Blue Man Group led the way for today’s trends in out-of-the-box entertainment.
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Attendees of the Natural Products Expo West welcomed the warm Southern California morning with a sun salutation during a yoga class on March 11, 2016, in the Grand Plaza in front of the Anaheim Convention Center. visitanaheim.org/cit

Meeting pros share their predictions for 2017.  PAGE 14
Playing to Your Audience

No matter what your opinion is or whether or not you voted for him, President Donald J. Trump has an enviable attribute. One that may have helped catapult him to the top office in the land. Trump the entertainer reigns supreme. He knows how to play to his audience and engage his fans and supporters. His rallies around the country, which continue to this day as part of his “USA Thank You” Tour, give him a stage to try out his material much like a comedian might do on late-night television. When Trump connects with his audience, he drives home the message and simply repeats the winning material time after time. Event pros are always on the lookout for a celebrity, a larger-than-life personality, an amusing master showman who entertains, motivates and inspires. What’s more, the entertainment must appeal to all segments of the audience. Event pros should develop a strategic, comprehensive plan and consider the savvy advice from planners in our cover story “Entertainment by Design: Deliver a Personal, Interactive Experience That’s the Right Fit for Your Demographics and Event Theme,” on page 20.

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Royal Caribbean International Opens Sailings to Cuba

MIAMI, FL — Royal Caribbean International’s newly revitalized Empress of the Seas will make history for the cruise line with its first visit to Cuba during a five-night sailing departing Miami on April 19, 2017. The ship will then reposition to Tampa offering two itineraries with calls to Havana on April 30 (seven-night sailing) and May 20 (five-night sailing). Empress of the Seas will homeport in Tampa for the 2017 summer season offering a series of four- and five-night sailings, including port calls to destinations in Cuba. While in Cuba, guests will explore Old Havana — a UNESCO World Heritage site — some of the city’s most notable squares, historic neighborhoods, a local artesian market, Havana’s rum museum as well as Hemingway’s former residence and favorite haunts.

www.royalcaribbean.com/cuba

United Sets Course to Be Best Airline for Employees, Customers and Investors

CHICAGO, IL — United Airlines presented to its investors November 15 plans for long-term earnings growth through a number of strategic initiatives across the airline. These initiatives include improving network connectivity and revenue management, broadening product segmentation and introducing additional customer enhancements. Along with maintaining disciplined cost control, this strategy is expected to generate $4.8 billion in earnings improvements by 2020.

To further meet customers’ needs and provide more options to price-sensitive travelers, the company announced the introduction of Basic Economy fares. This new offering provides customers the option of paying the lowest fares to their destinations, while still receiving the same standard economy class experience, including food, beverage, WiFi and personal device entertainment, with a few key differences. Customers who choose Basic Economy will be assigned seats on boarding group five and be permitted only one personal carry-on item on board. Complete details on Basic Economy can be found at www.united.com/basiceconomy.

In addition to Basic Economy, United will continue to offer Economy Plus and domestic first class, and introduced its reimagined international premium travel experience, United Polaris, on December 1. The company is evaluating a new offering to provide customers the added benefit for customers and employees of simplifying the boarding process, as fewer customers will bring overhead bags on board. Complete details on Economy Plus can be found at www.united.com/economyplus.

Meetings Yield Healthy Return on Investment for Small Business Owners

WASHINGTON, DC — Small business owners report that in-person meetings facilitate and enhance their ability to innovate, engage and collaborate, according to a new survey released by the national coalition Meetings Mean Business (MMB). As a result, 91 percent of small business owners plan to spend as much or more on travel for meetings in 2017 as they did in 2016.

“The small business owner community is a critical contributor to our economy, and in-person meetings help this community make the most out of their investments,” said Richard Harper, executive vice president at HelmsBriscoe and co-chair of Meetings Mean Business. “MMB’s survey illustrates that small business owners who connect with current and potential customers face-to-face build stronger partnerships that ultimately grow their bottom line.”

The survey shows that small business owners believe their most important business activities are more effective face-to-face, and they say professional development and productivity are improved by in-person meetings. Seven in 10 consider offline meetings a high priority, and more than half consider in-person trainings and continued education classes a priority as well.

Small business owners in the technology sector place an even higher value on connecting face-to-face. Seventy-five percent of tech small business owners place a high priority on attending networking events, and 81 percent prioritize participation in industry conferences and trade shows.

“In-person meetings help organizations build connections, create business opportunities and engage with their communities,” says Michael Dominguez, senior vice president and chief sales officer for MGM Resorts International and co-chair of Meetings Mean Business. “Small business owners want to know their investments are creating value and recognize that in-person meetings add that value in crucial ways that remote meetings simply cannot. Small business owners are careful about spending their dollars, so this continued investment in face-to-face meetings illustrates just how crucial they are.”

It’s no surprise that 85 percent of small business owners and 88 percent of tech owners say in-person meetings and face-to-face events are important to the health of their businesses.

www.meetingsmeanbusiness.com
Caesars Entertainment and Rewards Network Partner to Launch Total Rewards Dining

LAS VEGAS, NV — Caesars Entertainment and Rewards Network, the leading operator of dining rewards programs, launch Total Rewards Dining for loyalty members. By dining at more than 11,000 participating restaurants, bars and clubs nationwide, Total Rewards Dining members earn Reward Credits that are redeemable at Caesars Entertainment-owned resorts, retail outlets, restaurants and spas.

Individuals can learn more and enroll in Total Rewards Dining by visiting www.totalrewardsdining.com. For a limited time, Total Rewards Dining members will earn three Reward Credits — an increase of two points — for every dollar they spend at participating restaurants, bars and clubs. Members simply register their credit or debit cards and pay for their meals at program restaurants and instantly begin earning points. The process is simple and seamless, with no additional loyalty cards to remember.

In addition, Total Rewards Dining members who also are Total Rewards Visa cardholders have extra incentives to dine. Every dollar spent at participating restaurants will earn them five Reward Credits — up from the standard three — for an introductory period.

“Rewards Network offers something no other company can provide — rewards for dining at a nationwide network of leading restaurants,” said Bob Morse, president of hospitality initiatives for Caesars Entertainment. “We are thrilled to offer our loyalty members such unparalleled restaurant offerings through Total Rewards Dining, in addition to all the other benefits and opportunities they enjoy at our resorts every day.” www.caesars.com

Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort Transforms Dolphin Resort Lobby

ORLANDO, FL — The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort’s Dolphin lobby will undergo a $12 million redesign as the final stage of the largest makeover in the Orlando resort’s history. When finished in the fall of 2017, the new lobby will be completely transformed into a sleek contemporary space and feature new dining and beverage options.

