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Networking Transcends the Generations

In our cover story in this issue, we explore generational accommodation trends and discover that the “general direction of meetings is already shifting in a way that suits all generations.” I agree. After all, we are marking our 40th year in business this year; thus, I can attest to the fact that opportunities for face-to-face networking at meetings and events will always transcend differences among generations.

Even though millions of millennials, those born since 1980, are the first generation to be “connected” to the Internet from birth, the prospect of gaining access and networking with mentors is a huge factor in whether or not they will attend a meeting.

As Kim Lear, director of content for BridgeWorks, which provides speakers on generational workplace dynamics, says, “One reason that millennials are going to conferences is that it’s the only time they have access to leadership. A driver in attending meetings is access, ability to spend time and network with leaders. It needs to be orchestrated because if we let it happen organically, it doesn’t work. At cocktail hour, all the millennials are in one corner, all the leadership is in another corner. If meeting planners can think of interesting ways to create cross collaboration, they can really connect. Millennials are hungry for mentoring and getting feedback.” That’s probably why her “speed dating” design is so successful.

Other ideas gaining favor among the younger set include getting outside the meeting venue and exploring fresh experiences unique to the destination such as the crawfish boil Lear hosted in New Orleans or the teambuilding hike that Joe Martin of BDI Events suggests, as it provides a more personal, active component to networking efforts.

Also in this issue, planners will find plenty of places to satisfy the needs of all the generations: from the big cities and scenic off-the-beaten track locales of the great state of California on page 36 to the rich culture and history of magnificent Western European capitals and countrysides on page 42. As Jodi Swailes at ITA Group, says, “I choose Europe for the experience it gives people and the wow factor. It’s especially popular when someone wants to do a top-level incentive program and also wants to make sure it’s really special. When that’s the case, we tend to look more toward Europe as opposed to anywhere else in the world.”
Anne Hamilton Recognized as 2015 Supplier Honoree at the PCMA Education Foundation Dinner

WASHINGTON, D.C. — PCMA’s 2015 Education Foundation Dinner Celebrating Professional Achievement was held on April 8 at the Marriott Marquis in Washington, D.C. Anne Hamilton was recognized as the 2015 Supplier Honoree at the dinner. Hamilton, vice president, resort sales and services, the Disney Destinations, leads a team of 170 representatives responsible for sales and services efforts related to meetings and conferences and theme park events held at Disneyland Resort in California, Walt Disney World Resort in Florida and Disney’s Aulani, a Resort and Spa in Hawaii and Disney’s National Sales. She has been instrumental in growing the Disney Destinations sales organization while continuously balancing the company’s goals along with the customer’s desires, enabling both to achieve a high level of success.

A 35-year industry veteran with a wealth of experience, Hamilton has spent more than two decades actively advocating on behalf of the meetings industry. This includes serving on the board of directors for MPI and PCMA, and holding a broad range of other volunteer leadership roles with MPI, ASAE, PCMA and related industry organizations. She also serves on the Florida State University Board of Governors, the University of Central Florida Rosen Hospitality School Advisory Board and the U.S. Travel Organization’s “Meetings Mean Business” Coalition. In recognition of her industry contributions, Anne has been named an ASAE Fellow and Florida State University Dedman Hospitality School Alumnae of the Year. www.pcma.org

PCMA President and CEO Deborah Sexton Addresses Legislation and Meetings in Indiana

Deborah Sexton released this statement on April 6.

Last week, a civics lesson played out in real time. It started when lawmakers in Indiana passed a “religious freedom” measure — a piece of legislation that many businesses interpreted as legal protection for businesses to refuse service to the LGBT community. Critics spoke up loud and clear. A movement to boycott Indiana sprung up almost overnight. Individuals, businesses, sports teams, municipal and state governments all pledged they would avoid traveling to or investing in Indiana.

While the controversy erupted after Indiana Governor Mike Pence signed the bill into law, Visit Indy had been working with Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard and business leaders since February to oppose the legislation. Tourism officials worked hard to ensure that an amendment to eliminate the potential for discrimination was added to the law. The leaders at Visit Indy share the openminded belief of the entire meetings industry that every citizen and visitor should receive fundamental human rights everywhere they go. Other destinations around the state such as Bloomington and Fort Wayne joined the conversation, voicing support for policies that welcome every visitor.

Late in the week, the travel industry worked hard to find a solution. Lawmakers met in Indianapolis and approved changes to the law to prohibit service providers from using the law as a legal defense for refusing to provide services, goods, facilities or accommodations. It also bars discrimination based on factors that include race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or United States military service,” according to The Associated Press.

The legal language in Indiana has been fixed, but the backlash from the media attention lingers. We all know first impressions are often the strongest, and those who first heard of the initial measure didn’t necessarily stick around to hear about the corrective, clarification amendment. So there is the sad potential for a residual negative perception for our Indiana colleagues.

What can our industry do? Support Indiana. Keep our contracted meetings in Indiana and keep Indiana in our future consideration set. And when you are in Indiana, lend your voice to our colleagues who are asking the state legislature to obliterate intolerance and discrimination and make LGBT individuals a protected class.

www.pcma.org

The Scottsdale Plaza Resort Unveils Renovations This Summer

SCOTTSDALE, AZ — The Scottsdale Plaza Resort, located in the heart of Scottsdale and Paradise Valley, announced the details regarding room renovations, which will begin in May with the first phase to be completed mid-July and the remaining standard rooms to be finished in October.

The renovations include replacing bathtubs with glassed walled showers; replacing flooring throughout vanity and shower area; new in-room lighting; expanding the closet area; vanity bathroom area with more square footage; new accent chairs for seating area and desk; new framed vanity lighted mirrors; new plumbing fixtures; new brush nickel bar and grill. The Hilton West Palm Beach is designed by Miami-based architecture firm Nichols Brosch Wurst Wolfe & Associates. The 350,000sf Palm Beach County Convention Center features a 100,000sf exhibit hall, a 22,000sf ballroom and 21,000 sf of flexible breakout space divisible into 19 rooms. Hilton West Palm Beach is located minutes from Palm Beach International Airport, just steps away from CityPlace, a premier shopping, dining and entertainment destination, and less than a mile from Norton Museum of Art and Kravis Center for the Performing Arts. www.hilton.com

Hilton West Palm Beach Celebrates Topping Out

WEST PALM BEACH, FL — Related Companies, Coastal Construction, Hilton Worldwide executives, meeting planners, West Palm Beach city officials and civic leaders celebrated April 6 at a topping-out ceremony of the Hilton West Palm Beach, which is connected to the Palm Beach County Convention Center. The 400-room hotel is scheduled to open in early 2016.

The hotel will offer more than 24,000 sf of meeting space, an expansive pool deck and outdoor fire pit, a state-of-the-art fitness center, an eclectic and curated art program, lobby bar, restaurant and lounge, and poolside hardware; new mounted TVs; all new millwork; paint refreshed throughout; granite on wet bars and vanities; and the addition of in-room refrigerators.

The Scottsdale Plaza Resort boasts numerous amenities including five pools, lighted tennis courts, a fully equipped fitness center, a full-service salon and day spa, and a nine-hole putting green. Several dining options at The Plaza include a light lunch by the pool at Café Cabana, a breakfast brunch at Garden Court, a romantic dinner at Remington’s, or cold beer and freshly popped popcorn at JD’s Lounge.

www.scottsdaleplaza.com

Hilton West Palm Beach is located minutes from Palm Beach International Airport, just steps away from CityPlace, a premier shopping, dining and entertainment destination, and less than a mile from Norton Museum of Art and Kravis Center for the Performing Arts. www.hilton.com

IN MIAMI, CONVENTIONS OFTEN DEFY CONVENTION.

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©Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau — The Official Destination Sales & Marketing Organization for Greater Miami and the Beaches.
JW Marriott L.A. Live to Add 755-room Tower

LOS ANGELES, CA — Just five years since the grand opening of the JW Marriott L.A. Live, Los Angeles, plans were announced March 5 by AEG to develop a 755-room expansion of the hotel. Combined, the new project together with the existing JW Marriott L.A. Live and The Ritz-Carlton, Los Angeles will contain 1,756 rooms and more than 200,000 sf of function space, making it the second largest hotel in California. Taking advantage of the proposed rendering of the new tower at JW Marriott L.A. Live, connecting links to the Los Angeles Convention Center, Staples Center and Nokia Theatre L.A. Live, convention and hotel guests will have convenient access to the full range of amenities offered at L.A. Live including 19 world-class restaurants, Regal Cinemas, Lucky Strike Lanes & Lounge, the Grammy Museum and its popular Live sports and music venues. The new hotel tower will be directly connected to the existing 878-room JW Marriott L.A. Live and 123-room Ritz-Carlton Los Angeles hotels by means of a bridge across Olympic Blvd. In addition to two levels of below-grade parking and ground-level retail space, a second floor amenity deck will include a restaurant, bar/lounge, fitness center, executive lounge and pool area with cabanas. AEG will build additional meeting, conference, banquet and ballroom space to support the new JW Marriott L.A. Live hotel rooms. This new function space totaling more than 75,000 sf would be directly linked via two short bridges to the existing approximately 100,000 sf of function space immediately to the north of the Event Deck. Combined with the project’s additional outdoor entertainment deck, the development will deliver more than 200,000 sf of total convention and meeting space. Construction is expected to begin in late 2015 or early 2016, with the new hotel rooms and facilities scheduled to open in 2018. For more information call 863-428-1000 or visit streamsongresort.com

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Disney colleagues and friends celebrate with Anne Hamilton (center), vice president, resort sales and services, Disney Destinations, the Supplier Honoree at the PCMA Education Foundation’s Dinner Celebrating Professional Achievement held at the Marriott Marquis, Washington, DC, on April 8. Two other winners honored were Kati S. Quigley, CMP, senior director partner, community marketing, Microsoft Corporation, the Meeting Professional Honoree; and George G. Fenich, PhD, professor, School of Hospitality Management, East Carolina University, the Educator Honoree. Mark Sadowski (l), public relations director, Disney Meetings and Terry Brinkoetter (r), public relations director for Disney Cruise Line, Disney Vacation Club and Adventures by Disney, flank Publisher Harvey Grotsky at the PCMA Education Foundation’s Dinner Celebrating Professional Achievement held at the Marriott Marquis, Washington, DC, on April 8. Two other winners honored were Kati S. Quigley, CMP, senior director partner, community marketing, Microsoft Corporation, the Meeting Professional Honoree; and George G. Fenich, PhD, professor, School of Hospitality Management, East Carolina University, the Educator Honoree. More than 170 corporate volunteers helped revive and restore Virginia Key, Florida, by removing invasive and exotic plant species, and planting native plants — an award-winning project arranged by Stuart Gardner’s Florida Meeting Services in conjunction with Las Vegas-based R&D Events.
Focus on the 3 R’s to Take Your Event Sponsorships to the Next Level

A sking key partners to be sponsors at an event, exposition or convention is a proven way to offset program costs for you and a good way for sponsors to get valuable face time with your participants. It’s a tried-and-true marketing strategy that has stood the test of time. It’s unlikely to go away any time soon — nor should it! But it can be so much more when you apply the three R’s of audience engagement.

