2018 Meetings Industry Forecast
Preparing for the Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

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John H. Graham, IV, FASAE, CAE, President and CEO of ASAE, addresses trends for the coming year.

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Onward and Upward

The economy may be trending upward, but unfortunately, so too are meeting costs, a trend that will continue in 2018, according to the experts. That leaves planners with some tough decisions, says John H. Graham, IV, FASAE, CAE, president and CEO of ASAE, who is featured on our cover. “Costs are going up across the board with respect to meeting expenses, so planners need to be smart — evaluate what matters most to their attendees and eliminate areas that are less important.”

With the seller’s market still applying pressure in 2018, planners also must account for the cost of delivering the experiential component that attendees demand and expect to make it worthwhile to attend. A case in point is F&B, as Phelps Hope explains in “ViewPoint: What’s Trending in 2018 for Association Meetings” on page 10: “The continued demand for personalized and boutique-style menus by meeting planners has impacted the costing and resulting F&B pricing with menu offerings.”

Making it even tougher, Hope says, are automatic service charges that pile up in the final bill — a potentially nasty surprise for planners who failed to negotiate them down early on. These extra charges are multiplying in every sector of travel and meetings, from airline add-ons to hotel resort fees, to all the extra service charges that pad suppliers’ bills for catered events, technology and more. (This contentious situation makes our feature “How’s Your Relationship?” on page 20 a must-read for meeting planners seeking mutual understanding and win-win partnerships with hotel sales staff.)

But the big upside in our industry for the coming year is the continuing transformation of the meeting experience, which is now built from the bottom up, with attendees essentially crowdsourcing the program content. To that end, meeting planners can be major influencers of social trends that are reflected in the engaging, personalized experiences they design to meet high expectations. “It’s a time of change,” Graham says, “and it’s important for organizations to consider how they can evolve. “He continues, “It’s vital for organizations to look at their meetings and events through a new lens — deliver the experience and the engagement opportunities, as well as the content, in ways members want to learn, when they want to consume and at a price they are willing to pay.”

Read on about more trends and visionary advice from Graham and other industry experts in “2018 Meetings Industry Forecast: Preparing for the Challenges and Opportunities Ahead” on page 14.
Las Vegas Convention Center Breaks Ground

Las Vegas Convention Center District's Phase Two $860 million expansion project will add 1.4 million sf of the current convention center facility, including at least 600,000 sf of new, leasable exhibit space. The expansion is slated for completion in time to welcome CES in 2021. Phase Three will be the complete renovation of the existing 3.2-million-sf facility, with a projected completion date of 2023.

Monterey Conference Center Celebrates Grand Reopening

MONTEREY, CA — Monterey County celebrates the grand reopening of the highly anticipated, newly renovated $60 million Monterey Conference Center this month. The Monterey Conference Center will be a modern, LEED-certified meeting facility with more than 40,000 sf of flexible meeting space and a capacity of 3,200 people. The facility is adjacent to the newly renovated Portola Hotel & Spa and connected to the Monterey Marriott. Together, these properties will offer 85,000 sf of flexible meeting space, 19,150 sf of exhibition space and 700 hotel rooms. The conference center is expected to draw new group business that will benefit all hotels within the city of Monterey and beyond.

Monterey Conference Center opened its doors on April 30, 1977, and became instrumental for the growth of the hospitality and tourism industries in Monterey County. www.montereyconferencecenter.com.

Memphis Convention Center to Undergo $175 Million Expansion & Renovation

MEMPHIS, TN — In the first quarter of 2018, the Memphis Cook Convention Center kicks off a top-to-bottom renovation and expansion project that is scheduled for completion in the fourth quarter of 2019. Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland announced plans for the project to coincide with the city's bicentennial year.

The footprint of the building will have outdoor terraces and glass enclosed concourses, prefunction and meeting spaces that embrace the river and skyline views, while adding valuable square footage that includes additional breakout meeting rooms. The project will allow the Memphis Convention and Visitors Bureau to pursue new meeting and convention opportunities, while also allowing shows taking place in the facility on an annual basis to grow with the expansion and renovation.

Facility Fast Facts

• The Memphis Cook Convention Center's column-free Main Exhibit Hall, with more than 125,000 sf, will feature a newly constructed exterior pre-function concourse overlooking the Mississippi River.
• The expansion will bring the total number of breakout rooms to 52, a secondary flex space will easily convert to a 40,000 sf ballroom, in addition to an existing 28,000 sf ballroom.
• A new sky bridge across Main Street will conveniently connect the 600-room Sheraton Memphis Downtown Hotel to the convention center.
• Underground parking entrances to the building will be greatly enhanced with a total of 900-sf spaces in the parking deck available to convention delegates and exhibitors.
• Through careful planning, the convention center and Cannon Center will both remain open and continue to host events throughout the construction project.
www.memphistowntel.com/conventioncenter

Caesars to Develop $375M Conference Center in Las Vegas

LAS VEGAS, NV — Caesars Forum, opening in 2020, will include the world's two largest pillarless ballrooms and 300,000 sf of flexible meeting space, equivalent to more than five football fields.

The cost of the conference center is estimated to be approximately $375 million. It will be located east of the Las Vegas Strip with bridge connections to Harrah’s, Linq and the Linq Promenade. As part of a series of transactions with VICI Properties, Caesars Entertainment recently announced its intention to acquire 18.4 acres of land as part of its plans to develop this new conference center.

Caesars expects to break ground on Caesars Forum early in the second quarter of 2018. Caesars Forum also will offer:
• Two 108,000-sf ballrooms, two 40,000-sf ballrooms and state-of-the-art boardrooms.
• Conference space accommodating more than 10,000 attendees.
• A 100,000-sf outdoor plaza, which can be used as flexible space.
• Direct access to the Linq Promenade.
• Direct access to Harrah’s, Las Vegas, The Linq Hotel and Flamingo Las Vegas hotels, totaling more than 8,500 hotel rooms.
• Accessibility to approximately 20,000 rooms at Caesars Entertainment’s nine Las Vegas properties.
• The latest technology and design. www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com

$30 Million Renovation for Pinehurst Resort

EDEN PRAIRIE, MN — Teneo Hospitality Group has announced the addition of the landmark Pinehurst Resort in North Carolina, to its expanding portfolio. Teneo, the premier global firm representing 300+ independent and luxury branded hotels, resorts and DMCS, will drive group sales for the award-winning resort and promote its $30 million Capital Refurbishment Program that will preserve its past and actively build its future. Known as the place where golf in America was born, Pinehurst also boasts a luxurious spa and health center, and a renowned meeting hub.