The $140 million project also includes the transformation of all 2,267 guest rooms, along with upgrades to the hotel’s meeting space. Other new features will include a new geometric ceiling, increased lighting, all new contemporary decor and furnishings and more than double the amount of seating. Two new food and beverage options will be incorporated into the lobby, including a bar and lounge space seating up to 150 guests.

The Dolphin Resort lobby will remain open throughout the renovation with minimal impact to resort guests. The project is currently scheduled to begin in spring 2017 for completion by fall 2017. www.swandolphin.com

Growth Predicted for Global MICE Industry in 2017

BARCELONA — The Trends Watch report by ibtm events’ annual ibtm world predicts growth for the global MICE industry in 2017, despite the turbulent geopolitical and economic environment. The 12th edition of the report, authored by Dr. Rob Davidson, managing director of MICE Knowledge, makes forecasts for the industry’s performance in 2017. Davidson said, “Given this year’s political roller coaster, with the result of the EU referendum and the U.S. election, there is a strong probability that in 2017 our industry will be once more obliged to show that it is capable of prospering in the face of new challenges, some of them as yet unknown. We are much better placed to respond to these challenges now than at any other time in our history, as our industry is now robustly underpinned by widespread professionalism and a sound education and training system that supports the industry’s existing and future professionals.”

Pointing to a quiet optimism towards global economic performance, Davidson’s analysis predicts that cost per attendee per day, as well as group sizes will increase in almost all world regions. In the U.S., there is growing expectation that 2017 will bring a change in the balance of power from sellers to buyers. www.ibtmworld.com

SITE Global Conference — More than 300 attendees from 31 countries discussed important issues, traded best practices and took a deep dive into the culture during the SITE Global Conference in Panama. “Connecting Worlds” took place in November in the colorful and richly historic country of Panama at The Westin Playa Bonita in Panama City. For more information about 2017 events, please visit www.siteglobal.com.
When Event Planning Meets Marketing

By Kate Vasiloff

When Event Planning Meets Marketing

One-half (49 percent) of event planners report the marketing departments at their respective companies are always or often involved in the planning and execution of events, and an overwhelming majority find value in this type of partnership. This comes from new research from the GBTA Foundation, the education and research arm of the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), in partnership with Cvent. The new research report explores the prevalence and types of collaboration between event planners and marketing departments in the planning and execution of company events. Where such collaboration exists, the study explores the origins, structure, benefits and best practices for this relationship. Where it does not exist, the research investigates reasons for not pursuing such a collaboration.

The study is based on 10 one-on-one, in-depth, phone interviews with individuals with large-scale event-planning responsibilities who reside and work in North America. In addition, a supplemental online survey of 157 travel buyers in North America who have some level of involvement in planning or overseeing meetings or events for their organization was fielded in February.

Wearing Many Hats

Many organizations across all industries host large-scale events or meetings requiring hours of planning and coordination. While these responsibilities can fall on the shoulders of full-time event planners within a company, more often than not, an employee who wears many hats, such as a travel manager, may take this on. Because event planning is usually not a primary responsibility, stepping into such a role can be challenging and event planners are often forced to come up with creative solutions to close skill or knowledge gaps in order to plan and execute successful events.

Meetings and events usually have a number of objectives set by multiple people or departments within an organization, such as attendee or revenue goals, the number of leads generated or the amount of educational content delivered. It is the event planner’s goal to deliver an experience that satisfies all objectives, which takes careful planning and prioritization.

More than half (53 percent) of event planners feel setting objectives is important. They set objectives to support overall business goals in the most important factor to consider when planning a meeting or event. About one in five (19 percent) feel planning logistics or thinking about the ROI or event’s objectives is the most important aspect. Looking beyond logistics, only six percent of event planners feel the design and content of a meeting or event is the most important part of planning, but that does not make it any less vital to the success of an event. It is possible this area is less familiar to event planners, its value is not as readily understood or reported, leading them to look beyond themselves and their department to help close this gap.

Event planners and marketers have very specialized, but very different skill sets. While event planners excel at arranging logistics and many other areas of meetings and events, they may not be the best equipped to design email templates, registration pages and the like. Marketing team members may have a better handle on what messaging will attract attendees or what look and feel will support or perpetuate a company’s image and brand consistency. Grabbing the attention of potential attendees and ultimately converting that interest into registered attendees is a vital part of any event’s success. This is where collaboration across departments comes into play and can help companies enhance the success of their meetings and events.

Cross-Company Collaboration

Among those currently collaborating within their companies, event planning and marketing teams do so throughout the lifecycle of an event’s planning, execution and debrief. When you look at the opportunities for collaboration, currently the highest level of collaboration (59 percent) is around email communication. During the planning stages of the event, marketing teams and event planners frequently work together to determine the event’s theme (49 percent), logo (49 percent) and color scheme (37 percent). A majority continue to work together onsite with signage (54 percent), but collaboration drops off when it comes to post-event communications (41 percent) and the event debrief (33 percent), showing opportunities to continue collaboration to determine event success. Like any cross-company collaboration, getting to a good working relationship often comes with challenges along the way including lack of communication, control issues, budget constraints, timeline delays and lack of alignment on marketing event goals with meetings program guidelines.

Communication issues can be resolved by identifying a person from each department to be the main point of contact to avoid any confusion. Securing buy-in from company leadership and formalizing partnerships can help avoid control issues. Tracking meeting and event spend, including marketing materials, allows for greater understanding of the volume of resources used in an event and can set a company up for more successful collaboration between marketing and event planning teams, establishing clear lines of communication, demonstrating an openness to fresh ideas and accounting for time and money spent is a good place to start. By having constant alignment across SMM (Strategic Meetings Management) programs, marketing and communications teams, companies can deliver consistent messaging and maintain the integrity of their brand across all platforms. Above all, team members should respect each other for their strengths and unique talents each brings to the collaboration table.

Kate Vasiloff is Research Manager at the GBTA Foundation, the research and education arm of the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA). As such, Kate is responsible for developing and managing partner research studies on a variety of business travel-related topics. Prior to working for GBTA, Kate conducted public opinion polling for political, non-profit organizations. She holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Virginia and is currently pursuing a master’s degree in Survey Methodology from the University of Connecticut.
2017 Travel and Hospitality Outlook

Leading industry experts gathered in mid-November at the Travel Trends Summit to discuss 2017 trends. Held at NeueHouse Madison Square in New York City and hosted by the Magrino Agency — a lifestyle public relations agency for brands in hospitality, consumer and luxury goods, food, wine and spirits — the inaugural Travel Trends Summit issued its forecast for 2017 trends in luxury travel and hospitality.