Right Partners, Right Interaction, Right Results

Maximizing the impact of sponsorships for you, your partners and your participants requires bringing together the three R’s of audience engagement: Right Partners, Right Interaction, Right Results.

Using the three R’s means:
1. Working with the Right Partners who want to spend quality time with attendees and are open to new ideas to make that happen.
2. Creating the Right Level of Interaction with participants that appeals to their interests and needs.
3. Knowing upfront what you want your Right Results to be so you can communicate to your sponsors why investing in your event is worthwhile.

Traditional 10-by-10-foot pipe and drape booths and promotional product giveaways still have their place, but savvy marketers are applying the three R’s — and benefiting because of it.

A Case in Point

A major telecommunications company applied the three R’s to their call center employee incentive event in Puerto Rico recently and were astounded by what happened.

Instead of offering traditional and costly optional activities such as tours, golf and water sports rentals, the telecommunications company worked with three key partners to create a series of interactive events each day of the trip. The partners represented add-on products the call center attendees were expected to sell to their customers.

The afternoon events were held inside a closed, windowless nightclub — hardly a place most people visiting sunny Puerto Rico would choose to be. Yet these activities were eagerly attended by all the travelers. In fact these sponsorship events ended up being rated as the highlight of the trip by participants. And, the sponsor partners were equally pleased with the results.

Why were they so successful?
1. The telecommunications company wisely chose the Right Partners who appreciated the tremendous influence these call center employees had in selling their products.
2. The partners were willing to try new and entertaining ways to get the Right Interaction with the call center employees so they would be open to the sponsors’ messages and feel valued at the same time.
3. The telecommunications company utilized the services of BI Worldwide to create cost-effective interactive experiences that delivered the Right Results for everyone involved.

Making a Lasting Impression

BI Worldwide frequently applies key principals of behavioral economics as part of its successful three R’s design methodology. Each of the three distinctively different afternoons was cleverly designed by BI Worldwide as an interactive event that provided fun and engaging experiences that capitalized on two behavioral economic principles: vividness and memory bias.

Vividness causes people to remember things that are graphic or dramatic. Memory bias helps us to better remember those experiences we particularly enjoyed. Successful interactive sponsorships need to be positive emotional experiences that attendees remember and are excited to share with colleagues, friends and family.

Applying the Three R’s Is Easier Than You May Think

Inviting the right partners to play a role in your events goes way beyond the obvious financial benefits of cost sharing. When integrated properly using the right interactive experiences, everyone involved realizes the right results.

Applying the three R’s:
1. Gives partners a unique opportunity to interact with channel members to whom they normally can’t get direct access.
2. Gives event participants the ability to learn directly about the sponsors products, services and value propositions to better meet their own goals.

The Right Interaction Attracts New Sponsors

BI Worldwide has helped many organizations dramatically build their event sponsorships by using the three R’s to carefully and creatively develop partner packages that capture the specific interests of the event audience. The packages offer a range of investment opportunities for sponsors that meet their distinct needs. For one major energy company, BI Worldwide helped that organization add many new sponsors to their annual 2014 convention and business expo resulting in a 22 percent increase above the sponsorship revenue goal.

The Right Results Are Realized

What exactly did BI Worldwide do for the telecommunications and energy companies? What were those successful interactive experiences BI Worldwide created for the telecommunications company that had participants passing on the beach in favor of a windowless room in the Caribbean? Curious to learn how BI Worldwide helped the energy company dramatically exceed its revenue goals and have a key executive declare “you raised this convention to a new level”?

Visit our website at BIWorldwide.com or contact us at info@biworldwide.com and we’ll not only share what we did, but we’ll help you apply the three R’s to take your event to the next level. We’d love to hear from you.

“Given a chance, (sponsors) will try new approaches and even invest more for the right interaction that leads to the right results for their businesses.”

Mary MacGregor

is Corporate Vice President – Event Solutions for BI WORLDWIDE (BIW), responsible for all operating areas of the BIW Event Solutions Group including purchasing, design, delivery, group air, individual incentive travel, onsite operations, technology, communications and merchandise. She leads a team of more than 175 industry professionals who deliver memorable experiences and measurable results for their customers. www.BIWORLDWIDE.com, info@BIWORLDWIDE.com
The ground transportation/black car service space has gone through dramatic changes in recent years, driven largely by the explosion of peer-to-peer car sharing services and the advent of mobile technology. These changes are adding additional risks that need to be addressed by corporations and travel managers. While not an exhaustive list, these additional risks include a lack of regulation leading to security inconsistencies and the potential for employees to be transported by uninsured or underinsured providers.

What corporate travelers and corporate travel managers may not appreciate is that several firms within the traditional car service industry have evolved as well. A number of companies now offer all of the conveniences of the new tech-enabled players, but also a continued focus on safety, security and duty of care. Corporate buyers are discerning enough to understand that there are points of differentiation between the new ride share services and these “hybrid” traditional car service providers. However, they may need to focus on asking even more questions to fully understand what is best for their organizations and their employees.

Surge Pricing

It may come as a shock to some to learn that ground transportation is the fifth largest expense category in business travel. In fact, ground transportation actually outpaces car rental — just behind airfare, lodging, dining and entertainment (according to a recent study by Concur). Travel managers are sometimes of the mindset that peer-to-peer car-sharing services generally offer less expensive rates. Frankly, that is not always the case. “Surge pricing” for Uber, or “prime-time pricing” for its main competitor, Lyft, creates a major challenge for travel managers looking to manage costs. Pricing is based on supply and demand, and can be double, triple or more during periods of high demand (e.g. during rush hour, on concert or event dates and during rain and snow storms). Employees typically are not aware of “surge” periods until they request a car, and at that point, they don’t have other viable options. Due to fluctuating pricing based on demand, it is difficult for corporations to negotiate a flat or discounted rate for car service with these types of providers. According to a recent article on Boston.com, customers have felt victimized by Uber’s “surge pricing” practice. In one case, a woman was charged $362.57 after a 20-minute ride in Baltimore. Another customer in Denver racked up a $539 bill after a 25-minute ride.

Corporate travel managers also are becoming increasingly uneasy with at least one of the ride share firms’ apparent cavalier attitude toward safety and security. Reported incidents include: Just last month, as reported in the Denver Post, an Uber driver was arrested in Denver for attempting to break into a passenger’s home after dropping her off at the airport. In January of this year it was reported by the Boston Globe that an Uber driver was indicted on charges that he allegedly kidnapped and raped a female passenger. As reported in the San Francisco Chronicle in September of last year, a passenger accused a driver of being seriously injured by an Uber driver who "bashed him in the head with a hammer." In July of last year, a New York-based CEO traveling to Washington, DC, was kidnapped by an Uber driver, held against his will and taken on a high-speed chase across state lines (as reported by The Washington Post).

In city after city, Uber has failed to take responsibility for their actions. Beware the Ride Sharing Revolution — What You Should Know Before You Go

By Dean Sivley

WHERE INFRASTRUCTURE MEETS INNOVATION

The regional commercial hub and gateway between East and West, Dubai is a city built on innovation and infused with opportunities. The city’s diverse knowledge base and community of trained professionals makes Dubai the ideal location for association conferences, corporate meetings and incentive events. Direct access from over 240 destinations worldwide, an array of venues, over 89,000 hotel rooms in all categories and numerous exciting activities in and around Dubai, make this city the most remarkable destination for successful business events.
While on-demand services might appeal to consumers who are "out on the town" and need a quick lift home whenever the night ends, they don’t make sense for business travelers who have a flight to catch, need to be met at the airport or have an important meeting to attend. Make sure your provider can offer scheduled service, backed by a solid reputation of on-time performance.

Safety and security. Make certain that your ground transportation provider is insured and their drivers are properly licensed, and that they will stand behind their drivers. Passengers should know who is picking them up. A ground transportation company should provide each passenger awaiting pickup with a name and picture of the driver, as well as the car model and number. The peer-to-peer car sharing platforms typically do not offer Web bookings and certainly not phone bookings. The “new hybrids” I am referring to typically offer all three, and they work with travel agents.

While a rising number of companies now have travel risk management programs in place, nearly half of those do not include specific requirements/controls with respect to ground transportation. That is alarming, especially considering that 35 percent of frequent business travelers cite “safety of ground transportation” as a major concern, based on a recent study conducted by the Global Business Travel Association in conjunction with AIG Travel Assistance. That is alarming, especially considering that 35 percent of frequent business travelers cite “safety of ground transportation” as a major concern, based on a recent study conducted by the Global Business Travel Association in conjunction with AIG Travel Assistance.

Effective cost management. Stay away from ground transportation companies that raise their costs during periods of high demand, bad weather or traffic delays. You want to know all costs in advance and not be a victim of “surge pricing.”

One-stop shopping. Look for a solution provider that serves all of your travel markets — both domestically and internationally. It used to be that the industry was highly fragmented with mostly local and regional providers. Now there are companies that provide service across the country and around the world — providing you with better opportunities for negotiated rates.

Dean Sivley

is the chief executive officer of GroundLink, a leading tech-enabled provider of executive black car service in major cities throughout the world, offering the industry’s only on-time guarantee with a focus on duty of care, reliability and exceptional customer service. He also serves on the company’s board of directors and oversees the company’s growing operations throughout the U.S. and in more than 110 countries worldwide. www.groundlink.com

“Surge pricing” for Uber...creates major challenges for travel managers.”
Selecting the Perfect Meeting Destination

By Issa Jouaneh

A number of major world events occurred in the past few years, creating a slew of new, unique conference and event spaces available for use in business. Seasonal sporting events drew hundreds of thousands of tourists from around the world, both to developed countries such as London, which hosted the 2012 Summer Olympics, as well as to emerging regions in Brazil, which hosted the 2014 FIFA World Cup, leading to better hotels, upgraded airports, improved infrastructure and innovative facilities. With these options in mind, there are many additional factors to consider when selecting your next meeting destination, whether it’s domestic or international.