In an effort to preserve and share the wonderful golf pedigree of Pinehurst, the resort recently purchased Dornoch Cottage, the home that golf course designer Donald Ross built overlooking his masterpiece. Course No. 2. The home will be made available in 2018 to group functions and events.

With 80,000 sf of meeting space, Pinehurst Resort hosts more than 500 groups per year. Guests can choose from 428 guest rooms located around Pinehurst. There are three historic properties: The Carolina Hotel — which also offers Villas geared toward golfers; the intimate Holly Inn and the cozy and casual Manor Inn. Construction has begun on the Village’s original Steam Plant, which will become a microbrewery and restaurant, set to open in the summer of 2018. www.pinehurst.com, www.teneohg.com

MGM Grand Conference Center Celebrates Topping Out Milestone

LAS VEGAS, NV — The award-winning MGM Grand Conference Center reached an important milestone — the topping out of its 250,000 sf expansion. More than 100 construction workers along with MGM Resorts and MGM Grand executives were onsite to sign the last of nearly 2,700 individual steel beams before it was lifted into place by a 270-foot, 125-ton crane.

The $130 million project opens at the end of 2018. When completed, the conference center will total more than 850,000 sf, including a 22,000-sf expansion of Stay Well Meetings, the industry’s first-ever wellness meetings experience.

MGM Grand’s new space comes on the heels of expansions at sister properties Mandalay Bay and Aria. www.mgmresorts.com
The 2018 PCMA Convening Leaders took place January 7–10 in Nashville, aka Music City, where more than 4,500 attendees learned how to “Amplify Engagement” at their own meetings during three jam-packed days of thought-provoking sessions, networking events and learning opportunities. “We’ve entered the new school of engagement — one where business-event organizers must amplify their attendees’ engagement at every turn,” said PCMA President and CEO Deborah Sexton prior to the event. “Our 2018 Convening Leaders participants will learn how to electrify their experiences, elevate their conference’s brand, and truly engage with their audience.” Sexton stepped aside January 19 after 13 years as president and CEO of PCMA to start her own consulting firm. She is succeeded by PCMA COO Sherrif Karamat, CAE.
What’s Trending in 2018 for Association Meetings

Interactive Tech and Boutique-Style Menus Lead

The meetings and conferences industry saw many changes in 2017 and that trend continues through next year. The impact of new technologies, personalization of catered food and beverage (F&B), and the economic effects on the hotel and convention industry’s business practices have created a few key trends to watch in 2018.

Menu personalization driving up F&B costs

There’s been a lot of change in the evolution surrounding food and beverage offerings in the hotel and convention center industry. The continued demand for personalized and boutique-style menus by meeting planners has impacted the costing and resulting F&B pricing with menu offerings. Gone are the days of attendees receiving an across-the-board menu of one-cut-fits-all steak or chicken. Hotels and convention center food service professionals have adopted variety-driven menus to accommodate attendees who suffer from food allergies (such as dairy free or gluten free) or simply want healthier food options (such as vegan, ovo-vegan, etc.). Boutique restaurant-style and enhanced-choice menus are costly for most hotels and convention center caterers because of the continued rising cost in food prices, the increase in labor to prepare and serve these different choices, and the cost of the hard-to-find specialty foods. These higher prices are having further upward pressure on F&B profits, so naturally the higher costs are passed along to the consumer (i.e. meeting planner).

To help offset the rising cost of food and the costs associated with the wider variety menus, hotels and food service providers are increasing the automatic service charges on catered events to upwards of 25 or 26 percent, in addition to the labor they typically itemize and charge you for on their final bill. We have even seen a service charge added to meeting room rental on a few occasions!

So, be aware enough to ask early on in the negotiation process what additional charges you can expect to see on your final bill. This will help you determine if that hotel or convention center is worth engaging in business with or if you need to look for a better venue option.

Onsite + Online Audiences Reinvent the Conference

Where should we start? Because technology is changing so fast, it will continue to be one of the strongest influences on the design, promotion and onsite experience, with more leveraged use of social media, attendee tracking at education sessions, and connecting of virtual audiences to live face-to-face events. Extending the convention experience through podcasts, webinars and other virtual tools to connect remote audiences across town, around the country and in global regions for networking, is a major benefit in the use of technology in 2018.

The same virtual connectivity will continue to strengthen the pre- and post-convention experience as we all strive to increase engagement from our attendees 365.

Internet Bandwidth Getting Supersized

Because of technology’s influence in our society, conference and meetings attendees continue to use a multitude of tools to connect to one another, e.g. through apps, social media and other interactive technologies. In order to guide the connectivity between attendees, conference organizers are continuing to invest in the purchase of bandwidth at conferences and providing event-specific technologies for attendees. This investment widens the revenue stream for providers and helps to fuel the growth of internet availability and increased bandwidth. Eventually cities will move towards a citywide Wi-Fi connection service, similar to Singapore, and perhaps even total global coverage. Until that day comes in the U.S., purchasing bandwidth is a necessity and a growing cost line item on all meetings professionals’ budgets.

Meeting Locations Driving New Member Recruitment

As associations look to expand their member base, the growth of internet availability and increased bandwidth allows them to expand their member base through podcasts, webinars and other virtual tools to connect remote audiences across town, around the country and in global regions for networking, is a major benefit in the use of technology in 2018.

“T’LL BE HERE ALL WEEK. DON’T FORGET TO TIP YOUR... AV GUY?”

Since we have broached the topic of automatic service charges, watch out for a disturbing trend to continue through 2018 where hotels, convention centers and their in-house service providers (AV companies, internet providers, transportation, etc.) are adding upwards of a 25 percent service charge for their services. This is in addition to the labor they typically itemize and charge you for on their final bill. We have even seen a service charge added to meeting room rental on a few occasions!