The summit was moderated by Susan Magrino, chairman and CEO of Magrino Agency, and Allyn Magrino, president and COO of Magrino Agency. The event brought together the industry’s top leaders to discuss the factors that are shaping travel trends for the coming year, including millennial preferences, technology integration, social media and the luxury customer. The panels of experts included:

- Nikheel Advani, co-founder, COO and principal, Grace Bay Resorts
- Jack Eaton, president and partner, Ovation Travel
- Alex Glasscock, CEO and co-founder, The Ranch
- Matthew Kenney, chef and founder, Matthew Kenney Cuisine
- Peter Jon Lindberg, director of inspiration, Conrad Hotels & Resorts
- Judy Stein, co-president, Ovation Vacations
- Kat Tanita, blogger, With Love from Kat
- Charlotte Voisey, director of brand advocacy and portfolio mixologist, William Grant & Sons
- Alexandra Walterspiel, CEO and co-founder, Imprint Hospitality (management company for El San Juan Hotel)
- Brian Young, managing director, Castle Hill Inn

This event came together in an effort to create an environment that invites influential leaders to engage in thought-provoking conversations,” says Allyn Magrino. “We wanted to fill a void by sourcing input on today’s trends from the experts in the industry who are actually on the front lines.”

The Millennial Mindset

According to Jack Eaton, head of the global travel agency Ovation Vacations in New York City, millennials can no longer be looked upon as young travelers between the ages of 18 and 24. In fact, he says, being a millennial is a much more diverse mindset. “We define that group by their behaviors,” Eaton adds. “For the first time, we’re seeing parents trying to act like kids rather than kids trying to act like their parents.” He says once businesses can move beyond the misconception of age, they will find a wide demographic of travelers who share similar interests and needs.

Wi-Fi is King

In the world of ever-evolving technology, there is one belief that holds true, according to the panelists: “Wi-Fi and bandwidth are like hot water and plumbing,” states Brian Young, managing director of the boutique Castle Hill Inn in Newport, Rhode Island. “Wi-Fi is a utility, and it’s basic to the guest experience.”

Beyond Wi-Fi, experts also note that simplicity is key when exploring new technologies. “If it’s just technology for technology’s sake it becomes a distraction,” says Alexandra Walterspiel, CEO and co-founder of the hotel management firm Imprint Hospitality, with offices in Denver and Chicago. To explain further, the panelists note the rise of certain off-brand options for luxury guests. “We are reading and hearing so much about the keyless entry. In the luxury segment, I think it’s a ‘must,’” Eaton explains. “You need to make your staff more efficient to connect with guests.”

Young supported this sentiment, noting “remote check-in or mobile kiosks miss the basic human connection that anyone is who is a traveling guest needs to have — and it’s just not luxury.”

Airbnb Is Here to Stay

Airbnb, the three-house sharing network valued at $30 billion, is a hot topic within the travel industry and one that is not likely to fade away. For Nikheel Advani, COO of the luxury Grace Bay Resorts in Turks & Caicos, the competition from home rentals is a challenge hoteliers must embrace.

Noting that the company has filled an obvious void in the industry, Advani stresses that businesses need to study the behavior patterns of their guests to make themselves stronger. “We need to listen to our customers, and if we cannot satisfy them, someone else will.”

Food and Beverage Is Guiding Travel Plans

When choosing a destination that meets their needs, experts say food is the motivating factor. Guests are constantly researching notable restaurants, award-winning vineyards and trendsetting bars to experience during their travels. “Food and beverage is the No. 1 priority in terms of every type of trip planned,” said Judy Stein, co-president of Ovation Vacations.

There also is an interactive, culturally immersive element to the food experience. Young says restaurants are flipping the table on the “farm-to-table” trend bringing guests directly to the farm, whether it is truffle hunting in Tuscany or catching your own clams off the coast of Newport.

Peter Jon Lindberg, an award-winning travel writer who has explored culinary destinations around the world, notes there also is a return to fine dining after years of casualization. “There’s a certain specialness that’s coming back.” This manifests equally in the storied hotel bar, which has seen a renaissance alongside the continued rise of cocktail culture. “The hotel bar is the pinnacle of our industry,” says Charlotte Voisey, director of brand advocacy and portfolio mixologist for William Grant & Sons. “There is a sense of occasion about them, which inspires the new generation.” The hotel mini-bar is another place where innovation is seen, containing a more discerning collection of offerings, since people are becoming more aware of what they are consuming.

To that end, wellness also has played a part in people’s culinary decisions. Today, guests are more informed than ever about the food they eat. “There is a megatrend with diners being more conscious of the ingredients on the menu,” said Judy Stein, co-president of Ovation Vacations. “Food and beverage is the No. 1 priority in terms of what they are consuming.”

In regards to negative reviews, Alex Glasscock, who co-founded The Ranch, a healthy lifestyle brand, says social media allows companies to showcase their brand’s integrity in a genuine manner.

“Occasionally we have someone who writes something that is not favorable. We address those people by being authentic, and we are consistent in how we respond to those comments.”

But the industry also has had to adapt to a tech-savvy generation of travelers. Voisey notes a demand has been placed on the hospitality industry to provide products that are Instagrammable. “It used to be favorable to have a drink consumed while it’s still live — meaning seconds after it’s freshly prepared — whereas now, we’re tasked with making sure it can withstand a full minute of perennial Instagramming.”

“I think [Instagram] is a megatrend that’s here to stay, and it’s always been a megatrend that younger travelers demand,” says Matthew Kenney. “But I think there’s more of a need to make sure that this is going to be a trend that extends beyond ‘just having the hippest restaurant.’”

“We need to know how to respond to Instagram, not just feed — our guests.” — Chef Matthew Kenney

The Impact of Social Media

Experts agree word of mouth is one of the strongest promotional tools with social media networks giving voice to the consumer, while also allowing brands to connect directly with their guests.

“It’s a tremendous way of storytelling and sharing a brand ethos,” says Kenney. “Before companies could only rely on media to tell their story.”

When social media is present, they can sometimes become overwhelmed sifting through sites such as Yelp and TripAdvisor to find the best recommendations. They struggle to find sources they can trust.

“There’s a part of me that misses this expert that was the conduit to your knowledge,” he says. “It’s mindboggling how much information we have to sort through.”