Analyzing Air Travel

One of the most important considerations in destination selection is air travel. In particular, performing an event travel analysis as part of the planning process can help planners to select the best location. The first item to consider when evaluating destinations from an air travel perspective is accessibility. Be sure to determine the airport location in relation to potential hotels and venues to get clarity on ground transfer time to the meeting location.

Another key consideration is ease of travel, specifically the average flying time and number of direct flights from key locations. Flight time should be considered as part of the attendee experience, especially for situations where attendees may need to transition into meetings immediately upon arrival. Also, a limited number of flight choices could result in the number of attendees per flight exceeding organized group guidelines. Partially as a response to such issues, many countries have intensified scrutiny on foreign jurisdictions. Due to such pressures, meeting planners are focusing increasingly on complex compliance standards as regulatory pressures on multinational corporations have intensified, especially when operating in foreign jurisdictions. Meeting planners should research airline promotions that offer reduced fares for new aircraft or for new or focus destinations.

Compliance

If there was ever a time when planning a corporate meeting simply involved choosing the perfect location and coordinating guests, that time has passed. Today, meeting planners are becoming increasingly aware of complex compliance standards as regulatory pressures on multinational corporations have intensified, especially when operating in foreign jurisdictions. Due to such pressures, meeting planners are facing increased scrutiny on third-party outsourcing, information security, data privacy and corruption-related risks.

Emerging markets, which often equal high-risk jurisdictions from an anti-corruption perspective, continue to present challenges for many global corporations, where growth opportunities arose recently in London, Russia and Brazil. Meeting planners should keep an eye on worldwide sporting events that will provide new possibilities in coming years across the globe, specifically in South Korea, Rio de Janeiro and Japan.

Integrating Air Travel Management

Evaluating and understanding past travel experiences and issues can help planners make recommendations for future events. With these components of destination evaluation in mind, organizers can reduce budgetary impact from the initial stages of planning. Integrating air travel management as part of planning allows planners to manage the budget in a comprehensive fashion. If not controlled, air travel can easily consume a significant portion of an event budget. However, savings achieved through proper management of air travel can provide funding for other important areas such as food and beverage.

Looking at What’s Trending

Airfare cost comparisons can have a major influence on the destination choice. In the case of two similar destinations, a significant difference in air cost can be the deciding factor. However meeting planners should research airline promotions that offer reduced fares for new aircraft or for new or focus destinations.

Meeting planners who organize domestic meetings will frequently turn to Chicago, Orlando, Las Vegas, Atlanta and San Diego in 2015.
Information Security

Experts Reveal Alarming Vulnerabilities and How to Prevent Them

By Karen Brost

If protecting the security of information at your meetings isn’t near the top of your list of things to worry about, it should be. Just ask the experts. Whether it’s a competitor trying to get the inside track on your company’s business plans or a hacker trying to grab your attendees’ credit card data, dangers are all around.

Let’s start with the physical security of your data. John Sileo, a keynote speaker on cyber security who has tested the system to determine just how easy it is for someone to gain access to the information they’re after. “I’ve personally been able to talk my way into more than 20 hotel rooms that weren’t mine (telling the maid I forgot my key), and have attended conferences for which I had no badge. At over 1,000 talks in conference rooms, I have picked up laptops, tablets, phones and laptops more than 10,000 times without more than a handful of people (ever) noticing. In 1,000 conferences, I’ve probably been caught five times.”

Sileo’s experience underscores the importance of reminding attendees to keep close tabs on their electronics. It also leads to a couple of other questions: Just how easy would it be for one of your competitors to slip into your general session or a breakout session? Is anyone checking badges at the door? If it’s a large meeting, the attendees won’t all know each other, so a stranger could just blend right in.

He shares another alarming story. “I’ve also been at conferences where the registration desk was left unattended and the entire set of laptops and printers was taken.”

Arturo Perez-Reyes, cyber, privacy and E&O practice leader for the insurance brokerage firm Hub International, has seen similar criminal activity. “I’ve been to two places where the speaker turned around and somebody stole their computer.” He explains why this situation is so tempting for hackers and those engaged in corporate espionage. “If the person who is speaking is someone like the CFO of a major technology company, you definitely want their computer, especially if it’s on. If it’s off, you have to know the password. If it’s on, they’ve already logged on.” In other words, that makes it very easy for the thief to steal whatever confidential data is stored on the laptop.

Sileo offers this advice. “Don’t leave your computer unattended on the lecture, in the seating area, in the green room, in the registration area or in your hotel room. All of those areas are very common places where mobile devices are stolen during conferences. If you have to leave devices or files in your hotel room, hang the privacy sign on the door and call housekeeping to let them know that you don’t want to be bothered.”

In a blog post that Sileo wrote on data security tips for meeting planners, he states that almost 50 percent of serious corporate data theft occurs because a laptop computer is stolen. He recommends, “In addition to the standard forms of protection (passwords, encryption, anti-virus, etc.), carry as little data on your laptop as possible. Identity thieves target business travelers because they are generally rushed, distracted and carrying valuable data.”

Staffing Up for Security

Depending on the value of the information being presented at the meeting, it may be worthwhile to hire private security to protect data confidentiality. U.S. Security Associates, a security solutions firm based in Roswell, Georgia, offered the following suggestions in its “Threatscapes Risk Intelligence” newsletter: “At events where participants are privy to sensitive information, security must work on the assumption that adversarial competitors are motivated to compromise the confidentiality of the meeting. Security agents are guarding not against the actions of the many but the determined few.”

The newsletter goes on to explain, “Security agents for these events should be chosen with utmost care, because those with experience are more likely to know what to look for. People who are too curious, ask questions or try to cozy up to attendees and strike up conversations — these are just a few examples of behaviors that raise flags. Every security agent must remain alert for individuals behaving in suspect ways and interrogate respectfully.”

According to the company, protecting data security requires a team effort. “To ensure that proprietary and confidential information is not compromised, security must establish liaison not only with hotel security but also with housekeeping and banquet staff, to coordinate daily room sweeps to capture and properly secure or dispose of potentially sensitive materials left behind by attendees. Plans also should be established to secure confidential information if there is an evacuation.”

Who’s Listening?

U.S. Security Associates also addresses the use of recording devices. Security staff may need to conduct sweeps of areas where recording devices might be hidden, and policies may need to be established regarding usage of personal electronic devices for recording purposes.

Scott Schober, president/CEO/cyber security expert for Berkeley Varitronics Systems based in Metuchen, New Jersey, explains, “One of the big concerns with corporate meetings is somebody listening in. Sometimes it’s the bad guy, sometimes it’s the competitive company looking for the edge or to see what the
When you go to an airport, you see the public encryption handshake, and it will create an SSL (secure socket layer) connection. You’ve seen these with your browser when you log into your bank. It switches from http to https. That tells you that you’re now using a secure socket layer protocol and that the other end is trusting you, creating an encrypted tunnel between you and the bank.

Bluetooth, Red Flag
Bluetooth connections on mobile devices also can be insecure and the experts recommend only turning on the Bluetooth feature when it is needed—“It’s a pain, and yes, you can forget, but it’s a lot safer,” Schober says.

Schober-Peres shares a story about how several years ago, two young hackers—now co-workers for the Oscaars as all of the stars were coming in and they were able to harvest the ad-address books of all of the major stars by hacking into their phones. In addition to recommending that people shut off their Bluetooth connection when it’s not being used, he says, “If you’re a likely target for industrial espionage, don’t carry your smartphone with you because the bad guys can get to you.” He even knows of IT executives whose companies will not allow them to bring their phones into their buildings. “They just buy disposable phones randomly so that nobody can sell them a hacked phone,” he explains.

Schober is a big proponent of using a personal hot spot for Wi-Fi connections. “It can be hosted off of a 4G LTE connection and perhaps 12 people can tie into this hot spot. Then you have a secure private tunnel.”

The Drone Threat
According to Schober, cyber criminals could even enlist the help of drones. “You could take a modified access point and mount it on a drone. If you fly over people, where you’re maybe 200 or 300 feet above them where they can’t hear it or see it, and you could actually take over somebody’s phone and hack it and pull the contact list and compromise emails and other content.”

His company recently purchased a drone as Schober was preparing to present at a cybersecurity event where he will talk about how easy it is to hack data by using a drone. When one of his employees took the drone on a test flight, it really drove the point home. “I’m here in my office and I’m up on the second floor and he put the drone one foot outside of my window and took live HD footage of me inside my office. I turned around and nearly fell out of my seat! It shows you how easy it is to spy on somebody.”

A Protection Plan
Schober says there are four basic ways to manage cybersecurity risk: avoid it, prevent it, mitigate it or transfer it. “It’s easy for people in public spaces to just harvest everything everybody’s doing.”

Watch Out for the Wi-Fi
All the experts we interviewed warned about the dangers of using unsecured Wi-Fi connections. “Be careful of the free Wi-Fi hot spots,” Sileno says. “If you aren’t logging in to them with a unique password and username, almost any cybercriminal can be sniffing what you send over the wire, including emails, account logins, intellectual property, etc.”

That advice also applies to the free airport Wi-Fi service attendees may elect to use to turn off their Roaming setting. “When you go to an airport, you see the hot spots pop up, the free Wi-Fi that we all know is very dangerous. You should never click on these hot spots because you can get redacted,” Schober explains.

Schober-Peres elaborates on the dangers. “What people do is go to an airport or a hotel and they’ll create a hot spot. It’s really easy for a major vendor to say you have Ronald Reagan Airport Wi-Fi and it isn’t Ronald Reagan Airport. It’s basically a hacker who has attached his or her hot spot and all of the data goes through that hot spot. It’s ludicrous how many people are doing that. The last time I was in Ronald Reagan Airport, I counted five of these fake hot spots. I was in the business travel area of the airport about a year ago, I counted 20. It’s really hard to distinguish who the authentic hot spot is because there are just so many impersonators. So basically, if you can’t see it, hear it, or feel it, you should be suspicious.” He adds, “It’s easy for people in public spaces to just harvest everything everybody’s doing.”