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Convert Your Data for Real-Time Action

Arm Yourself With Intuitive Event Technology

Talk about big data is everywhere. It’s the new gold that everyone wants to mine, including meeting planners. Event planners have been able to collect tangible data; however, the challenge is how to convert this data into useful, actionable items. According to statistics collected in a July/August 2017 survey of 600-plus event producers, meeting planners and corporate event marketers conducted by Cvent, in partnership with Event Marketer:

- 81 percent of event professionals said integrating data from event attendees’ digital and physical footprint is extremely or very important, but only 20 percent feel their organizations are effective at data integration.
- 75 percent of event professionals said they’re missing out on integrating a wider range of data and information to build out more complete attendee profiles.
- 67 percent of event professionals said they find value in integrating attendee data with their CRM systems, and 66 percent said they see value in integrating event data with social media.

Clearly, we’re not just talking about attendee demographics. There are many data points associated with events, including those that reveal what matters most to exhibitors, sponsors and attendees: what they like/dislike; what motivates their decision to participate in an event; and what criteria help them justify their event investments.

Understanding these technologies and their functionality can help event planners develop and implement a sound data strategy for their events.

Event Technologies That Support an Effective Data Strategy

Many event planners are familiar with the application of event technology to help automate registration and marketing processes, support sustainability practices and help enhance the overall event experience. What they may not be considering is the broader role these technologies play related to data. For instance, the data captured can be applied to:

- Improve future events, drive increased revenue and validate an event’s ROI for future exhibitors, sponsors and attendees.
- In addition, data captured through registration software can be imported into Excel spreadsheets and integrated with CRM and lead retrieval systems. Other technologies also have multiple functions including data capture.
- Mobile event application software, for example, is extremely effective in driving attendee engagement in online surveys, program agendas and push notifications to drive attendees to breakout sessions, sponsors’ and exhibitors’ booths or other marketing elements and interactive games while also capturing demographic and behavioral data. The software also provides back-end reporting and analytics that can be seamlessly integrated into an organization’s CRM and/or marketing automation system. This functionality enables event planners to further cultivate and transition a contact into a relationship.
- By using mobile event application software, personalized and customized content can be delivered and local media integration can be achieved.
- Beacon technology, which scans items like technologically enabled registration badges, can help event planners collect real-time, broad analytics data intelligence from the convention or trade show floor. Beacon solutions can track what exhibits, sessions or facilities are drawing attendee traffic. With this insight and predictive analytics, event planners can then take action. In concert with mobile event application software, planners can send communications to drive attendees to areas that may not be gaining as much traction through the use of a mobile push notification. Data capture and analytics can arm event planners with the insight they need to optimize the overall experience and ROI for exhibitors, sponsors and attendees. The event performance metrics captured through beacon technology can help event planners improve on various factors for future events, from the quality of attendees to the quality of the program and even the venue. Beacon software can be used for any size event and doesn’t require that attendees have a mobile app. The software is intuitive, with web-based dashboards that provide detailed information to help attendees justify their financial and time investment in the event.

Interactive touch screen displays, kiosks and digital signage also can be used to engage attendees with a variety of content (such as surveys, games, social media feeds and applications) through which data can be collected, both from their behavior and direct input.

Data at Work

There is a lot of crossover in the application of data for conventions, trade shows, user conferences, annual sales meetings and educational conferences. All stakeholders want data for the purpose of building and strengthening relationships and to gain insight to improve future events. Some, like conventions and trade shows, also want to capture data to identify new opportunities and drive higher revenue. User conferences, however, may be more inclined to capture data for the purpose of identifying new challenges facing users or topics that are trending among their users. For educational conferences, the data capture is often tied directly to how attendees participated in the program.

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- and what criteria help them justify their event investments.

Interactive event technologies can help event planners meet their mission to collect and leverage data. Event planners should have multiple functions including data capture.

Interactive technology clearly has an important role in the mission to collect and leverage data. Event planners should make certain that this is a line item for all of their events. Additional due diligence may be necessary to convince those holding the purse strings within an association or organization, that mobile event software, beacon software or other event technologies are critical to an event’s ROI. As evidence of event technologies’ value becomes more apparent, accounting for its use will become easier.

Some also are offering free access to attendee behavioral tools for exhibitors who purchase their events’ lead retrieval packages. Other event planners are also offering to share some of the data they have collected with their exhibitors.

Due Diligence

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Preparing for the Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

By Cynthia Dial

A new year typically translates to champagne toasts, off-key renderings of “Auld Lang Syne” and a final farewell to the last 365 days. However, in the world of meetings, additional elements are incorporated into the mix. So, though the future is never as clear as the past, here is a forecast geared to help guide planners from such perspectives as budget, safety, technology and more.

“Costs are going up across the board with respect to meeting expenses, so planners need to be smart — evaluate what matters most to their attendees and eliminate areas that are less important,” says John H. Graham, IV, FASAE, CAE, president and CEO of ASAE — a membership organization of 39,000 association executives and industry partners representing 7,400 organizations in nearly 50 countries. “All of this is in an effort to balance rising costs in the areas of food and beverage, as well as rates for hotel rooms and technology.”

In addition to managing budgets, Graham foresees the following challenges for associations in 2018:

• Delivering ROI for all stakeholders.
• Placing meetings and events in a seller’s market.
• Offering meetings that provide a customized experience.
• Learning new job skills necessary to attain these objectives. Though essential talents are continually changing, basic skills include negotiation, financial supervision, relationship management and operational excellence.

When discussing numbers, Graham opines that associations may experience a slight decline in meeting size due to the recent tightening of travel restrictions. Overall, however, associations are experiencing steady attendance at their meetings, and many are seeing increased popularity in smaller regional meetings.

A TIME OF CHANGE

Graham says it’s imperative to acknowledge the business climate: “It’s a time of change, and it’s important for organizations to consider how they can evolve.”

Though every department within an association plays a critical role in creating an experience for its members and attendees, Graham considers meetings and events one of the most visible deliverables — oftentimes the most significant asset in producing member engagement.

He addresses millennials and microlearning. “Everyone engages differently, so it’s critical for associations to use data to determine how attendees want to personalize their experience. As organizations start to reimagine their events, they need to consider how to meet the needs of all audiences.”

One way of appealing to millennials is to introduce new learning formats, such as microlearning. Graham explains that when an association provides more ways for members to customize their experiences, the result is increased engagement with the organization.

A significant theme for 2018, Graham believes, is the reimagining of association meetings and events. One of the reasons why associations are changing how they produce meetings is because of how attendees consume content and engage in forums. His advice: “It’s vital for organizations to look at their meetings and events through a new lens — deliver the experience and the engagement opportunities, as well as the content, in ways members want to learn, when they want to consume and at a price they are willing to pay.”