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2017 Travel and Hospitality Outlook

By Susan Magrino and Allyn Magrino

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Trends

RevPAR growth is expected in all of the Top 25 markets except Houston. The continued strength of the hotel industry means that planners will have to contend with an ongoing seller’s market. “Even though hotels are experiencing similar occupancy percentages for 2017, I think the rates are still going to go up,” notes Jennifer C. Squeglia, CMP, owner of RLC Events Inc., based in Warwick, Rhode Island. “I think it will be a seller’s market for quite a while. It’ll swing back some time, just not terribly soon.” Squeglia reports no decrease in bookings among her clients, and indeed there is evidence that many corporations are increasing their meeting budgets.

Contending With the Ongoing Seller’s Market

On the positive side, there are well-known strategies that give planners leverage, and which will continue to be critical next year. “The more flexibility with dates you can bring to your hotel partner, the better your chances of negotiating a better deal, says Squeglia. “For example, if it’s a short-term window and you’re filling a hole (in the hotel’s schedule), I think the planner is in a very good position.” She also recommends negotiating other line items, such as discounted internet in the meeting space or suite upgrades.

“That’s one thing the hotel can do without losing a ton of revenue. However, the 1-per-40 comp is becoming more like 1 per 45 or 1 per 50,” Squeglia adds. Sharon L. Schenk, CMP, is the director of conventions and event management at ECC Global Partners Inc., the umbrella company for 13 different businesses, the largest being Carpet One Floor & Home. Schenk cites the approach of signing multiyear contracts with the same hotel company or property whenever possible to increase leverage.

“Our meeting budgets have had to increase with the rising prices of F&B and sleeping rooms,” observes Maggie Johnston, CMP, vice president, meetings, with Assurex Global. “I attend numerous industry events, and I have been hearing from many other planners that investment in meetings is increasing in almost every company.” Johnston says she expects the seller’s market to continue past 2017. “I am now negotiating and signing contracts for 2018, and I have not seen any changes in the rising sleeping room rates or availability at the hotels. If anything, it has been more difficult to find available hotels in the price range that I need for my groups.”

The challenge is not automatically removed by selecting a second-tier city, as a strong seller’s market is in effect at some of those destinations as well, with Austin and Nashville being prime examples.

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SMM More Valuable Than Ever

In a market with rising costs, strategic meetings management programs (SMMs) are especially useful. They provide centralized control over a company's meetings spend, informing decisions about where to cut costs as well as which suppliers to drive volume toward, thereby gaining leverage. “One of the obvious advantages of deploying SMM is the visibility of what you’re spending on your travel and meetings dollars on,” says Kari Wendel, SMMC, senior director, global SMM strategy and solutions, Carlson Wagonlit Travel Meetings & Events. “We’ve definitely seen a more intense focus on strategies to mitigate the realities of a seller’s market, and interest in SMM from clients of every size.”

While it takes time and effort to bring an SMMP to full maturity, where all of a company’s offices and departments are on board with the program, benefits can certainly be derived with each step in implementation. “One of the most common starting points is venue sourcing and contracting, which drives 60+ percent of the savings opportunity and starts to get you some pretty meaningful data,” Wendel notes. Getting buy-in on these programs continues to be a challenge at some companies, she adds. “As a consultant I’ve come into companies where they’ve got that champion (of the SMMP) identified, but their ability to get the champion to action is still a challenge,” she says. “It’s about business case development and being able to speak the language of the C-suite.”

CSR on the Rise

When planners merge corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities with meetings, they’re speaking the language of millennials, who increasingly important complements to meetings, business sessions remain at the core of these events. And the quality of the presentations is what delivers ROI for the sessions. Presenters have come to understand that in order to really engage their audience, particularly the Gen Y set, they need to be as interactive as possible, and avoid “death by PowerPoint.”

Engaging Millennials

While CSR and wellness activities are increasingly important complements to meetings, business sessions remain at the core of these events. And the quality of the presentations is what delivers ROI for the sessions. Presenters have come to understand that in order to really engage their audience, particularly the Gen Y set, they need to be as interactive as possible, and avoid “death by PowerPoint.”

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“Attendees are so much more knowledgeable about food now with multiple TV channels dedicated to it,” Squeglia observes. “They are more interested in food that’s local, that hasn’t been frozen, cage-free eggs, etc. Tapping into (cuisine that’s) indicative of the destination is also important.” According to Johnston, “During our annual wellness meeting I work with the chef at the hotel to provide healthy meals such as a salad bar and fruit smoothies. We also offer an early morning yoga session.”

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“Presenters now know that they can’t sit up there an hour and a half with a bunch of slides; people aren’t engaged in that,” says Squeglia. “I’m also finding the presentations are shorter, sometimes as short as 10 minutes. TED Talks have had a huge influence on how people are programming their agendas now: briefer and more interactive presentations with lots of video.”

The interactivity is often facilitated by mobile apps. Just one example is Poll Everywhere, an app that allows audience members to reply to the presenter’s questions in real time using mobile phones, Twitter or web browsers. The results are then displayed in PowerPoint. “We have been using Poll Everywhere for the past two years,” says Johnston. “I have found it to enhance presentations and engage the audience.”

Raising the Planner’s Profile

Most of the trends cited above were not in place two years ago, and just as the meetings industry has evolved, so has meeting planning as a profession. Education has been one key to that progress. Schenk transitioned from an executive secretarial position to meeting planner jobs, and earning her CMP in 2001 helped to distinguish her skillset. “The CMP kind of emphasizes the fact that just because you can plan your wedding or a family get-together doesn’t mean you can do conferences and conventions, negotiate contracts and understand what’s going on in a general session in terms of production and technology,” she explains. Her participation in MPI member events was another source of “great education” and helped her grow in the profession, she says.

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I worked at a financial services company, and the money that I saved in negotiations effectively paid my salary.”

In contrast to the more general CMP and CMM, planner certification programs in recent times have been developed to target specific skillsets, such as MPI’s Healthcare Meetings Compliance Certificate (HMCC) and Sustainable Meeting Professional Certificate (SMPC). That trend will likely continue. In late 2017, SITE expects to roll out a certification program aimed at mid-level incentive travel professionals. “We completed the job analysis earlier this year, and it gave us a validation of the 14 competencies that incentive travel professionals need to be able to become experts at,” says Hinton. “As part of that, we recognize there is a need for some kind of mid-level certification program, so we’re in the process of developing a program aimed at the manager or director level incentive professional.”

The Impact of the Trump Presidency

Corporate America has come to appreciate the professional meeting planner, but will the American economy and political climate continue to support a healthy investment in offsite meetings and group travel? While it is too early to predict with confidence the effect the new administration will have on the industry, planners can certainly express their hopes that the outcome will be positive. “What I would carefully say is that I am hopeful that Trump’s business acumen will shine through and come to fruition for the economy in general, which can help the meetings industry,” says Wendel. And the fact that Trump’s business is largely the hotel business suggests that he understands the economic value of meetings and events. “Says Hinton, “Trump has an international hotel brand, and they have plans to be a 30-hotel brand in a couple years. They certainly are targeting the meeting and incentive sector.”

