



VegasMeansBusiness.com



FLETCHER

Michael Fletcher was named director of sales and marketing at Hilton Atlanta. He was most recently director of sales and marketing with Westin Hotels & Resorts.

Visit Denver has appointed four new sales managers. **Brittany Froelich** was promoted to convention sales manager, Midwest region. She was executive meetings manager, East region. **Amanda Rodriguez** was promoted to executive meetings manager, East region. She was convention services coordinator. **Phillip Rohrbach** was promoted to executive meetings



FROELICH

manager, West region. He was convention sales coordinator.

Carol Motley was named director of convention sales for Destination DC. She most recently was senior national account executive for Visit Orlando.

The Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau has named **Donna Wilson** as senior manager of convention sales responsible for the association market. She was director of sales at the Waterford Marriott in Oklahoma City.



MOTLEY



WILSON

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel, Orlando, Florida, has named **Michael Duve** as group sales account director, West Coast corporate and association accounts and Florida association accounts. He was senior sales executive at Grande Lakes Orlando for The Ritz-Carlton Orlando and JW Marriott Orlando.

Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau, Anaheim, California, has promoted **Harriet Porter** to vice president, convention sales. She most recently served as convention sales director. AC&F



PORTER

ReaderServices / AdIndex

PAGE	ADVERTISER	PHONE	WEB ADDRESS	CONTACT	E-MAIL ADDRESS
47	Caesars Entertainment	855-MEET-CET	www.cetmeetings.com	Group Sales	meet@caesars.com
29	Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau	313-202-1930	www.meetdetroit.com	Keith Kirsten	kkirsten@meetdetroit.com
49	Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority	702-892-0711	www.vegasmeansbusiness.com	Chris Meyer	cmeyer@lvcva.com
37	M Resort Spa Casino	866-551-1540	www.themresort.com	Gabe Kuti	gkuti@themresort.com
13	Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau	831-657-6416	www.meetinmonterey.com	Group Sales	sales@seemonterey.com
COV IV	Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp.	615-259-4739	www.visitmusiccity.com	Kay Witt	kayw@visitmusiccity.com
11	Omni Dallas Hotel	214-744-6664	www.omnihotels.com/dallas	Harold Queisser	hqueisser@omnihotels.com
COV II	San Diego Tourism Authority	877-973-6338	www.sandiego.org/positiveresults	Group Sales	meetinsd@sdcvb.org
43	South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa	702-797-8050	www.southpointmeetings.com	Maureen Robinson	sales@southpointcasino.com
25	Team San Jose	800-san-jose	www.sanjose.org	Mark McMinn	mmcminn@sanjose.org
19	Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton	888-810-8767	www.tropicana.lv.com	Group Sales	sales@troplv.com
COV III	Universal Orlando Resort	888-322-5531	www.uomeetingsandevents.com	Group Sales	meetings@universalorlando.com
5	Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel	800-524-4939	www.swandolphinmeetings.com	Gino Marasco	meetings@swandolphin.com
45	Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino	702-732-5631	www.westgatelasvegasresort.com	Sam Messina	dos@wgreports.com
41	Wynn/Encore	888-320-7117	www.wynnmeetings.com	Hotel Sales	hotelsales@wynnlasvegas.com



OPENING SUMMER 2016
LOEWS SAPPHIRE FALLS RESORT



VISIT UOMEETINGSANDEVENTS.COM OR CALL 888-331-9108.

UNIVERSAL'S ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE® | UNIVERSAL STUDIOS FLORIDA® | UNIVERSAL CITYWALK®
LOEWS PORTOFINO BAY HOTEL | HARD ROCK HOTEL® | LOEWS ROYAL PACIFIC RESORT
UNIVERSAL'S CABANA BAY BEACH RESORT | SUMMER 2016: LOEWS SAPPHIRE FALLS RESORT

GET READY
FOR AN EPIC
EXPANSION
OF YOUR MEETING &
EVENT POSSIBILITIES.



Universal Orlando® Resort is already Orlando's most dynamic destination for meetings and events. And it's about to become one of the biggest.

An expansion of the meeting space at Loews Royal Pacific Resort, and the Summer 2016 addition of Loews Sapphire Falls Resort, make Universal Orlando® the ideal destination for groups of any size. When complete, Universal Orlando will offer 360,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, along with a total of 5,200 guest rooms resort-wide.

Your attendees can also experience an epic private event in two jaw-dropping theme parks, or in Universal CityWalk® where you'll find exciting nightlife and eight brand new dining venues. Plus, one-of-a-kind thrills await like The Wizarding World of Harry Potter™ – Hogsmeade™ and Diagon Alley™, TRANSFORMERS™: The Ride-3D, and The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man.®

Flexible meeting space. Exhilarating entertainment. Exceptional dining. Impeccable accommodations. If you can dream it, we can make it happen.

HARRY POTTER, characters, names and related indicia are trademarks of and © Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Harry Potter Publishing Rights © JKR. (s15)
TRANSFORMERS and its logo and all related characters are trademarks of Hasbro and are used with permission. © 2015 Hasbro. All Rights Reserved. © 2015 DreamWorks L.L.C. and Paramount Pictures Corporation. All Rights Reserved. © 2015 MARVEL.
Hard Rock Hotel © Hard Rock Cafe International (USA), Inc. Loews Portofino Bay Hotel and Loews Royal Pacific Resort logos © 2015 UCF Hotel Venture. All rights reserved. Cabana Bay Beach Resort © 2015 UCF Hotel Venture II. All rights reserved.
© 2015 UCF Hotel Venture III. All rights reserved. Universal elements and all related indicia TM & © 2015 Universal Studios. © 2015 Universal Orlando. All rights reserved. 1507972/LE

LOEWS HOTELS
RESORTS

MEETINGS & MUSIC

HAVE BEEN OUR BUSINESS

Since 1897

JUST AS THE RYMAN REMAINS A REVERED REMINDER OF OUR HOSPITABLE HISTORY, we add new chapters of Nashville neighborliness daily as company comes calling. From eager arrival to fond farewell, prepare for a visit filled with music and memories you just won't find anywhere else. Call today to book your meeting in the city that music calls home.

NASHVILLE CONVENTION & VISITORS CORP
615.259.4730 or 800.657.6910 | VISITMUSICCITY.COM

STARTED IN 1897
& STILL REFINING

Gaylord
OPRYLAND

Nashville
MUSIC CITY

Music City
CENTER