As meetings and events are typically a revenue producer for most organizations, Graham says it is essential to reevaluate each of these get-togethers to determine what is resonating and what is not. It is critical to look at mature meetings and events or those that are declining and reimagine them or replace them with a new event that delivers what members want and need. “Regardless of the path, the key is to continually assess and increase the value proposition for attendees.”

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Experts Talk 2018 Safety

While safety is a prime concern in 2018, there unfortunately are no safety precautions or technologies that can fully eliminate all security threats. However, knowledge is power, so read on.

According to iJET International — a provider of intelligence-driven, integrated risk management solutions that enable multinational organizations to operate globally with confidence — here's the inside safety scoop on hotels, venues, convention facilities and technology.

**HOTEL TARGETS**

Hotels, particularly those catering to foreign nations, remain potentially high-risk targets for terrorist groups and lone actors in many parts of the world. iJET’s hotel audit program illustrates that most large hotel chains are continuously reviewing and updating security procedures in light of this evolving threat. Hotels, particularly in regions recently affected by terrorism and mass shootings, are likely to enhance security measures in an attempt to assure hotel guests. However, hotel companies are aware of the delicate balance they must strike between privacy and guest safety.

**ACCESS CONTROL**

One of the most noticeable changes for venues and convention facilities since 2017’s major security incidents (e.g. the Las Vegas shooting and the Manchester Arena bombing), has been increased access control. Many of these sites have boosted the number of security guards at access points, implemented more thorough bag checks and installed metal detectors. Meanwhile, meeting planners are likely to more comprehensively vet venues and convention facilities during the planning phase and look for venues that provide the previously mentioned security services, as well as facilities that have built-in safety features such as closed-circuit television, bollards, security perimeters and an adequate standoff distance from main roadways.

While recent incidents have prompted enhanced security at event venues and convention facilities, there were few instances specifically targeting meetings or events, and there is no significant evidence to suggest there will be an increase in violence or unrest specifically aimed at such events in 2018.

**TECHNOLOGY**

Technology plays a critical role with respect to safety, primarily when it comes to communicating potential threats. This is true for attendees, as well as those charged with protecting them. The key to success is synchronization — everyone operating from the same information to communicate a coordinated message. Without technology solutions in place, this is simply not possible.

On the other end of the spectrum, technology also presents threats of its own, particularly with respect to information security. Most meeting attendees will arrive with a smartphone, tablet and laptop. Cybercrime is a major concern for attendees’ electronic devices. Planners need to be aware of cyberthreats and establish a plan to communicate to meeting attendees the practices to best ensure against this threat, such as using a VPN and only connecting to trusted networks.

**EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS**

With respect to recent natural tragedies and disasters, Graham views these incidents as reinforcement for the importance of two protocols: good communication and emergency preparedness procedures. “There’s no way to prepare for all instances, but it’s critical to have a plan in place and to make sure it’s communicated and practiced by all staff so that everyone is ready to respond in the event of a crisis.”

Experts with iJET International agree. As a company providing end-to-end, tailored solutions that integrate world-class operational threat intelligence, innovative technology and response services to help organizations avoid threat, mitigate risk and protect their people, operating locations and reputations, its advice for meeting planners is straightforward.

Advances in mobile technologies and two-way instant communications, ongoing efforts to make identifying, communicating and responding to threats much more efficient in 2018. Thus, meeting planners will have more resources available to them than at any time in history — from better technology to the ever-expanding cadre of experienced security professionals in the risk management industry. If they can effectively leverage the information and resources at their disposal, they can increase their likelihood of putting on a safe, successful event.

Three tips iJET International’s security team suggests are:

1. Utilize a reliable source of intelligence as far in advance as possible so you can identify and mitigate potential threats to the event itself, as well as those associated with travel to the broader area.
2. In the event’s communications package, be sure to highlight any threats to the event or the broader area, along with easy-to-understand actions attendees can take to stay safe.
3. Establish a reliable means of communicating new information and updates in a timely manner and disseminating that information to attendees from security stakeholders alike.

“It’s no secret that we live in a time where security is a top priority,” states Carisa Norton, CMP, vice president, event services with the Los Angeles Convention Center (LACC), AEG Facilities. “Attendees want and need to feel safe at an event, and from an international traveler’s point of view it is a requirement to book a destination where the venue, tourism board and event take steps to provide that security.” She suggests to the meeting planner that when it comes to budgeting, these questions should be answered. What are your venue’s requirements? What is the cost to provide the proper security measures for your event?

**F&B, MOBILE APPS AND SITE SELECTION**

An additional trend Norton anticipates for the new year is the continued interest in healthful, sustainable food choices. She explains: “We have gotten many requests from attendees for more farm-to-table food options — there is a greater desire for local tastes that are healthy and environmentally conscious.”

With respect to mobile applications, Norton is definitive. “Mobile apps are not only a trend, they have become standard.” Attendees expect an event to have a mobile app where they can find information and engage with the event — it’s the norm.

To that end, Norton has suggestions. Stay engaged with your venue partners. “As venue partners, we become an extension of your team and are here to make your event a success. Keeping a two-way communication is key.” Provide feedback to your venue. “At the LACC we send out client surveys after every show. Providing in-depth and candid feedback not only helps us grow, but also helps the event if, and when, they sign up for the upcoming year.”

**CURATING CONTENT**

“With the markets up, geopolitics unpredictable and divisions (culturally and politically in the U.S.), those who take risks and provide innovative speakers, sessions and topics will break out,” says David Saef, CTSM, executive vice president of strategy with GES, a global, full-service provider for live events.

“2018 should be another great year for the meeting professional, and to know that we have a global economy positively growing at the same time bodes well for the future.”

— GM
“People are time-starved and budget-deprived. Attendees simply don’t have the time and willingness to travel multiple times per year, so make sure your meeting is a must attend.”

David Saef, CTSM
Executive Vice President of Strategy
GES
Hodgkins, IL

and producer of corporate events, exhibitions, conferences, congresses and entertainment experiences.

Today’s planners have information, so they need to provide tools for attendees to select, plan and participate in sessions and forums that accelerate their success through proactive recommendations, access to unique viewpoints and peer-to-peer exchange. “Don’t just create a forum and expect attendees to navigate it — like Amazon or Netflix. Meeting planners need to help attendees curate a better experience,” says Saef.