Of course, perceiving meetings as a valuable source of clientele and seeing them as important to large-scale economies are separate things. But ideally, the first perspective will engender the second. “I would hope that as a hotelier, which he is, Trump would be sensitive to how important meetings and conventions are in domestic and international relations,” Schenk adds. “And that he would continue to support trade and international access and just making things as easy as possible for people to continue to meet face to face.”

The Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby will undergo a $12 million re-design, the final stage of a $140 million renovation project, the largest makeover in the resort’s history. It will be completely transformed into a sleek, contemporary space featuring new food and beverage options and offer an inviting area for guests to relax or network. A recipient of the prestigious Meetings & Conventions Hall of Fame Award, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. The resort offers more than 329,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 84 meeting rooms, and 2,267 guest rooms and suites which feature the Westin Heavenly® Bed. Attendees can also relax in the luxurious Mandara Spa, indulge in one of our 17 world-class restaurants and lounges or enjoy our unique Disney Differences.
Deliver a Personal, Interactive Experience That's the Right Fit for Your Demographics and Event Theme

by Design
By Patrick Simms

Many are the strategic elements to meeting planning, from site selection to budgeting to negotiation to marketing. But sourcing entertainment isn't typically thought of as among those elements: Book a generally appealing musical act to complement your reception or closing night, no strategic thinking required. However, if a planner wants every facet of the program to be engaging and achieve the highest possible overall ROI, entertainment should not be an afterthought,” as Jen Chauvin, CMP, puts it. “The success of entertainment has to come from a design perspective.”

Chauvin, senior director, marketing strategy and event management with Interstate Hotels & Resorts, plans conferences for the company’s hotel leaders that feature experiential atmospheres showcasing the latest trends in the meetings market. Entertainment acts are carefully selected to complement differently themed settings within the conference venue. “Even for something as simple as a reception, we’re always going to have some kind of atmospheric element, so it may be a small-stage piece of entertainment, and there are some events that have a networking or coffee hour afterward with entertainment,” she explains. For instance, a recent conference in Orlando featured a high-tech sensory area complemented by an avant-garde pairing of a DJ and a live percussionist. Thought also goes into the pacing of the entertainment: “I work to crescendo the entertainment throughout the night,” says Chauvin. “From a multi-stimuli perspective, you’re engaging different physical senses throughout different areas of the event, so that way it’s an evolving event.”

A different kind of strategic approach expresses the local destination via the entertainment, as opposed to a theme of the meeting. That’s especially appropriate if the attendees have limited free time to explore the culture outside of the hotel walls. “I try to incorporate the culture of the destination in the entertainment,” says Miriam Davis, partner with Los Angeles, California-based EventPro Productions, a company she founded in 2000. “So if the corporate event is the South Pacific, for example, I’ll bring in a group that will sing, dance and do fire dances and get people up to do the dancing. That spans the generations; everybody likes it.”

**Audience Demographics**

Entertainment also should be selected with audience demographics in mind, particularly the varying musical tastes of different generations. When the event includes several entertainment components, as Chauvin’s programs do, “multiple generations can be represented in the entertainment,” she says. But when there is one main act, it can be difficult to please a multigenerational or multicultural audience. It’s often wise to select generic entertainment that will not alienate any segment. Things are different when the demographics are more homogenous: “If I have an audience that’s mostly in their 50s and 80 percent male, I’ll bring in a Foreigner, Styx, Boston or some rock band from the ’80s, and they’re going to tear it up,” says Brad Bronenkamp, senior director of events for Dayton, Ohio-based Teradata. And while country is a hot genre today, Bronenkamp has found that with attendees over 50, “many times country is not going to resonate with them unless they grew up in the South.”

Bronenkamp has had success with acts such as Keith Urban and Imagine Dragons at Teradata’s incentive programs, and OneRepublic, The Band Perry, Dennis DeYoung (founding vocalist of Styx) and Foreigner at the annual convention. “We’re always looking for the big-ticket items, someone who can possibly make a difference in our attendance,” he explains.

**More Interaction**

But corporate audiences, especially in more recent times with the onset of the Rock and Roll Fantasy Camp, are looking for more than just a passive concertgoer’s experience. They want more interaction with the performers. A “meet and greet” before and/or after the performance is ideal, especially with big-name acts. “Some are really great about it,” says Bronenkamp. “We had Keith Urban in Paris for our incentive program this past year, and you talk about a down-to-earth, great guy. He was really interested in everybody that came in, talked to them for a few minutes about where they were from, what they liked and so on.”