So, how do you prevent that? “We’d like to have a dedicated access point that we know the password for that we can access just for our group.”

John Sileno, CEO
The Sileno Group Inc.
Denver, CO

next product is coming out or what you’re discussing in the boardroom. (Companies are) very paranoid of bugs being planted.” He describes just how easy that is to do. “In many cases, what they’re doing is buying these cheap smartphones. You can get them prepaid so it can’t track back to anyone. Someone like me can go to it. You take a piece of duct tape and you duct tape it underneath the table. You do it the night before the meeting and then throw it into the trash. The whole concept is that. He explains why this cheap, easy trick works. “If they pick the phone up and look at it and say, ‘Hey, who put this here? Guess what? It’s wiped clean. There are no fingerprints, there’s no traceability, because it was paid for in cash at 7-11. It’s a prepaid throwaway so nobody knows who it is. It’s a simple way to kind of be a spy without getting into the spy business and finding microbes to hide.”

Arturo Perez-Reyes. Cyber, Privacy and E&O Practice Leader
National Executive-Liability Practice
Hub International, Chicago, IL

“If you see an unlocked Wi-Fi anywhere, you should be suspicious. It’s easy for people in public spaces to just harvest everything everybody’s doing.”

Perez-Reyes says his company recently purchased a drone as Schober was preparing to present at a cybersecurity event where he will talk about how easy it is to hack data by using a drone. When one of his employees took the drone on a test flight, it really drove the point home. “I’m here in my office and I’m up on the second floor and he put the drone one foot outside of my window and took live HD footage of me inside my office. I turned around and nearly fell out of my seat! It shows you how easy it is to spy on somebody.”

A Protection Plan
Perez-Reyes says there are four basic ways to manage cybersecurity risk: avoid it, prevent it, mitigate it or transfer it. “Avoidance would include steps such as not using public Wi-Fi and not taking a four-hour flight on an airplane where there is a higher risk of being hacked.”

Prevention would include steps such as using a VPN connection to connect to Wi-Fi. “Mitigation means, ‘All right, so I suffered a loss, but I want to make sure that it’s as small a loss as possible, so you’re mitigating by encrypting your hard disk,” Perez-Reyes says. “‘If somebody steals your hard disk and it’s encrypted, basically, it’s useless.’ It’s a brick.”

Transferring the risk would involve buying cyber insurance that protects against liability in the event of a data breach. These types of policies may cover costs such as credit monitoring for individuals, fines, legal settlements and even the cost of hiring cybertalk for when you own a system. "We’re shocked at how little people buy the cyber insurance," he states. "What is it going to take? How many companies can operate without a computer? They’re not insuring their brain.”

Perez-Reyes is seeing somewhat of a sea change in this area, however. He shares the story of a major vendor who he knows of that serves the movie industry. “Prior to the Sony breach, it was like ‘We don’t need this stuff. Get rid of it out of here, you’re wasting our time.’ After the Sony breach, it was, ‘How much can I buy?’”

In his blog post on data security tips for meeting planners, Sileno recommends additional steps such as securing your online reservation system to protect attendees’ personal information and shredding registration information. He also recommends educating attendees. “Before they ever begin their travels, attendees should read through a quick, two-minute tip sheet on how to protect themselves while going to a conference. Simply making them aware of some of the risks that exist (traveling laptop, theft, hacking, the bystander effect, smartphone hijacking, etc.) will cause them to pay greater attention onsite.”

He’s also seeing planners paying more attention to this issue. “Lately, I’ve been at more conferences with badge-checkers, before-break reminders to take your own security, just gives you peace of mind.”

CRIT
January 1, “all of the big pharmaceutical companies now have their own (policy) practices and standards and all the HCPs (health care professionals) are fully aware of them,” says Vanessa Stafford, CMP, senior project manager at Indianapolis-based Ashfield Meetings & Events, which is noted for its expertise in medical meetings and events. Today, Stafford says, the high-end meetings once hosted for doctors at five-star resorts — as an incentive to attend — are a thing of the past. “Now a lot of these meetings are being held at airport hotels across the U.S.” she says, “in order to make the rate limitation in major cities.”

In top-tier destinations, Stafford says, a major-flag downtown meeting hotel can no longer be used if the hosting pharma company wants to adhere to the rate restrictions. “The only possible exception to that would be off-peak times of the year or week,” she says.

Judy Johnson, CMP, HMCC, president emeritus of Plano, Texas-based Rx Worldwide Meetings Inc., says that as a result of the latest generation of cost guidelines, it is now becoming increasingly difficult to get the dates, rates and space needed to hold the meeting and still meet the spending guidelines. “Incredibly, however, there is no set of formal spending guidelines. Neither PhRMA nor OPA dictates any specific restrictions or cites any numbers. In effect, acute paranoia about optics has motivated pharma companies to set increasingly conservative spending restrictions of their own — with little commonality among them except that there were planned at the last minute, they are attended by many of the most renowned doctors in the U.S. and from around the world. As of January 1, 2015, relative longstanding but vague ethical guidelines created by Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) collided head-on with new requirements under the provisions of the Open Payment Act (OPA), formerly known as the Sunshine Act, to wreak havoc on pharmaceutical companies and their meeting planners.

Although there are no formal rules under either PhRMA guidelines or OPA, concerns about optics have forced pharma companies to set strict and conservative limits on the amounts of money they can spend on hotel rooms, meals and other costs such as transportation. In light of the pre-existing and much-feared PhRMA guidelines, OPA — which requires detailed reporting on a public website of every “transfer of value” to a doctor or other health care professional (HCP) who attends a meeting paid for by the pharma company — has led to even more draconian limitations on spending.

As a result of the enactment of the OPA reporting requirements as of
A Different World

Michael Flagg, co-CEO of Bannockburn, Illinois-based The Meeting Group, which serves a number of pharmaceutical clients, functions in a much-different world from those who plan meetings attended by doctors.

The Meeting Group plans meetings for rank-and-file internal employees of pharma companies. And by definition, its events are largely exempt from the growing regulation and optic sensitivity that afflict their PhRMA-influenced counterparts.

“Paid for every meal for the doctors for the most part at the property, and room rate was never a factor,” she says. “And even back in 2008, when the PhRMA guidelines were strengthened and led to reductions in the amounts you could spend for each meal, pharma meetings were still a great piece of business for the hotels. But now, other industries don’t have the spending restrictions that pharma meetings do in terms of room rates and food and beverage.”

In Las Vegas, Flagg often favors Caesars Entertainment properties, including its flagship Caesars Palace.

“The ability of Caesars Entertainment to really understand what a pharma client needs and their flexibility are important to me,” Flagg says. “Pharma meetings are a part of our expertise and we look to find that with our partners as well. And Caesars Entertainment does a great job of being able to say, ‘Hey, I know what your needs are. I know how this works.’ And they address things immediately as they come up. And that kind of service is also important to us.”

However, current market conditions across the country sometimes present challenges for Flagg, just as they do for all meeting planners.

“The biggest challenge for us at the moment is that everything is just being booked on shorter and shorter notice,” he says. “And that’s not just true of pharma meetings. It’s true of all meetings. And even if it’s a large meeting, we’re even seeing those being booked on a short-term basis now, because decisions are more and more being made on a short-term basis today.”

And that means that all planners, including those who execute pharma meetings, now often have trouble getting the dates, rates and space they need.

“Sometimes, though, by booking short-term, you can get a good deal,” Flagg says. “But then you have to take what’s available in order to get that deal. You don’t get the luxury of selecting from a vast array of properties. You’re down to the hotels that can offer the time frame you need. That’s just the nature of the beast nowadays when it comes to planning meetings.”

And budgets also continue to be under longstanding and unprecedented scrutiny since the Great Recession.

“Budgets are definitely tighter,” Flagg says. “Even though our pharma meetings are not restricted by the spending guidelines for doctors, you do see a watchful eye being kept over everything that gets spent, because companies want to control their costs. So in that case, it’s self-monitoring, in terms of their budgets. But it is happening.”

— JB

Michael Flagg
Co-CEO, The Meeting Group
Bannockburn, IL

“And we can use whatever destinations we want. For example, we are probably in Las Vegas four times a year with pharma meetings.”
just figuring out the amounts of what will have to be reported for each doctor that is going to attend,” Stafford says. Many pharma companies and planners did not fully anticipate how much new work would be required once the Open Payment Act’s reporting requirements took effect January 1. “I think we all had a pretty good idea,” Stafford says, “but there are definitely a lot more questions now that the act has actually gone into effect and companies know what is required of them. And that requires a lot more work, especially on the front end. Everyone has to be much more diligent now.”

Under OPA, a standalone website is required for every individual meeting hosted in order to report all data specific to that meeting. “So I now build websites every day as part of my job,” Stafford says. “The great irony, of course, is that neither PhRMA nor OPA actually set any formal restrictions on spending. Determinations are calculated by each pharmaceutical company based on an abstract formula that includes PhRMA’s broad ethical guidelines, the specific reporting requirements of OPA and sensitivity to optics. Required for every individual meeting, PhRMA and our member companies are committed to following ethical standards and all legal requirements. To ensure the appropriateness on education and information exchange and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety, pharmaceutical companies comply with codes of conduct that address requirements for conducting or sponsoring meetings with health care professionals.”

PhRMA did not comment on the specific issues and concerns raised by planners interviewed for this article.

**Miscalculation**

The most fundamental indication of the disconnect that has led to the current situation is the fact — which all meeting planners are aware of — that costs of airfare, hotel rooms and F&B are rising each year. And no one doubts they will continue to rise until another economic downturn swings the pendulum back to a buyer’s market, which might not happen for years.

Meanwhile, Stafford says, “It is becoming very challenging now to meet the current guidelines and provide good food — and especially healthy options like whole foods during breaks.”

Johnson adds, “The fact is, we keep asking the hotels to do more and more for less and less money. And then we’re mad if they won’t give us exactly what we want for breakfast when we’re paying $25 inclusive.”

F&B prices, in general, are going through the roof as a result of a seller’s market and rising food costs, Johnson says. On top of that, she adds, are ever-increasing service fees of as much as 22 percent or more in some high-demand destinations.

“Our greatest frustration, Johnson says, is that many pharma companies are now taking a closer look at the destinations they use, because there are places where you have to say to yourself, ‘There’s no way we can get breakfast for $25 inclusive in that destination. So you don’t go there anymore. And that is frustrating.’”