The certified trade show manager sees one challenge for 2018’s meeting planners is being able to attract and engage attendees. He elaborates: “People are time-starved and budget-deprived. If your meeting is not No. 1 or No. 2, then you may not get them in the door. Attendees simply don’t have the time and willingness to travel multiple times per year, so make sure your meeting is a must attend.”

**MILLENNIALS’ PREFERENCES**

Millennials have impacted the current meetings market three-fold explains the GES strategist. The lecture format that the boomers have grown to love is quickly fading in favor of a more interactive and engaging approach. This hipper demographic wants to solve problems, network with peers and make a difference — and then tell the world about it via social media. Having grown up on portable devices, millennials demand a tech savvy experience — from registration to course selection to content access in real time (or as close to post-event as possible). Millennials are additionally forcing meeting planners to provide additional venue, hotel and food choice options. “Planners need to be more flexible and ensure there are options for millennials who may not have the budget of their Xer and boomer peers; because if they don’t see those options, they won’t show.”

In conclusion, Saef says, “Meetings are a forum to collect content to be shared later. Think of a meeting as an anchor ‘content event’: Gather videos of sessions, testimonials of attendees, roundtable discussions, white papers, etc. Then use this content in relevant and meaningful ways to engage and recruit new audiences and members throughout the year.”

**HOTELIER’S PERSPECTIVE**

From the outlook of a hotelier, Michael Dominguez, chief sales officer, MGM Resorts International says, “There has been a subtle change in the length of meetings that we have witnessed by about a half day. It seems very much related to ‘time poverty’ versus a cost savings. People are just trying to get back home.”

The MGM executive sees Las Vegas, Orlando and Chicago still leading the charge as top meeting cities. However, he cites Austin, Dallas and Nashville — cities that have put resources and effort into their experiences — as destinations that have experienced increased demand in return. When comparing large versus smaller markets he says, “Except for citywide capacity, you see very little difference in what is being offered and their attractiveness.”

Dominguez details perceived challenges: “There is a lot of compression in the meetings market, and although meeting budgets have increased, the budget per attendee in many cases has shrunk.” The good news is that the opening of some new facilities in 2018 will be a bonus for a compressed market. His advice to modern-day planners can be summed up in three key words: flexibility, negotiation and distinctive. “Flexibility still matters today, so ask what is needed to make a program work if space and capacity are issues. Leveraging future meetings as part of a negotiation has never carried more value and should be added to the conversation if there is an ability to contract multiple meetings at one time. Unique venues are in high demand as many have built-in experiences and décor, which help when budgets continue to be a struggle.”

In addressing the millennial impact, he believes the group should be separated into older versus younger millennials. Explanation: “In the meetings market specifically, the older millennials (28 to 35 years) are behaving like many generations before them. The exception is their early adoption of technology.” Thus, his advice is to focus on behaviors, not age, to be successful.

Dominguez concludes, “2018 should be another great year for the meeting professional, and to know that we have a global economy positively growing at the same time bodes well for the future.”

Kelly came as an educator.

And left with a love for Mayport shrimp.
I t women are Venus and men are Mars, are meeting planners and hotel sales directors Mercury and Saturn? Maybe, but the relationship between these two groups isn’t social-science curiosity. It’s business, and the good news is that when planners and hoteliers take a hard look at their mutual relationships, they share much common ground — a positive that impacts their respective bottom lines. We spoke with five meeting planners and five hotel sales staffers to learn what lies at the core of this relationship and what it takes to make it work. To start, several must-haves were mentioned over and over by planners and hoteliers alike: trust, respect, honesty and good communication.

THE PLANNER SIDE: WHAT HELPS RELATIONSHIPS

LaDonna Pettit, director of operations and conferences for Stone Fort Group, which produces events for associations and other organizations, says that in addition to being respectful, planners have to understand that hoteliers are busy, too. “Hotel convention services managers juggle groups like we juggle events,” she says. “I don’t always expect an immediate response, especially if I know they have a group in-house. The most important thing I do is to make a site visit to kick off the preplanning, where I meet with the CSM and department heads I’ll be working with. I provide a background of my group and explain their goals and what’s important to them. We get started at the same place and are typically in sync throughout the planning process.”

There’s one more very important thing, Pettit notes: “I say please and thank you.”

Leslie Wiemik, CSRP, executive director of the National Association of Subrogation Professionals, says early and frequent communication is key. “I always arrange an in-person pre-precon with the CSM and department heads nine to 12 months prior to the event. During this meeting, I learn about their procedures, answer questions and set forth my expectations. They can’t meet my expectations if they don’t know what they are.”

Neil Nicholas, senior director global sales with HelmsBriscoe, recalls what a favorite client once said: “A spoon of honey goes down easier than a spoon of vinegar.” That advice could not be wiser. Hotels and planners each want something for their stakeholders, and it’s not always the same thing. Hotels require profitability while planners require cost control. However, he adds, “we all can agree that a win-win is a successful program exceeding attendees’ expectations so that the organization wants to return to the property. The single most important thing to creating a positive planner/hotel relationship is recognizing each other’s opposing goals and objectives yet finding common ground in which to work.”

Kay V. Granath, CMP, CAE, director of meetings and conventions with Association Management Center, and Martin Bay, CMP, senior director meetings operations and procurement for Kellen, an association management company, point to creating a partnership as essential. “Neither party can create a successful meeting without the expertise and cooperation of the other,” Granath says, “so work together as a team to plan the perfect event.”

Bay concurs. “The single most important thing a planner can do is avoid an ‘us versus them’ mentality with the property. When we approach this as a partnership to create the best possible event we can toward achieving conference goals, it’s the best possible experience for both parties.”

THE SALES SIDE: WHAT HELPS RELATIONSHIPS

Brian Lang, director of sales and marketing, Hyatt Hotels in downtown Denver also agrees. “We cultivate a true partnership by getting to know the planner on a personal level,” he says. “Learning the client’s likes and dislikes, needs and goals allows for a greater degree of empathy and trust. Our staff takes ownership of the meetings they book. They’re the liaison between the planner and hotel, ensuring that everything down to the smallest detail, is implemented to the satisfaction of the planner.”