The personal interaction even can happen during the performance. “At our partners conference we have sponsors for the band so they might get to do the
For one of my recent incentive clients, a was a part of that physical entertain with another one of the band members star of a very large rock group met the stage — so you're even worried about the Being Part of the Act ator of the Earth Harp, an instrument to complement music that was divided tenee volunteers, but the practice is tendee guests, and they played at the event. Being Part of the Act A different kind of interaction has audience members involved in the performance itself. Circus acts, jugglers, and magicians often are adept at using at-tendance volunteers, but the practice is less common with musicians. One example is William Close, cre-ator of the Earth Harp, an instrument whose strings extend throughout the performance venue. Interstate Hotels & Resorts featured Close at the company's annual awards ceremony as part of a “futuristic farm-to-table event.” The theme was the future of locally sourced food, and “in that atmosphere, I needed to complement music that was divided among our courses of meals,” Chauvin explains. “In the ballroom, our attend-ees actually sat among the Earth Harp. It was performed from the base of the stage, but the strings went back 300 feet across the room. Each of our attendees was part of that physical entertain-ment; the room wouldn’t sound the same without each of their contribu-tions in the vibration of that music.” Out-of-the-box acts like Close’s Earth Harp Collective are becoming more common in the corporate market these days, with highly innovative acts such as Cirque du Soleil and the Blue Man Group leading the way. Nicole Gallou, CEO of Washington, DC-based talent booking agency Pelonkey Inc, has provided her services to Interstate in the past. She observes, “People are really going more avant-garde today; they’re not afraid to push the envelope. There are so many different types of acts out there. Where-as a human lamp (a performer function-ing as a lamp) may not have gotten any花 on their resume. Performers are getting a lot more creative; they want to stand out and be different.” Keeping the Budget in Mind A disc jockey is just one option for planners on tighter entertainment bud-get. “In the corporate entertainment space there certainly are a lot of great resources,” Chauvin says. “For instance, I’ve hired talented bands that within an hour can take on two completely differ-ent looks,” thus delivering more bang for the buck. And sometimes the audience is aware it was the same group they saw and sometimes not. I’ve also worked in some markets with schools, bringing in a high school band that wants the expo-sure, for example. It’s an opportunity to give back to that market and also make a contribution to the school.” For planners who need a good deal on a name act, there are several ap-proaches to consider. One is to try to book an up-and-coming act while their price is still reasonable; a good booking agent can help to find these opportuni-ties. Once the band hits the big time and starts winning awards, attendees will be pleased to have experienced the act when their star was still rising. Many of Teradat’s meeting attend-ees had that experience with Imagine Dragons, One Republic and the Band Perry, all of whom now command much higher prices for corporate gigs, Bronen-kamp notes. “Another key — and this is where your agent comes in — is if you can ‘body shop’ the act you’re going to be in your event’s immediate vicinity. You can often get a better deal than what they usually offer because they’re there on a dark night anyway,” he explains. “When we had the Band Perry we were in Nashville, and they just happened to be home and did it for half of what they would charge anybody else.” Bronenkamp says that is also a comedian. “Such an indi-vidual can be off color, not just comedians. Comedians are especially important to ‘prep’ as their material may or may not be appropriate for the audience, and if it isn’t, the results will be unpleasant at best. “You have to know your crowd and what they’ll tolerate and what they won’t tolerate,” says Davis. “You have your ‘clean’ comedians and your off-color comedians. If I get a band-new client that asks me to get a comedian, I’ll discuss what they like and don’t like and who they’re bringing to the event.” When the Act Is a Mismatch first timers with the group. “I give a very detailed description of my audience and what my goals for the event are,” says Chauvin. “Because of the way I comple-xify my plan to the theme of the night with the entertainment, I work diligently to tel-l them about that and let them creatively play on the theme to see what ideas they have to contribute to it. Then I’m very specific from a production stand-point. We’re very locked into timing and into exactly what they’re going to look like. So I approve attire before we go on by way of pictures and playlist long before the event. An act that is practiced in the corpo-rate market should ask plenty of ques-tions, in addition to being interviewed by the planner. Definitely we ask, what are you trying to achieve with this event? What kind of atmosphere are you look-ing to create?” said Gallou. “Do you just want people to dance and have fun, or interact (with the performer) as well? Questions like that help us get a better understanding of what would work well for them.” Comedians are especially important to “prep” as their material may or may not be appropriate for the audience, and if it isn’t, the results will be unpleasant at best. “You have to know your crowd and what they’ll tolerate and what they won’t tolerate,” says Davis. “You have your ‘clean’ comedians and your off-color comedians. If I get a band-new client that asks me to get a comedian, I’ll discuss what they like and don’t like and who they’re bringing to the event. For example, I wouldn’t have Andrew Dice Clay at a family event or a religious event, but I might at some of my ‘all boys clubs.”
A “Rammy” restaurant awards show featured Nicole Gallub in character as DJ Neekola.

for the company’s incentive program in Sydney, Australia. “We wrote in the contract a ‘PG event,’ but they used profanity and it didn’t go over well. We probably had 80 percent of the people leave right when they opened up.”

For various reasons, booking the wrong act, or one that isn’t the best fit, “happens to all of us no matter how professional we are,” Davis has found. “You learn and you deal with it when it happens, and you make it a better situation if possible.” She relates an instructive case of an act that didn’t go over with a group due to a generational mismatch. “I had one corporate client that held an event in Las Vegas and the president said, ‘Miriam, we’re in Las Vegas, I want a Rat Pack group.’ I said, ‘I will find you the best Rat Pack imitators I can get you.’ This group was very well known, very hard to book and very expensive. The audience they were playing for were between the ages of 21 and 65. So we did the award ceremony and then we introduced the Rat Pack, beginning with Sammy Davis Jr. Davis notes that when she overheard one of the guests commenting to another, “Who’s that?” she thought, “We’re in trouble.” Sure enough, she relates, “It did not go over well, because a lot of these young people had no idea who the performers were supposed to be.”

Davis addressed the situation by first being up front with the performers. “I feel honesty is the best policy. I said, ‘Guys, I’m sorry but half the kids here don’t know who you are,’ and they completely understood. ‘The senior executives know who you are, why don’t you go mingle with them in character?’ So they mingled and took pictures; they didn’t stay the whole time.”

She then had the DJ who was playing background music take over the entertainment, and the attendees ended up enjoying themselves. “So if you are leery of how an act will be received, have a backup in place, have a plan B,” Davis advises.

With a strategic approach to booking entertainment, a planner will seldom need to resort to a plan B. Occasionally a senior executive may call for an act that does not end up being appropriate, but apart from such scenarios, a planner can take confidence in an entertainer who has been matched to carefully considered audience demographics and event theme, and who delivers a personalized, interactive experience. The experience may well be memorable enough to market to potential attendees with photography or video. “We want to show it off and say, ‘Look what you missed,’” says Bronenkamp. “When they see an incentive trip where you have a Keith Urban and you’re in Paris, that’s a pretty good sell.”
Diversity is the name of the game within the mid-Atlantic region. Along with a wealth of properties well-suited for events of all sizes, the region has much to offer meeting participants. Not only does it include some of the nation’s major population centers with their attendant cultural attractions, but it also features everything from popular oceanside casino resorts to historic sites going back to the Civil War, colonial times and more.

Atlantic City

Once known primarily for its gambling, Atlantic City now offers a more diversified profile. Today it boasts an attractive combination of casino hotels and non-gaming hotels, with an inventory of well more than 15,000 rooms.

“Atlantic City, with its world-famous boardwalk, gaming, fine dining and world-class entertainment has become one of the most popular destinations of the entire mid-Atlantic region,” says Jim Wood, president and CEO of Meet AC. “There is something here for just about everyone.”

For Judy Fishman, who plans conferences for owners and managers of dental laboratories in her capacity as president of LMT Communications, Atlantic City has proven itself a great option. She recently held a highly successful conference in Atlantic City for more than 900 people with connections to the dental lab industry. Having held previous meetings in New York City, she was pleasantly surprised with the new location.

“I was really reluctant to leave New York City, but when we got there I saw how nice it was,” she says. “It wasn’t as much of a gambling town as it has been, and there weren’t too many distractions from the conference. It’s an attractive seaside location with a nice kind of ambience.”

The purpose was to provide an opportunity for people to come to a trade show to see, touch and play with new dental equipment and materials that have been introduced. Educational seminars also were offered.

Fishman says that the goals for the meeting were fully met. Events were held at the conference center, and guests stayed at the Sheraton Atlantic City Convention Center Hotel.