Fortunately, Johnson says, she is still able to do meetings in Las Vegas, one of the most coveted destinations for many doctors, because of the value proposition she gets there.

Her go-to properties include Aria Resort & Casino and Vdara Hotel & Spa, operated by MGM Resorts International at its sprawling CityCenter complex. “Some clients like Vdara because there is no casino and therefore no perception issue there,” Johnson says. “The No. 1 reason, especially today, that I like MGM Resorts properties is the buying power they have based on their entire portfolio of major Las Vegas hotels. So if you say you have $45 for lunch, you’re going to get a lovely lunch for that $45. You’re not going to be embarrassed in front of your attendees like you would be at some other hotels.” And their hotels are also staffed properly onsite for meetings that require a lot of attention, as pharma meetings do.”

The most frustrating fact of all, perhaps, about the broader current situation, Johnson and Stafford agree, is that it’s as if the current meeting cost guidelines were created without any attention to market dynamics, instead being driven by nothing more than perception and concerns about optics. And that, in reality, is not good for anyone concerned.
Focus on Small Meetings

They're Taking A Bigger Slice Out of the Group Business Pie

By Patrick Simms

Regular group business is certainly of interest to hoteliers, and that’s just what small meetings offer, especially in recent years. Serving as a guest blogger for IMEX last fall, Sherry Romello, senior director, Hilton Meetings & Product Management, noted that meetings requiring a room block of fewer than 25 rooms “now make up more than 70 percent of (Hilton’s) market. While that doesn’t diminish the significance of large meetings, it does shed a new light on a market segment that deserves some special recognition.”

The common definition of a small meeting (i.e., 10–100 guest rooms on peak night) covers larger events than the bulk of internal planners’ workload. And many of those events are small under the common definition (e.g., advisory board and investigator meetings).

In her IMEX blog post, Romello elaborates on the point: “Historically, our industry has viewed small meetings as high investment, low return. Unfortunately, that diminishes the critical role that many small meetings play in achieving business objectives. Just think about a board meeting focused on setting a company’s strategic direction or a sales meeting with a large new client. The attendee numbers really don’t tell the story.”

Crucial Content

Indeed, the content of small meetings is seldom of small importance, and even may be crucial for the segment of the company in attendance. “Regardless of how small the program is, the meeting content is just as important as a larger meeting,” says Jessica Menzer, account lead, Caledonia, Wisconsin-based Meetings & Incentives Worldwide. Menzer, whose focus is on corporate and pharmaceutical meetings, notes that about 50 percent to 75 percent of her events are small under the common

Small Meetings Growth

Phoenix, Arizona-based Avnet Technology Solutions is one example of a company where small meetings form the bulk of internal planners’ workload. “Approximately 95 percent of our meetings have between 10–100 attendees on peak night, on average using close to 50 rooms,” says Susan Morgan, event planner. The exceptions would be Avnet’s annual partner conference and annual incentive program, but these are vastly outnumbered by small meetings, many of which have a training focus. And in line with the trend noted by PCMA, Avnet’s number of small meetings is increasing, due to “growth in the business and the various initiatives that we have in place at a given time,” Morgan explains. “Our events are tied to our strategy. So if we have an initiative that’s best communicated in the form of an event, that results in more activity for us, and we are seeing some of that right now.”

Top Small Meeting Destinations

According to PCMA’s Meetings Market Survey, published in March, 28 percent of respondents (compared to 67 percent in 2013 survey) said that they are booking their small meetings more than six months out. The average lead time is nine months, compared to 11 months for the 2013 survey. For Morgan and Barker, the lead time is usually at least three to four months. “If there’s a regular group of people gathering we may have a heads-up as far as a year out,” Morgan says, “but generally, no, because the environment that we’re in varies. We can make plans, but especially for some of the smaller meetings, certain (key) participants can have a conflict in their schedules. So we can make (long-range) plans but end up adjusting them because of that.”

Third Parties to the Rescue

A regular flow of meetings that need to be placed within a few months of being approved can be quite taxing for an in-house planning team. Hence, third parties often “come to the rescue” with their numerous hotelier connections and knowledge of properties with “holes” to fill, properties that have had cancellations, and so on.

“For our sourcing department is very good at what they’re able to reach out to all the relevant properties pretty quickly and get some responses,” Menzer says. “Avnet has been working with a third-party sourcing company for nearly 15 years, and will place about 70–80 meetings with the company this year. Morgan says, “Because of the longstanding relationship we have, they know our preferences, and they know our contractual terms.”

Some planners prefer to book small meetings in smaller hotels. “The reason

Meetings & Product Management
why it does sometimes matter is that if the hotel has tons of meeting space, there may be several other large meetings in the hotel at the same time. Then they might not necessarily focus on your (small) meeting as much,” Menzer relates. “Thus, the size of the hotel doesn’t matter. (small) meeting as much,” Menzer relates. “I can’t think of any instance where I feel like I’ve received less service because of being a smaller group. I feel the attention that we get from the property.”

“Regardless of how small the program is, the meeting content is just as important as a larger meeting.”

Jessica Menzer, Account Lead
Meetings & Incentives Worldwide, Caledonia, WI

Equal Treatment

A planner who has had such an experience at a large hotel is likely to pair small meetings with other hotels going forward, when possible. But many planners have not experienced a lack of focus on their meeting at such properties. “I have never felt that the attention will change because of the (meeting) size,” Toro says. “The hotel should not treat me based on the number of attendees that I bring, but based on the future and the opportunities that I will bring to the industry.”

More often than not, hotels bear in mind this potential for repeat business, and treat groups of all sizes accordingly. Thus, “the size of the hotel doesn’t matter. First we see if it’s convenient for the people if most of them are flying,” Toro explains. “No. 2 we look for the concessions that the hotel is offering us, and the wow factor that the hotel will offer our attendees. At the end of the day, it’s going to be about the experience for the planners and the participants.” Morgan echoes Toro’s viewpoint: “I wouldn’t demand that we get the same sort of attention in that respect as larger meetings. So even though it’s a small meeting, we still need some suites at the group rate. They wouldn’t necessarily think we would need that since it’s a smaller meeting, but it has a lot of the same components.”

With a small program, it is challenging to gain the leverage needed to negotiate for concessions due to the lower revenue the event represents. But there are tactics a planner can deploy to make the business more attractive. For example, maximizing the amount of F&B revenue for the hotel by keeping group meal functions onsite. And when the C-level executive will be attending, that demographic should be communicated to the hotelier, who may perceive an opportunity to impress these individuals and perhaps draw a larger piece of business down the line.

Disproportionate Space

Another negotiating hurdle may arise when a small meeting uses an amount of meeting space that the hotel feels is disproportionate to the number of guest rooms the group is booking. This may happen, for example, when some of the attendees are flying in but others are not staying overnight at the hotel.

Menzer has noted that even small investigator meetings for pharma companies tend to use a significant number of breakout rooms, more so than hotels are used to allotting for the guest rooms being used. In such scenarios, “I have seen hotels increase the guest room rate,” Menzer says. In other cases, the hotelier might levy a room rental fee for the disproportionate space, a fee that is normally waived if the group meets its F&B minimums.

If the extra space usage does not in some way reflect the value of the business, it’s highly dependent upon that,” says Morgan, who notes that Avnet groups sometimes end up needing additional breakout space beyond what was originally contracted. When there is some potential conflict, “we are as flexible as we can be with meeting space,” Menzer says. “So we wouldn’t demand that we get the space two days ahead of time for setup, for example.”

Hotel Brands Take Notice

While there can be challenges to negotiating the best deal for a small meeting, the good news is that the major hotel chains are generally well aware of the value of this kind of business. As Hilton’s Romello emphasizes, “Small meetings are particularly important to us at Hilton because, at our core, we believe in the power of personal connections through face-to-face interactions. Many times these interactions take place at the large-scale events like IMEX; however, we feel personal connections are at the heart of small meetings.”

Some properties within a chain will be especially suited to those types of gatherings. Menzer has found the 860-room Hilton Chicago O’Hare Airport to be especially well suited to the needs of small companies.”

Even large hotels are catering to small meetings: The JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa in San Antonio now offers a meeting and event concierge service focused on corporate groups using 10–300 rooms. (Inset) The resort’s warm and inviting Sunday House is perfect for board meetings or receptions.

The meeting market is getting more fragmented, and many more small corporate groups are looking to make hotel purchases more like consumer purchases,” says Thais Toro, Senior Corporate Event Planner, Autotrader.com, Atlanta, GA. “The hotel should not treat me based on the number of attendees that I bring, but based on the future and the opportunities that I will bring to the industry.”

Hotel, for example, to be a great host for groups of fewer than 100 attendees, offering 40 pre-set boardrooms for up to 25 people. “They don’t have huge meeting spaces (the largest meeting room is 3,500 sf) so a lot of the concurrent meetings are going to be similarly sized,” she observes. “Also I like the fact that there is a meeting concierge located on level two.”

A dedicated Griffin Meetings Specialist coordinates all the details regarding meeting room space, guest room reservations, amenities for VIPs as well as F&B planning. Guest rooms are blocked into one priority area. The hotel, keys are customized with the host company logo, and a complimentary hospitality suite as well as well-come amenities for up to five VIPs are all part of the Griffin Meeting Experience.

The fact that a mammoth hotel such as the JW Marriott, at 1,002 guest rooms, is a meeting concierge located on level two.” The concierge obviates the need to contact the convention services department with requests, and ensures immediate service for all groups, no matter how small.
Now that millennials — adults born since 1980 — are expected to outnumber baby boomers this year, their proclivities and preferences are of paramount interest to, well, everyone. Per the U.S. Census Bureau, the generation of people under 35 will be 75.3 million strong by the end of 2015, according to a 2013 survey of U.S. planner respondents. From a planner perspective it's more paramount to encroach on leaders’ time, she says, although “from a planner perspective it’s more difficult to handle the logistics.” For example, a crawfish boil hosted in New Orleans was a draw for millennials and Gen X. “Instead of being stuck in a hotel conference room, professionally they were gaining things from the content, and personally gaining things from the city,” Lear says. “I’m not worried face-to-face meet-
Millennials want to be heard and see the results of being heard. They hope to see a difference or a change the next year, so they feel they have a reason and a purpose.”

LANE WEST, Events Specialist, Meeting Professionals International, Dallas, TX

“Millennials have grown up having their voices heard by their baby boomer parents — where to go on vacation, what TV to buy — and now that translates into incorporating their voices into programming, into speakers chosen and location chosen,” says Lent.