Dan Boyer, director of sales and marketing, Sheraton Grand Phoenix, is succinct: “I believe there are several things that can create a positive relationship, but it starts with openness, honesty, integrity and responsiveness.”

Three hoteliers referenced listening and communication. Jessica Bowman, area director of sales for four Charleston Hotels in Charleston, South Carolina, says, “Listen and have good communication. Build a relationship by phone from the start. If you can meet in person, that’s even better.”

Autumn M. Mullen, HMCC, senior manager, sales, at Hilton Orlando, advises sales staff to “listen and seek to understand first, so your solution is meaningful and meets the planner’s needs. By seeking to understand needs first, you show respect for the person and build trust. This foundation will last over time no matter what the needs or challenges as you do business together.”

“By seeking to understand needs first, you show respect for the person and build trust. This foundation will last over time.”

Autumn M. Mullen, HMCC
Senior Sales Manager
Hilton Orlando, Orlando, FL

Nancy Cimney, director of sales and marketing at Opal Sands and Sandpearl resorts, both in Clearwater Beach, Florida, says good communication skills are essential to the relationship. “That means listening to what the meeting planner is saying and making sure you clearly understand the needs of the planner and group.”

THE PLANNER SIDE: WHAT HURTS RELATIONSHIPS

What, then, is the biggest impediment to achieving that true partnership and mutual trust and respect? Answers varied.

“Sometimes working in a different time zone doesn’t allow for voice-to-voice communication, which is critical in building a relationship,” Pettit says. “Email can actually be an impediment to good communication.”

Not being forthcoming with information is a problem, too. Pettit shares as much about an event as she can early on, from history to demographics to why something is important. “Likewise, I like to inquire about the hotel and what goals they are striving for during the time frame of a meeting. It’s amazing what you can learn when asking that question.”

“It’s disappointing when hotel personnel working directly with the client are not empowered to make decisions.”

Leslie Wiemik, CSRP
Executive Director
National Association of Subrogation Professionals, Houston, TX

““The single most important thing a planner can do is avoid an ‘us versus them’ mentality.”

Martin Bay, CMP
Senior Director, Meetings Operations and Procurement
Kellen, Atlanta, GA

By Christine Loomis

Planner-Hotel Sales Staff Relationships Don’t Have to Be Planets Apart

How’s Your Relationship?
For Wiernik, the problem is turnover, and that plays out in multiple ways. “It’s very frustrating to develop a relationship with the property only to find out that your sales—or worse, your CSM—left just before your event. Also, it’s disappointing when hotel personnel working directly with the client are not empowered to make decisions. All hotel staff, right down to housekeeping, should have authority to fix minor issues without having to get authorization from a manager. Empowering staff gives them a sense of belonging; they feel needed and appreciated.”

Nicholas points to lack of flexibility on both sides as a roadblock to a solid relationship. “I had a situation in which one party demonstrated flexibility and the other party did not in the contract-negotiation stage. What ensued later was lack of flexibility in the pre-planning phase. From an attendee standpoint, the program was a success, but the program did not repeat.”

Granath says many things can derail the relationship. “There’s time, for example, needing things immediately and not being able to get or produce them. Budget issues can cause friction, as can outside pressures such as sales quotas and hotel staff trying to juggle several meetings at once.”

And work styles can differ, such as one person wanting to do everything by email while the other wants to talk with a human. Then there’s personality. “I use the example of being from the Midwest,” Granath continues. “Some of the sales practices of the East Coast do not work well with me.”

Bay says it’s a challenge when planners and sales team members are at different experience levels. “Senior level planners and hotel sales executives foster the strongest relationships and know how to resolve challenges quickly to both parties’ mutual satisfaction.”

**THE SALES SIDE: WHAT HURTS RELATIONSHIPS**

From the hotel side, communication and honesty are essential. “If there’s one thing that is most important, it’s responsiveness,” Lang says. “There’s nothing worse than having a long list of tasks to accomplish and waiting for a response. We understand planners have a tremendous amount of work on their plates. Without open, honest and timely communication it is impossible to cultivate relationships.”

“If the meeting planner is not clearly communicating the hot triggers of the group, it impedes the relationship.”

**SALES STAFF**

Nancy Conner
Director of Sales & Marketing
Opal Sands and Sand Pearl Resorts, Clearwater Beach, FL

Bowman agrees. “It’s helpful when the meeting planner is easily available by email or phone through the planning process. If the planner is unavailable or doesn’t get back to the hotelier in a timely fashion, this puts the hotel at a standoff.”

Boyer believes the relationship can fail if “one party or the other is not being honest and forthright.”

Adds Cimney, “The biggest impediment from the hotel side is overselling or overpromising what the hotel can deliver. And if the meeting planner is not clearly communicating the hot triggers of the group, it impedes the relationship. The hotel works toward exceeding expectations; however, if they’re missing key information, that can be difficult.”

**PLANNER EXPECTATIONS**

The planning stage is just part of this relationship process. Once a meeting is onsite at a hotel, stakes and expectations remain high. Availability and engagement are expected on both sides, among other things. “I expect that sales will remain involved, checking in with me periodically through the event,” Wiernik says. “I get that usually only if I ask for it. To me, that should be a given.”

Bay also expects the hotel sales team to “be engaged in the successful execution of the event and to understand our goals for the event. We usually get that,” he says, “and if we don’t, we immediately point it out and get it resolved.”

Granath wants sales to be available “to welcome me and then be there as I need them. There have been some instances where they are not on property but have taken the time to connect me with someone on property who is their backup if I need assistance.”

Nicholas says his clients have been blessed with amazing conference service managers. “A big shout-out to all you folks who work crazy hours with a smile on your face and a ‘can do’ attitude!”

But she cautions planners to take a big-picture view. “There have been times when CSMS in the pre-planning phase have not been the most responsive, but wouldn’t you know that when onsite, when it really counts, they are there 100 percent for us exceeding our expectations. This is a lesson for us planners. We have to remember our CSMS may not be as responsive in the preplanning phase because they may be making magic for another client onsite. And we’ll get that same treatment when we are onsite.”

**SALES EXPECTATIONS**

On the hotel side, Cinney and Lang want open, honest and timely communication and feedback from planners. “We like knowing any challenges or issues as soon as they arise, no matter how small, so they can be corrected as quickly as possible,” Lang says. “We welcome the opportunity to make revisions as the meeting progresses and greatly prefer this to learning about a service opportunity after the conference.”