“Everybody at the convention center was super professional,” she says. “They were attentive to our needs and diligent with follow-up — that’s rare.”

She adds that Meet AC contributed door prizes for attendees to add to those offered by her team. “They also provided staff with food while we were stuck in registration all day,” she says. “We didn’t have to close down or lose setup time to go find food.”

Fishman says other details, most notably costs, also were positive.

Pricing in Atlantic City is quite attractive and competitive,” she says. “It makes the whole experience a win-win.”

Of course, gaming is still a strong attraction for many, and properties such as the Resorts Casino Hotel offer exciting meeting options. The first Atlantic City resort to include gaming among its offerings almost 40 years ago, Resorts was updated in 2013 with the opening of Jimmy Buffett’s Margaritaville casino and entertainment complex.

Resorts has 64,000 sf of meeting space with 24 meeting and function rooms, and a 13,000 sf ballroom. There are two hotel towers with 942 guest rooms and suites, two theaters and an 80,000 sf casino.

Harrah’s Waterfront Conference Center turned out to be the right choice for the 2016 TSNN (Trade Show News Network) Awards Gala Celebration, which attracted trade show organizers from the country’s largest shows.

“The event celebrates the largest and fastest-growing trade shows in the U.S., and the attendees hold their own high-profile events and have a very discerning eye,” says Rachel Wimberly, president. “Harrah’s met all of our expectations of wowing this elite crowd.”

She recalls that during her site visit, Harrah’s reps readily understood the need for a high-end event desired for this particular audience.

“They pulled out all the stops, including an amazing four-course meal from their very talented executive chef, as well as a stunning awards production,” she says. “The entire team was extremely easy to work with.”

“Atlantic City...has become one of the most popular destinations of the entire mid-Atlantic region. There is something here for...everyone,” Jim Wood, President and CEO Meet AC, Atlantic City, NJ
Harrah's Atlantic City offers more than 2,500 guest rooms and 63 meeting rooms ranging from 506 sf to 13,475 sf. A total of 150,000 sf of event space includes two 50,000 sf ballrooms. Among other hotel options, the 24 meeting rooms at Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa range from 550 to 4,500 sf, with capacities ranging from 10 to 3,500. Caesar's Atlantic City has more than 1,100 guest rooms and 28,000 sf of meeting space. Its 12 meeting rooms include a 17,135-sf ballroom and capacities ranging from 10 to 3,500. Among other hotel options, the 24 meeting rooms at Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa range from 550 to 4,500 sf, with capacities ranging from 10 to 3,500. Caesar's Atlantic City has more than 1,100 guest rooms and 28,000 sf of meeting space. Its 12 meeting rooms include a 17,135-sf ballroom and 63 meeting rooms ranging from 506 sf to 1,262 sf of space. At Bally's Atlantic City, some 1,200 guest rooms are complemented by 28 meeting rooms and 80,000 sf of meeting space.

### New York

Things are hopping as usual in New York, which attracted a record 6.1 million meeting and convention delegates in 2015, according to NYC & Company, the city's destination marketing organization. New York City not only boasts more than 200,000 sf of convention and ballroom space with 36 meeting rooms including a 17,135-sf ballroom and 63 meeting rooms ranging from 506 sf to 1,262 sf of space. At Bally's Atlantic City, some 1,200 guest rooms are complemented by 28 meeting rooms and 80,000 sf of meeting space.

#### Richmond

Within a day's drive of half of the U.S. population, Richmond offers an attractive combination of history and contemporary design. "Richmond is a beautiful city," says Michele Jacobson, CMP, senior meeting planner for Richmond-based Allia Client Services, the parent company of Philip Morris USA. "There is plenty to keep people entertained and happy as they experience another region of the country." She says the region's rich history is a plus, along with assets ranging from great restaurants and wineries to nearby Busch Gardens. "There's also a really interesting arts scene," she adds. And there is a nice urban feel along with attractions in the nearby countryside.

The premier venue for meetings is the Greater Richmond Convention Center. The state's largest such facility, it has more than 200,000 sf of convention and ballroom space with 36 guest rooms and more than 7,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space accommodating up to 200 guests. Another large hotel, the New York Marriott Marquis, offers 124,755 sf of event space, 48 meeting rooms and more than 1,900 guest rooms. For its part, the Grand Hyatt New York has 60,000 sf of meeting space. One ballroom accommodates 1,500–2,000 guests and another handles up to 500.

The Hilton New York Midtown has 1,929 guest rooms, and the 150,000 sf of exhibit and meeting space includes a 24,000-sf ballroom and 18 small venues. At the classic Waldorf Astoria New York, major renovations are in the offing. As a result, the hotel has announced that no large groups are being accepted for March 2017 and beyond.

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meeting and banquet rooms and a 258-seat lecture hall. Others include the Richmond Coliseum with 70,000 sf of space, the Richmond Raceway Complex with five buildings totaling more than 150,000 sf of space, and the Stuart C. Siegel Center at Virginia Commonwealth University with seating for up to 7,500 participants.

Several major projects are bringing enhancements to the region’s attractiveness for corporate events. Completion of a $92 million renovation of Main Street Station is slated for the summer of 2017. The historic downtown train station, originally constructed in 1901, has been upgraded through three phases initially begun in 1991, with the newest phase the restoration of a 100,000-sf train shed. The station currently has four Amtrak trains running daily and a Megabus station, and with the new space will have additional trains, incorporation of the Virginia Capital Trail, a bus rapid transit downtown hub and state/regional welcome center.

The station also boasts several event spaces. The Main Street Station train shed has 47,000 sf of event space with a capacity of more than 2,220 attendees and outstanding views of the city. Another section featuring a balcony and grand hall offers 10,000 sf of event space with capacities of 395 for seated dinners and 740 for receptions. And an outdoor space will open in fall 2017.

New event venues on the horizon include the Institute for Contemporary Art. Planned for an October 2017 opening, it will be a 41,000-sf non-collecting museum with exhibitions, performances, film and special programs, and including as yet unspecified event space. The recently re-opened Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia offers 12,000 sf of interactive exhibits and other space.

On the hotel front, early 2017 will see construction begin on a Marriott-branded Moxy Hotel, and The Graduate Hotel will open in summer 2017.

Four Points by Sheraton Richmond recently completed renovations of the hotel’s 194 guest rooms, ballrooms and 10,000 sf of meeting space. Homewood Suites by Hilton Richmond-Chester will be renovating the décor of the lobby, which has 2,300 sf of meeting space including three rooms that open into one and can hold up to 200 people. In addition, the Crowne Plaza Richmond Downtown is currently being renovated and will be reflagged as a Delta Hotel by Marriott. And the historic Jefferson Hotel is undergoing changes that include transforming what had been 262 guest rooms into 181 more spacious rooms and suites.