Social media, especially Twitter with its easily located hashtags and Facebook with its dedicated event pages, is the go-to resource for any meeting professional. When you take a meeting on the road, even before it begins, “we constantly have to compete with their social media with things like audience polling or a continual Twitter feed where you can tweet questions that are passed on to the presenter,” says West.

Shortened attention spans also means trying different types of formats to keep attendee engagement high, and not only for millennials. “We’re a very visible generation, so we’re leading the charge, leading it and pushing it forward, reminding planning committees to take risks,” Martin says. For example, a company that usually plans the same type of speaker in the same format took a risk by doing more focused topics and a shortened keynote — 30 to 45 minutes — immediately followed by a workshop, break, lunch or so. “It totally paid off,” Martin says. “Registration increased 30 percent this year.”

Orbextactics include mixing different styles of sessions or presenting information in a different way — in an outdoor venue, for example, or using five-minute TED Talk presentation styles for certain content. Cartoons, animation, videos are all ways not to lose the audience or to surprise them.

Martin says for some meetings, the keynote speaker can be preceded by several “warm-up acts” as a way to engage attendees. “It’s powerful,” he says, “and can be more impactful because it’s easier to remember.”

For meeting planners, this can mean instead of scheduling six general sessions with identical structure, thinking through how to create a meeting conference venue, for millennials, “cost” was the No. 1 factor.

Hotels seem to be finally coming around to this reality: Many of the major chains now offer at least baseline free Wi-Fi for their preferred or reward members, with the option of faster speeds available for a fee. Hyatt now provides free Wi-Fi for all hotel guests.

Martin says he likes to send out a mobile app link two to three weeks in advance of his meetings to “get the buzz going,” so attendees can add the schedule to their phone, connect with exhibitors and otherwise become engaged with the conference before it begins. Marriott and Starwood both also have meeting services apps designed to help facilitate this.

The meetings industry has undergone unprecedented innovation in the past 10 years in terms of technology, collaborative meeting design and crowdsourced program content. You might even say that meeting planners have millennials to thank for raising the bar for better meetings. C&IT
What’s New for Meetings From SoCal to SanFran

Destination

Experiencing a destination as a local, not a tourist, is certainly a trend in leisure travel, and one that has impacted corporate group travel. Accordingly, planners often seek to create offsite events that immerse participants in the local culture and make them feel part of it. When meeting in California, it’s natural to try to capture the laidback, West Coast lifestyle, and a reception held at Grapevine, Texas-based GameStop’s Expo 2014 in Anaheim succeeded in that regard.

Anaheim

The Anaheim Convention Center’s new Grand Plaza, spanning 100,000 sf, was converted into a casual setting for attendees to sample classic street fare, mingle, relax and enjoy the Southern California weather.

“GameStop’s Expo brought 4,000 attendees to the Anaheim Convention Center where they enjoyed outdoor events on the Grand Plaza.”

It’s fair to say the city’s Resort District is booming with a nearly $200 million investment by major hoteliers to bring more than 1,500 guest rooms online by the end of this year. Last year saw the opening of the 178-room Hyatt Place Anaheim Resort and two SpringHill Suites by Marriott (172 and 120 rooms, respectively). This year will see the opening of the 262-room Hyatt House Anaheim Resort, 274-room Residence Inn, 215-room Homewood Suites by Hilton - Anaheim Convention Center/Downtown Anaheim Main Gate, 96-room Holiday Inn Express and 221-room Courtyard Waterpark Hotel At Disneyland. Additionally, the Hilton Anaheim, Anaheim Marriott and Sheraton Park Hotel are undergoing $55 million in renovations expected to be completed by year’s end.

San Diego

Unlike the Anaheim Convention Center expansion project, San Diego’s is still at the proposal stage, and no construction is scheduled to take place prior to 2016. The phase three plan would add approximately 200,000–225,000 sf of exhibit space, 100,000 sf of meeting space and an 80,000-sf ballroom.

Portland, Oregon-based Johnstone Supply, an HVAC wholesale distributor, held its Spring Sales Meeting and Tradeshow at the San Diego Convention Center in March, and previously in 2010 and 2012. With 1,200 attendees, the event does not require the added space under construction, but will be more easily accommodated with the new Concourse addition.

San Francisco, Los Angeles, Phoenix and other cities in the West, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Phoenix...
Off California’s Beaten Paths

As the nation’s third-largest state, California is home to both major cities and a great deal of rural wrinkles and natural environs, from Laguna Beach to Death Valley to Redwood National Park. Planners sometimes want a resort that is removed from the metropolitan areas, one that offers a retreat for participants, and there is no shortage of options.

Scenic Natural Surroundings

One example is Ojai Valley Inn & Spa, located in Southern California’s Ojai Valley, about 60 miles north of Los Angeles. The AAA Five Diamond, 308-room resort offers 65,000 sf of meeting space, the 31,000-sf Spa Ojai and a George Thomas-designed golf course. One example is Ojai Valley Inn & Spa, located in Southern California’s Ojai Valley, about 60 miles north of Los Angeles. The AAA Five Diamond, 308-room resort offers 65,000 sf of meeting space, the 31,000-sf Spa Ojai and a George Thomas-designed golf course. Ojai Valley Inn is certainly not averse to change, however. The first phase of its renovation plan will be complete in July, including a refined lobby design with tablet check-in, an upgraded adult pool, a new Italian signature restaurant and a refreshed parlor concept at the Neff Lounge, a cornerstone of the property since 1923. The second phase of the renovation will begin in early 2016.

Removed From City Life

While Loews Coronado Bay Resort is located in San Diego, it also is removed from city life, though in a different way than Ojai. Situated on its own 15-acre peninsula, the 439-room resort offers views of the Pacific Ocean and Mexico on one side, and the San Diego skyline on the other. Pleasanton, California-based Zelig, a medical technology company, held its global sales meeting for about 215 attendees at the Loews.

“We look for resort-style properties for this particular meeting, but we also look for properties that are a little bit removed from the prime location in a destination,” notes Kimberly Coleman, CMR senior event manager. “The reason the Loews was such a good fit for us is because it is not in downtown San Diego and not in the main area of Coronado. So we keep our team on-property, they don’t have as much access or need to go on-property.” Loews Coronado Bay Resort offers 65,000 sf of function space, and Coleman found the layout of the indoor meeting space very convenient. “The meeting rooms are in proximity to each other, only on two levels and very compact.” -PS

The Ojai Valley Inn & Spa is a scenic meeting oasis tucked away in Southern California’s Ojai Valley. who can explore more than 60 exhibits and a collection of 29 restored aircraft.

Long Beach

The last couple of years have seen numerous upgrades to Long Beach’s meeting facilities, including the debut of the Pacific Ballroom at the Long Beach Arena. The ballroom’s 45,000 sf of customized event space is complete with adaptable, electronic walls and a $1.6 million state-of-the-art AV system. On the hotel front, the Renaissance Long Beach Hotel (21,000 sf of meeting space) completed an $8 million renovation last April that rede signed its 374 guest rooms. Other major renovations include the Hyatt Regency Long Beach ($30 million), Westin Long Beach (more than $12 million) and the Long Beach Marriott ($10 million). Overall, more than $60 million has been invested during the past several years to upgrade the city’s primary meeting hotels.

Two fine choices for offsite events represent Long Beach’s status as a maritime hub of the U.S.: the Queen Mary and the Aquarium of the Pacific. The Queen Mary departed from Southampton, England in 1936 on its maiden voyage, and since 1967 has been docked in Long Beach, today serving as a floating hotel and attraction with three world-class restaurants. The ship offers groups more than 80,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space in 14 art deco salons. The Aquarium of the Pacific offers the LEED Platinum-certified Watershed classroom with catering by Savor.

and Las Vegas, San Diego is actually very competitive,” she remarks. The city’s CVB is certainly an added value, she says. “One of the nice things about the San Diego CVB is that they do a great job with social media, so you’re constantly getting specific, useful updates about new things that are happening. I find their communications are really spot on for planners. They’re also a great resource for any third-party referrals, such as DMCs and photographers.” The city’s suppliers now have even more flexibility with planners: More than 200 salespeople representing hotels, restaurants, venues, attractions and other service providers registered for the first session of San Diego Meeting Certified, a six-month course custom-designed by Terri Roberts, director of training and communication for Destination Marketing Association International. The program just graduated its 2014 inaugural class.

Overall, Tipton has found San Diego to be a “very visitor friendly” city where “you don’t have to create a lot of specific things for your attendees to do because it’s very self-service. They can find things to do on their own, such as great restaurants and shopping, and the downtown is very walkable and safe.” Nonetheless, Johnstone Supply did host an organized off-site event at the USS Midway Museum this year that included dinner, docent tours and fireworks. The historic naval aircraft carrier accommodates private events for up to 3,500 guests,
San Jose
The “capital” of Silicon Valley offers its own distinctive venues for offsite events, including The Tech Museum of Innovation, the recently renovated City National Civic (formerly San Jose Civic Auditorium) and the Center for the Performing Arts. All are located within walking distance of the San Jose McEnery Convention Center, whose expansion was completed in October 2013. The center’s 169,957 sf of additional space includes 27,834 sf of flexible meeting space and a 35,194 sf Grand Ballroom.

The city’s “Wickedly Fast Free Wi-Fi” now extends to the downtown and the Mineta San Jose International Airport, which recently installed two automated Global Entry kiosks in the International Arrivals facility.

During free time in San Jose, attendees can visit the bohemian San Pedro Square Marlet and Plaza de Cesar Chavez, home to the San Jose Jazz Festival. Planners can rent spaces in the San Jose Civic, Center for the Performing Arts and four other venues, is a natural for a high-tech hub like San Jose, the fast and free Wi-Fi service also is offered throughout the downtown and the Mineta San Jose International Airport, which recently installed two automated Global Entry kiosks in the International Arrivals facility.

Monterey County
Home to some of the country’s most scenic coastlines including the Big Sur, Monterey offers groups much more than R&R in a consistently mild climate. Twenty-five golf courses, 19 state parks, 10 major museums and a variety of vineyards open to the public are among the offsite options. The county’s regional airport offers direct service to Las Vegas, Phoenix, San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego.