**Pet Peeves**

**PLANNERS**

- Sales staff who will only email and never answer the phone.
- Sales managers lacking flexibility, whether it be with the contract terms, pricing or a simple request.
- A “sell it and forget it” mentality.
- Overpromising. If a hotel says it can offer X-Y-Z during a site inspection, those items should be in the contract. If they can’t be delivered, that’s a problem.
- Lack of honesty about the product being sold, e.g., trying to put a large meeting in a small room, or hidden items on a contract or deliverables.
- Lack of responsiveness or sending out responses that the planner has to ask for again.
- Budget issues can cause friction, as can outside pressures such as sales quotas and hotel staff trying to juggle several meetings at once.

**SALES STAFF**

- Planners not being honest or not providing accurate information.
- Planners waiting until right before the meeting to share important details with the hotel.
- Lack of communication or feedback provided to the property during the RFP process.
- A “lowest rate wins” mentality.
- More than one planner communicating with and directing sales staff but not communicating with one another. That can impede the sale and execution of a program and leave sales staff caught in the middle of conflicting information.
- Planners being unrealistic about pricing, concessions, contract language, addendums, etc. Why can’t customers simply accept the hotel’s contract? — CL

**PLANNER**

Kay V. Granath, CMP, CAE
Executive Director, Meetings
Association Management Center, Chicago, IL

“Very few (sales staffers) understand what a planner does and is responsible for unless they have once been a planner.”

Bay says hotel staff don’t always understand what an association management company is.”

“Very few (sales staffers) understand what a planner does and is responsible for unless they have once been a planner.”

For Granath, it’s about responsiveness. “Some of us are very busy and cannot always respond as quickly as we would like. My team is busy, and we just don’t have time to respond to every email we receive — we’re too busy implementing the meetings that we just booked with them. Here is where the relationship is very important,” she says.

“We like knowing any challenges or issues as soon as they arise, no matter how small, so they can be corrected.”

Brian Lang
Area Director of Sales & Marketing
Hyatt Hotels Downtown Denver, Denver, CO

concludes. We find about a 90 percent of the planners we work with agree.”

Boorman also wants to know about needs quickly. “I expect them to let me know if we are meeting their needs onsite and if there is anything we can do better to make their meeting a success. I would rather know of an issue during the stay as opposed to after so we can fix the problem right away.”

**WHAT PLANNERS WISH SALES STAFF UNDERSTOOD**

Planners and sales staff agree that a beneficial relationship from differing perspectives. So what do they wish their colleagues better understood about them?

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LaDonna Pettit
Director of Operations & Conferences
Stone Fort Group – Show Management, Houston, TX

“Very few (sales staffers) understand what a planner does and is responsible for unless they have once been a planner.”

**TheMeetingMagazines.com**

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Nicholas, however, believes hotels sales staff understand her well — now. “I feel the hotel sales staff have a wonderful knowledge of my job as a third party,” she says. “It has not always been that way in my 15 years with HelmsBriscoe. Kudos to the evolution of both industries and the recognition of that.”

**WHAT SALES STAFF WISH PLANNERS UNDERSTOOD**

Among the things hotel sales staff wish planners better understood: “The level of internal accountability sales managers have, which is based on the information meeting planners give them,” Mullen says. 

Boyer wishes more planners would have a better understanding of the financial side of the hotel business, while Cimney notes that there are many people involved in the production of a successful meeting, “and the sales professional has an obligation to the hotel as well as to the meeting planner.”

Bowman wishes planners better understood how much goes on behind the scenes to ensure that a meeting is successful, “and the sales professional has an obligation to the hotel as well as to the meeting planner.”

Granath wants planners to remember, “Sales staff have different pressures than we do, which affect their interactions with us. Keep this in mind when you’re working with them and try to understand their side of the relationship.”

Bay points out, “It’s a relationship-based business, so get to know the hotel salesperson you're working with. Ask questions — about their background, how long they’ve been with the hotel and what experiences they have had that might impact how they negotiate. In the process, planners are better able to educate sales staff and help them understand conference goals.”

“Don’t sweat the small stuff and keep your eye on the prize.”

**SALES STAFF**

Jessica Bowman

Amelia Director of Sales

Charleston, SC

Jessica Bowman advises asking open-ended questions and coming to the table with a wish-list of concessions. Stick to your needs. If a property cannot accommodate you, walk away; there’s another property that will. Prioritize your wish list; it helps during the negotiation process.”

Nicholas advises, “Don’t sweat the small stuff and keep your eye on the prize.”

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When Connie Cathey, meeting planner at DaVita, Inc., decided to host an event in Breckenridge, Colorado, scheduling the meeting during the mountain region’s “shoulder season” made sense. Cathey explains, hosting events at mountain resorts during the off-season offers many advantages, including especially attractive lodging rates and flexible guest-room options due to lower occupancy. In addition, staff members often have more time to dedicate themselves to the event.

And though many people naturally think of Breckenridge and other Rocky Mountain resorts only as winter skiing destinations, there are plenty of enticing off-season activities to enjoy, including rafting, fly fishing, zip lining and mountain biking, wildlife tours, gallery tours, wine tasting, stargazing, hiking, golf, horseback rides, and gondola and ski-lift rides.

“With the warmer weather, the mountains offer you many options outdoors, and the fabulous views make for an incredible breakfast, lunch, dinner outside,” Cathey says. Cathey and her team at DaVita are not alone in realizing the benefits of hosting meetings during shoulder season. Cost-conscious associations are taking advantage of discounted lodging costs and venue fees, and deals on dining and activities, among other incentives and promotions for visitors. The opportunity to score significant discounts on local activities during the off-season will allow attendees to take advantage of much more than they might be able to afford at other times of the year.

Courtney Lutkus, owner and event planner at Simply Radiant Events in Brea, California, says that booking a meeting or event during the shoulder season offers planners more flexibility with dates, as fewer scheduled events means more availability.

“The price can also be different at peak season times,” Lutkus says. “It’s not uncommon to have peak pricing during summer and winter. If the date is flexible with the client, ask for all dates and time frames they are open to, to help maximize their dollar for the same services.”

As Lutkus explains, in her home base in Southern California, things have a tendency to remain busy most of the year, so flexibility in dates, rates and space is not easy to come by.