For a more rural Virginia experience, Primland combines the beauty of a mountaintop location in the Blue Ridge Mountains with meeting facilities accommodating up to 200 guests. The resort’s lodge features a 2,000-sf ballroom, breakout rooms, a private dining room, theater and executive boardroom.

### Baltimore

Baltimore offers an especially convenient location, with the downtown area only a 20-minute ride from Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport and its more than 600 flights per day to 75 cities. Amtrak’s Penn Station is a major stop on the Northeast corridor service, and the city is within easy driving distance of much of the Eastern U.S. Headlining the city’s varied meeting locations is the Baltimore Convention Center, offering 300,000 sf of exhibit space, 85,000 sf of meeting space with 50 meeting rooms and a 36,672-sf ballroom. Recent upgrades include completion of an outdoor terrace and updates to Wi-Fi and audio systems. More than 9,000 hotel rooms are located within walking distance of the convention center. What locals have dubbed the “convention campus” includes the well-known Inner Har-

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The Virginia Beach Convention Center has more than 500,000 sf of total space. There is a 150,000-sf exhibit area, a 31,029-sf ballroom and a variety of meeting rooms totaling 28,929 sf. Smaller facilities include a boardroom, VIP lounge and observation deck. It’s less than a 20-minute drive from Norfolk International Airport, which services 200 flights daily.

Hotel options include the Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront, with 289 guest rooms and 12,000 sf of meeting space. Several smaller meeting rooms are complemented by a 7,100-sf oceanfront ballroom. Opened in 2014, Hilton Garden Inn Virginia Beach Oceanfront features 167 rooms and suites and 5,000 sf of oceanview meeting space.

Other hotels include the Best Western Plus Oceanfront, with 214 guest rooms, four meeting rooms and 4,110 sf of meeting space; and the Wyndham Virginia Beach Oceanfront, with 16,000 sf of meeting space, 11 meeting rooms and 244 guest rooms.

The Crowne Plaza Virginia Beach has 149 guest rooms and nine meeting rooms totaling 12,000 sf. The DoubleTree by Hilton Virginia Beach offers 292 guest rooms and 12,000 sf of event space, including a 5,000-sf ballroom and nine meeting rooms.

The Sheraton Virginia Beach Oceanfront has 214 guest rooms and 10 meeting rooms with 12,000 sf of space. And the Founders Inn and Spa offers 25,000 sf of meeting space with 33 meeting rooms and 80,000 sf of event space, with the largest room handling up to 1,600 guests.

Virginia Beach
One of the East Coast’s most popular destinations, Virginia Beach has more than 10,000 hotel rooms, about 2,500 of them within a three-mile radius of the Virginia Beach Convention Center. Along with its long-standing beachfront identity, Virginia Beach also offers the advantages of a diverse metropolitan region. The immediate area also includes Norfolk and Portsmouth, and Richmond is only two hours away.

Washington, DC
Washington may be world famous as our nation’s capital, but it offers much more than political happenings. Meeting planners will find its many attractions an asset in holding memorable events.

Ami Mayfield, CMP, senior events manager with Austin, Texas-based real estate firm Keller Williams, sees the nation’s capital as an exciting destination.

“We were very surprised to find that such a popular city (DC) with must-see attractions was so competitively priced.”
Ami Mayfield, CMP, Senior Events Manager, Keller Williams, Austin, TX

“We love that the city and its signature attractions are easily accessible from the facility. It will create an immersive destination experience for our participants.”

Mayfield notes that beyond meeting the goal of offering convention participants a meeting destination they have not yet experienced, DC is appealing for many reasons.

“The city’s package is very competitive,” she says. “They have fantastic domestic and international airlift, and an unrivaled selection of special event venues. And we were very surprised to find that such a popular city with must-see attractions was so competitively priced.”

The district’s many attractions have been enhanced with several new or recently opened hotels. Undoubtedly the biggest attention-getter is the Trump International Hotel, with 262 guest rooms and suites and 39,000 sf of event and meeting event space. Among other features, it boasts one of the largest ballrooms at a DC luxury hotel with more than 13,000 sf of space.

The Kimpton Mason & Rook Hotel offers 4,000 sf of meeting space including a 1,700-sf ballroom with two skylights. Located in the 14th Street corridor, it has 178 guest rooms and suites. A sister hotel, the Kimpton Glover Park, is a 154-room boutique hotel located outside of Georgetown. A large ballroom on the main level offers 1,860 sf of meeting space. Recently re-opened after a $125 million renovation, the well-known Watergate Hotel offers 337 luxury guest rooms and 27,000 sf of meeting space. Event space includes a 7,000-sf ballroom.

Ami Mayfield notes that beyond meeting the goal of offering convention participants a meeting destination they have not yet experienced, DC is appealing for many reasons. "They have fantastic domestic and international airlift, and an unrivaled selection of special event venues. And we were very surprised to find that such a popular city with must-see attractions was so competitively priced."
Yolanda Cardiff was named director of sales and marketing for the Hyatt Centric Waikiki Beach, Honolulu. She previously served as the global account executive for American Express Global Business Travel.

The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa in South Carolina has named Vita Canizaro as sales manager. She previously was sales manager for The Westin Maui Resort & Spa.

Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach, Florida, has named Miguel Diaz as director of sales and marketing for the new luxury resort slated to open in 2017. He previously was director of sales and marketing for The Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa in Savannah, Georgia.

Hotel Irvine in Irvine, California, has named Joe Martino as director of sales and marketing, and John Cullinane as director of sales. Martino most recently served as director of sales and marketing for The Laguna Cliffs Marriott Resort & Spa in Dana Point, California. Cullinane was the associate director of sales manager.

Benjamin Caban was promoted to area director of sales and marketing for both the Beachwalk Resort, a Benchmark Resorts & Hotels property in Hallandale, Florida, and Marenas Beach Resort, a Gemstone Collection property in Sunny Isles Beach, Florida. He most recently served as Beachwalk’s director of sales and marketing.

W Las Vegas has named Christopher Adam Baran as vice president of sales and marketing. He was sales manager for Caesars Palace Las Vegas.

Leigh Harris-Henderson was promoted to group sales manager for One Ocean Resort & Spa in Atlantic Beach, Florida. She most recently served as the resort’s catering sales manager.

Allison Kneubuhl was named senior vice president of marketing and sales for Noble House Hotels & Resorts Ltd. She most recently was the president and founder of her own company, Allimar Marketing, a luxury hotel marketing services firm.
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