Monte Carlo Hotel & Spa, the Hyatt Regency Monterey Hotel & Spa completed a $6 million renovation over the last two years, featuring the theme “Land, Edge, Sea” in the color scheme and décor of its ballroom and conference center. (The Monterey coast has been described in literature as “the greatest meeting of land and sea” by poet Robinson Jeffers.) The hotel offers more than 40,000 sf of flexible meeting space, including indoor and outdoor venues.

The Monterey Conference Center and Meeting Connection, a partnership with three adjacent hotels, combine to offer more than 61,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space and 700 guest rooms.

San Francisco
Like Los Angeles, the City by the Bay is one of California’s most accessible, particularly for international groups. SFO offers nonstop flights to 21 international points on 30 international carriers. When in town, there is great cultural diversity for attendees to explore, including iconic areas such as Chinatown, Haight-Ashbury and the Mission District, as well as a variety of compelling venues for planners to hold offsite events.

Several of them will be showcased this August at the 2015 Meeting Professionals International World Education Congress. Pier 48 will be the site of the Opening Night Celebration. Approximately 2,000 attendees of the Congress will enjoy panoramic views of the waterfront, Bay Bridge and the city skyline, as well as some of the city’s finest sustainable cuisine. The MPI Foundation will be hosting two events. The Big Deal poker party at City View at Metreon, an indoor/outdoor venue overlooking the renowned Yerba Buena Gardens, and the Rendezvous fundraiser and networking event at the historic Fillmore, the stomping grounds of many classic rock greats. The Beaux-Arts City Hall, reopened in 1915, will provide stately surroundings for the Congress’ Closing Night Celebration.

Hosting MPI will surely boost meetings business in San Francisco, but many other major cities in California should see that result once planners gain exposure to the investments that have been made into the state’s meetings infrastructures. California’s culture may be laidback, but its meetings industry certainly is not.
“Kinkell Byre is just an incredible venue. It’s imbued with so much character. It was just great for our event.”

Steven Gray, Operations Analyst
Health Learning, Research & Practice
Wolters Kluwer, New York, NY

And the Holy Grail for golf-oriented groups is fabled St. Andrews, where the Old Course is among the most acclaimed in the world. Steven Gray, operations analyst, health learning, research and practice for New York-based Wolters Kluwer, an aggregator of content for hospitals and other health care providers, took 198 attendees from 22 countries to St. Andrews in January 2013 for the company’s annual global sales meeting. Wolters Kluwer did a buyout of the intimate and tony Fairmont St. Andrews.

Most attendees flew into Edinburgh and spent several days there before heading off to St. Andrews. “That was a nice way to give people even more of the flavor of Scotland,” Gray says. Although he knew Scotland would have a lot of appeal for his attendees, Gray says, the value he received had much to do with the company’s decision. “We also looked at other destinations,” he says. “But based on the responses we got to our RFP, Scotland came in at a really good price point. And the Fairmont St. Andrews just offered us a really wonderful deal on a budget.”

Among the things that most appealed to Gray about the Fairmont St. Andrews was its meeting space. “It is phenomenal,” he says. “We usually use 10 to 12 break out rooms. And the break out rooms at the hotel are just very beautiful. And the staff was very accommodating.”

Wolters Kluwer held its awards ceremony in Kinkell Byre, a renovated 14th century barn. “It’s just an incredible venue,” Gray says. “It’s imbued with so much character. It was just great for our event.”

What was once the home to the farm’s livestock has now been converted to provide a versatile function venue. For dinners, the main dance floor seats between 200 to 300 at round tables. And because their awards ceremony is always a themed costume event, the company staged this event in medieval costume. Attendees created their own medieval costumes for the event. What was once the home to the farm’s livestock has now been converted to provide a versatile function venue. For dinners, the main dance floor seats between 200 to 300 at round tables. And because their awards ceremony is always a themed costume event, the company staged this event in medieval costume. Attendees created their own medieval costumes for the event.

By John Buchanan

A s the meeting landscape expands internationally as a result of ongoing globalization, perhaps no other place on earth is generating the kind of enthusiasm among planners that Europe is — especially for incentive programs. In fact, savvy planners at progressive companies who want to deliver “chance of a lifetime” trips for incentive winners have been loyal to European destinations for decades, knowing they dramatically outperform lesser destinations when it comes to wow factor motivational power.

“Matchless Experiences Abroad Provide the ‘Chance of a Lifetime’ for Groups and Incentive Winners”

I choose Europe for the experience it gives people and the wow factor,” says Jodi Swailes, senior buyer, purchasing and product development, at West Des Moines, IA-based ITA Group. “It’s especially popular when someone wants to do a top-level incentive program and also wants to make sure it’s really special. When that’s the case, we tend to look more toward Europe as opposed to anywhere else in the world.”

For the past 16 years, Swailes has planned incentive programs to major Western European destinations. “The experiences you get in Europe are hard to match anywhere else in the world,” she says. “There’s a lot of that has to do with the history and culture you experience in Europe.”

That’s one key reason why so many tried-and-true destinations, such as England, Ireland and Scotland in the United Kingdom, as well as Italy, have always ranked high in the destination pecking order, along with other traditional favorites such as France and Spain.

Today, however, new and even more exotic destinations such as Hungary and Turkey are getting their share of planner attention — and business.

Scotland

Scotland is among the most beautiful and fascinating places in the world. And especially since the epic Mel Gibson movie “Braveheart,” Scotland has held a special appeal.

“People are also familiar with the history of Scotland, and it has fabulous scenery,” says Swailes, who has several incentive programs headed for Scotland over the next few years. “It also has kind of a romantic appeal.”

For Swailes, a Scotland itinerary usually includes the historic medieval city of Edinburgh and the storied Gleneagles Hotel, located about 30 minutes outside Edinburgh on 850 acres of rolling green hillsides in the Perthshire countryside. The world-renowned, five-star property, a member of the Leading Hotels of the World Collection, is especially prized for its three championship golf courses and spa.

“Gleneagles is really popular with incentive groups,” Swailes says. “It’s just a fantastic hotel.”

Historic Edinburgh also earns high praise from Swailes. “Edinburgh is a great city,” she says. “And it’s easy to walk around and discover history.”

Although the city offers a wide range of hotel options, Swailes favors The Balmoral and Sheraton Grand Edinburgh — both rich in history, culture and luxury.

“The Balmoral is another great hotel, and it has a very convenient location,” Swailes says. “But if a client has a little more money to spend, we usually recommend the Sheraton Grande. It’s just a fabulous hotel.” The Sheraton Grande completed a major renovation in 2012 that reinforced its distinctly Scottish flavor.

Scotland is among the most beautiful and fascinating places in the world. And especially since the epic Mel Gibson movie “Braveheart,” Scotland has held a special appeal.

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The Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre (AECC)  
Edinburgh-based Apex Hotels opens in the Glasgow market  
The new Technology and Innovation Centre at the  
Lennox Suite at Edinburgh International Conference  
SSE Hydro in Glasgow was voted as the second busiest  
Five-star luxury resort Gleneagles is converting one of its  
Activity School equestrian arenas into a modern, multi- 
purpose event space. Located within the hotel’s 850-acree  
estate, the venue will have the capacity to cater up to 2,000  
guests for concerts, launches and brand-experience events.  
Key features will include loading bay access doors, 63 inte-
grated hanging points tested to 500kg, a 200-amp power  
supply, LED lighting and oil-fired heating.  
Edinburgh-based Apex Hotels opens in the Glasgow market 
for the first time with the acquisition of Marks Hotel in  
Glasgow’s Bath Street. The hotel is expected to re-launch in 
June 2015 as the four-star Apex City of Glasgow Hotel.

Andrews, even an Indian restaurant.  
The company also hired a local event company to stage a  
Highland Games competition, a wonderful teambuilding ac-
tivity. “It was a huge teambuilding activity and a huge success,”  
Gray says, adding that after the games he hosted a dine-around  
within the hotel’s multiple restaurants.  
After dinner, the group visited a local Scotch distillery  
and enjoyed the other thing, besides golf, that Scotland is  
best known for.  
And despite some inclement weather, the group played golf  
in the most famous golf destination in the world. “But it hap-
pened to snow the day we were scheduled to play golf,” Gray  
says. “And the Fairmont St. Andrews pulled out all the stops  
to find a course that was still open and didn’t have ice on their  
tees. So our folks got to play golf in Scotland.”

New and Noteworthy  
Scotland is currently investing huge sums in public and pri-
ivate projects to improve the country’s tourism infrastructure,  
according to Visit Scotland, Scotland’s national tourism orga-
nization. Some key highlights for 2015–2016:  
• The new Technology and Innovation Centre at the  
University of Strathclyde in Glasgow opened with four  
seminar rooms, which can accommodate 70 attendees  
each. Removable walls will allow for larger events.  
• Lennox Suite at Edinburgh International Conference  
Centre is a newly developed expansion exhibition space  
in Edinburgh, featuring an innovative moving floor sys-
tem, transforming the space from flat-floor to auditorium,  
arena and tiered-cabaret modes.  
• The Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre (AECC)  
recently retained a Gold accreditation from the Green  
Tourism Program following an extensive audit of the  
venue’s sustainability practices. Plans for a new AECC have  
been approved.  
• SSE Hydro in Glasgow was voted as the second busiest  
arena in the world by Pollstar in January 2015. The venue  
accommodates 13,000 for conventions/exhibitions and  
concerts.  
• Five-star Luxury resort Gleneagles is converting one of its  
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Jodi Swailes, Senior Buyer  
ITA Group, West Des Moines, IA

Ireland  
Ireland is yet another stunningly beautiful destination  
steeped in history.  
Swailes took an incentive group with 80 attendees there in  
2013 for a five-night program.  
“The reason we like Ireland so much is because of the combi-
nation of the value and experiences that you get there,” she says.  
For example, she says, for another recent program, she was  
able to deliver a program to Ireland for less cost than a simi-
larly sized program in California.  
For the most recent program, Swailes selected Adare Manor  
Hotel & Golf Resort, which ranks as one of Ireland’s most cel-

Look at business from another perspective.

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We all know that as much business is done on the golf course as  
it is in the Board Room, and as the undisputed Home of Golf with  
over 570 courses, you’ll be spoilt for choice in Scotland.  
And it’s not just the championship courses in breathtaking  
surroundings that will inspire you. With a range of unique  
venues, we have your next event covered from all angles.  
And it’s never been easier to get here. So to find out  
more about hosting an event in Scotland, log onto  
conventionscotland.com/us  
Or perhaps that should be unconventional Scotland.
The historic Dublin City Hall, designed by Thomas Cooley. Passengers departing from Dublin and Shannon to the U.S. are pre-cleared by U.S. Customs & Immigration prior to the final destination.

The iconic Ulster Museum, conveniently located in Belfast. Cork City is set to have a new 6,000-seat convention center opening in February after an extensive renovation, just in time for its 105th birthday celebrations.

By definition, London is among the world’s most fascinating cities for American travelers because of its unique role in U.S. and world history. Dublin on January 1, 2015, located in the former Four Seasons Hotel Dublin. The hotel features 197 rooms including: "sauté gourmand" of lobster and truffled chicken quenelles from Alain Ducasse; a Peking Duck Station from China Tang; a sushi bar from Henry Brosi and more.

New and Noteworthy

According to Tourism Ireland, Aer Lingus will be operating direct flights from Washington Dulles International Airport to Dublin, effective May 1, 2015. Also, there is increased capacity on Aer Lingus flights from Boston, New York, Orlando and San Francisco to Ireland as well as a new trans-Atlantic business class featuring improved service, fine food and entertainment, and a lie-flat bed.

The most endless list of destination options, none is more time-tested or spectacular than Italy. But it’s a shorter trip. It’s easy to get to. You can also get some very good airfares because London is a major European hub. "London is also a great choice because there is so much to do. You can just walk out the front door of any hotel and have a great experience wherever you are. And you also get good value in London. For example the museums are free."

It surprises a lot of planners, Swailes says, to learn that Ireland delivers some of the best value in all of Europe. Her program also included three nights at Hotel Principe di Savoia. Participants will unearth truffles and enjoy a three-course, truffle-themed lunch.

Although 21st century Europe offers an almost endless list of destination options, none is more time-tested or spectacular than Italy. Especially hotels and castles in Tuscany. For example, Castello di Casole is a restored Italian castle on a country estate in Tuscany, which features 28 restored and reconstructed Tuscan farmhouses and a 41-suite boutique hotel complete with a world-class spa and wellness center, swimming pool, pizzeria, stylish bar, fine-dining restaurant and unique meeting spaces.

Swailes uses London at least once a year for an incentive program.

Her hotels of choice include Grosvenor House, a JW Marriott Hotel, and the new Rosewood London.

"One of the reasons some clients like London is that they’re traveling to Europe, but they don’t have to travel too far or for too long,” Swailes says. “It’s a shorter trip. It’s easy to get to. You can also get some very good airfares because London is a major European hub.

"London is also a great choice because there is so much to do. You can just walk out the front door of any hotel and have a great experience wherever you are. And you also get good value in London. For example the museums are free."

New and Noteworthy

In addition, a wave of new hotel development and infrastructure construction that took place in advance of the 2012 Summer Olympics has made London particularly attractive for groups. And many of the facilities built for the Olympics, such as Olympic Park, are now being re-engineered into ongoing multipurpose venues that are perfectly suited for meetings and conferences.

The Goring, a family-owned luxury Belgravia hotel, reopened in February after an extensive renovation, just in time for its 105th birthday celebrations. The reopening also saw the arrival of a fleet of handsome footmen, channeling “Downton Abbey” luxury and true-blue aristocratic service. The footmen, in full regalia, will be on hand to fulfill every wish of The Goring’s guests.

The Goring was opened in 1910. In its second century, it is now the only five-star luxury hotel in London that is owned and run by the family who built it.

The hotels of the Dorchester Collection provide novel incentive offers with engaging and memorable experiences across the globe. For example, a private Kitchen Party at the 250-room The Dorchester, for up to 120 guests with a front-row perspective on one of the most highly regarded culinary operations in London. Guests will be personally escorted through staff service doors to the “back of the house” arrayed in color schemes of the client’s choosing. Additional options such as personalized aprons for cooking challenges also can be arranged. Menu highlights include: “sauté gourmand” of lobster and truffled chicken quenelles from Alain Ducasse; a Peking Duck Station from China Tang; a sushi bar from Henry Brosi and more.

At Coworth Park, Dorchester Collection’s 70-room country house hotel in Ascot, active and adventurous guests can engage in a variety of truly entertaining outdoor experiences. Duck Herding is offered for groups of all sizes and begins after guests are given a brief history and introduction of the sport. They are then paired with highly trained Welsh collies to work together and guide lively gangs of Indian runner ducks through an easy obstacle course.

Italy

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Swailes says, “I think one of the things people love most about Ireland is really getting to know the people there. But you also get fabulous scenery and won- derful food. It’s a great experience. But it’s really the people of Ireland that make it a special experience, because they’re so warm and welcoming.”

She also uses Dublin as a destination. There, her favorite hotels include the Shelbourne Dublin Hotel, a Renaissance property. “It’s a very nice five-star hotel located right in the heart of Dublin,” Swailes says. Her program also included three nights at Hotel Principe di Savoia. Participants will unearth truffles and enjoy a three-course, truffle-themed lunch.

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Swailes says, “I think one of the things people love most about Ireland is really getting to know the people there. But you also get fabulous scenery and wonderf...
In the past, people tended to think of Budapest as dark and dreary, primarily as a result of the perception that it was a Communist country,” Swailes says. “But once you go there, you realize it’s an incredible city with the Danube River running through the middle of it. It’s also incredibly clean.”

The Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace is her go-to hotel in Budapest. “It’s a very beautiful property,” Swailes says. “I’d say it’s one of the top hotels in all of Europe. It also has an excellent location, so you just walk out the front door and there are the restaurants, cafes, and shops.”

Budapest also features world-class wineries and unique off-site venues of all sizes.

“Another nice thing about Budapest is that it’s easy to combine it with Vienna, Austria, another city located along the Danube and one that also offers unique history and culture, like the history of classical music and opera.”

Turkey

Another destination that is gaining popularity simply because it represents something strikingly new and different when it comes to incentive destinations is Turkey. Turkey also has made extensive investments in new infrastructure aimed at attracting groups. For example, the country’s first and only mixed-use project, the Zorlu Center in Istanbul, includes a luxury hotel, a major performing arts center and an ultramodern shopping mall.

Istanbul also now enjoys status as one of the best of the world Heritage centers by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It earned the honor based on its important landmarks such as Topkapi Palace, one of the most important historical sites from the Ottoman Empire.

Major Istanbul hotels include the Hilton Istanbul Bomonti Hotel and Conference Center. JW Marriott Hotels & Resorts will open its second JW Marriott Hotel in Turkey on May 15. The 107-room property is located in the picturesque town of Yalikavak on the Bodrum Peninsula with panoramic views of the Aegean Sea, combining the alluring charm of the Turkish coast with JW Marriott’s contemporary design and intuitive service.

JW Marriott Bodrum will offer exceptional dining experiences in an array of restaurants and bars; the spa will offer an extensive selection of 24 treatment rooms, a salt room and traditional Turkish baths. Additional hotel facilities will include two outdoor pools, one indoor pool, a ballroom and five meeting rooms. JW Marriott Bodrum also will offer a unique space for alfresco events overlooking one of the peninsula’s most beautiful bays. JW Marriott Ankara was the brand’s first hotel in Turkey. JW Marriott Bodrum is the brand’s seventh property in Europe.

The city also offers an astonishing array of unique, smaller local properties that rank as one-of-a-kind architectural wonders. Radisson Blu has opened a new property in the ancient Pera Taksim district, and Wyndham Hotel Group has developed two new properties, including the Wyndham Izmir Ozdilek, which overlooks tranquil Izmir Bay.

Adams, CPIM, CEF; the director of engagement for Dittman Incentive Marketing in New Jersey. Hotels such as The Westin Palace, Madrid feature uniquely European style and Old World charm but have a clear understanding of the needs and expectations of international business events, with menus designed to appeal to an American palate. And just outside the door, the city offers a world of options for excursions and unforgettable off-site events, from the Prado Museum to the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium, home of Real Madrid, she says.

The Westin Palace, Madrid offers the most modern meeting facilities in downtown Madrid. Espacio Palace opened last year and is the largest five-star conference facility in the heart of the Spanish capital. The largest ballroom can accommodate up to 800 guests.

The new meeting rooms overlook Madrid’s renowned Neptune fountain, which inspired the design — an aquatic motif is reflected in the furniture, carpets and lighting, while both neutral and metallic finishes enhance the contemporary look of the function rooms. High ceilings, rooms offering full daylight, and an elegant but practical design are features of the complex that reflect the culture of innovation and style of Westin.

Hungary

Although it was caught up in the regional conflicts in the Balkans that dominated the 1990s, Budapest has emerged as a hot destination for incentive programs because of its unique history and exotic beauty.

More and more global organizations and associations are making the decision to Meet in Ireland, where working hard and an easy-going nature go hand in hand. Where else can you find state-of-the-art conference facilities and cutting edge professionalism amongst a young and vibrant population?

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On The Move

Heidi Bergos was named director of sales and marketing at Hotel Irvine in Irvine, California. She was previously director of sales and marketing for Laguna Cliffs Resort & Spa, Dana Point, California.

Suzette Deveau was named vice president of sales and marketing, the Americas, for Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group. She will join the group’s New York corporate office from Mandarin Oriental, Geneva, where she was director of sales and marketing.

Barry Brown has been named as vice president of sales and marketing for The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs, Colorado. A 30-year veteran of the hospitality industry, Brown most recently was regional director of sales and marketing for KSL Resorts where he oversaw Hotel del Coronado, Beach Village at The Del in Coronado, California, and Omni La Costa Resort and Spa in Carlsbad, California. In addition, Joshua Garcia was named national sales director for the Northeast region. He was director of sales and catering for Ameristar Casino Resort in Black Hawk, Colorado.

The Founders Inn and Spa in Virginia Beach, Virginia, has named Melissa Georges as director of sales and marketing. She previously worked for The Founders Inn and Spa for nine years as a senior sales manager.

The Wyndham New Yorker Hotel in New York City has named Joseph Sanchez as associate director of sales. He most recently was senior group sales manager at InterContinental New York Times Square.

La Quinta Resort & Club, a Waldorf Astoria Resort in La Quinta, California, has appointed Justin Ely as director of sales. He was director of group sales for The Fairmont Newport Beach in California.

Heidi Bergos
Suzette Deveau
Barry Brown
Melissa Georges
Joseph Sanchez
Justin Ely

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