“Sometimes adding more services does offer a better
• Visitors bureau to create unique experiences, tours or events with nearby restaurants, breweries and other popular spots.

Chicago-based meeting and event planning company, says the off-peak season. These include:

• There are some additional advantages to booking during tourist activity, and a more relaxing VIP experience as their events that fall during a slow period. It's often possible to event won’t be vying with leisure tourism for attention.

• Owners and Event Planner

Courtney Lutkus
Brea, California

overall deal,” Lutkus says. “For example, if we book the venue and they have in-house catering and a bar, using all their catering services sometimes results in a discounted package.”

For association event attendees who have to pay their own way, shoulder season means lower travel costs, less tourist activity, and a more relaxing VIP experience as their event won’t be vying with leisure tourism for attention.

Of course, planners shouldn’t overlook smaller, local events that fall during a slow period. It’s often possible to partner with other organizations and the local convention and visitors bureau to create unique experiences, tours or events with nearby restaurants, breweries and other popular spots.

Kelly Elliott, creative manager at Total Event Resources, a Chicago-based meeting and event planning company, says there are some additional advantages to booking during the off-peak season. These include:

• Rates, dates and space are much more negotiable.

Chances are association meeting planners may receive a much lower rate or space preference if they are willing to be flexible in dates during this time period.

• When it comes to booking venues, the market is very much held in the hands of the sellers (venues) right now. If a meeting or event planner is late to the game (especially during peak season), chances are the desired dates and space already have been booked. If not, planners are going to pay a premium to get them.

• Booking during the off-peak season puts the ball more in the buyer's court and gives them more opportunity for negotiation. For example, an association meeting planner may be able to negotiate a lower food and beverage minimum or space rental fee during this time. Venues are highly unlikely to even entertain rate negotiations or minimums during peak season.

The saying “big fish, small pond” comes into play with shoulder season meetings and events. Venues and supplier partners are able to dedicate more time and attention to clients during the off-peak season when they are not in overdrive. Book during the peak season, and a meeting planner and their client may end up feeling like a “small fish in a big pond.”

• If an association is looking to bring a large convention to a city during their off-peak season, the local CVB will typically come forward with some terrific complimentary concessions/offernings. For example, they may offer to plan and host the offsite evening event or work with local suppliers to offer the association great rates on décor, entertainment and other ancillary activities — all in the hopes of bringing revenue to their city during an otherwise slow season. Meeting planners should use this to their advantage.

MISTAKES AND CHALLENGES TO AVOID

When orchestrating an event or meeting during shoulder season, association meeting planners should not delay in booking a vendor. “You never know, they might have booked a vacation then because they have no other bookings or taken on a large project that will keep them going during the slow season,” Lutkus says. “Treat each event as though every vendor might be booked in order to get them locked in.”

Meeting planners also should be careful to avoid overlooking a destination’s weather and climate when booking dur-

one-of-a-kind course blends in with the surrounding environment of the new Alpine Camp and offers shade for those who want to observe the fun.

A new hiking loop takes guests on a journey of learning about Breckenridge’s high-alpine environment, including animals, flora and fauna, mountain wetlands, impacts of the gold rush and additional history of the area. Often thought of as a winter playground, Denver actually sees the majority of its visitors in the summer months, making the spring and fall ideal seasons to visit. The Denver climate is generally mild and arid, with only eight to 15 inches of precipitation each year. In 2004, Denver residents

In addition, not only is there more availability in meeting and hotel accommodations, but the ski resorts act as attractive destinations to association attendees and provide the opportunity to optimize programming — all while enjoying beautiful scenery. Late-season skiing is offered at various resorts, as is season-extending opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors.

For example, the Breckenridge Epic Discovery, which is offered during the summer, includes such adventures as the Expedition Zip Line Tour on Peak 7. Here, guests will spend two hours exploring the Peak 7 Ori Bucket area of Breckenridge Ski Resort by air; navigating over a mile on eight zip lines between 10 towers and a 200-foot-long aerial bridge walk with stunning views of Summit County. Additionally, the Alpiner Challenge Course, visitors pick their own paths through 16 different challenges — from lightly swinging logs to shoe-to-rope balancing maneuvers. The

“Groups are able to experience outdoor activities in shoulder months such as hiking, Tom cars, hot-air balloon rides and kayaking. We have an average of 330 days of sunshine per year (in Scottsdale).”

Kelli Bischoff, Vice President of Sales and Services Experience Scottsdale
Scottsdale, AZ

ATING DESTINATIONS TO CONSIDER

For Rocky Mountain ski resorts, April is a prime off-season month to schedule a meeting or event. In addition to wonderful culinary, spa and shopping experiences, the shoulder season in the Rockies offers a plethora of event planning options. Vendors throughout the region often offer increased group discounts, while many local restaurants run off-peak specials. Overall, meeting planners have the upper hand when negotiating concessions and food and beverage packages during these times.
signed off on a 12-year, $6.5 billion plan to create six light-rail, diesel commuter rail, and electric commuter rail lines with a combined length of more than 120 miles; expand existing light-rail systems; and add a bus-based rapid transit route between Denver and Boulder. And while spring and fall have proven to be ideal for off-season events in Denver, hotels in the region are solution-focused when it comes to accommodating winter meetings and managing accessibility in case of inclement weather.

Fall is also the ideal season to consider Anaheim, California for association meetings. Thanks in part to the modern Anaheim Convention Center, many associations have found this city to be the ideal destination for hosting events with a reasonable budget. In addition, Anaheim offers access to multiple nearby destinations including Dana Point, Huntington Beach, Newport, Los Angeles and San Diego.

Of course, an event held in a tropical Caribbean paradise is always appealing, and April and November are the best times to visit for shoulder season opportunities and pricing. In late fall to early winter months, the Caribbean hurricane season tapers off, leaving behind clear, sunny skies and average temps anywhere between 75 and 85 degrees. However, if an association’s meeting must take place in the fall, planners need to be mindful of potential hurricane season disruptions and contract favorable terms accordingly. Not surprising, the most expensive times to travel to the Caribbean are winter and the spring break seasons. Scheduling events post-spring break, yet before school is out for summer months, the Caribbean hurricane season have the opportunity to receive discounted room rates at resorts, as well as flexibility with dates of programs. “There is also flexibility on room upgrades for upper management or VIPs and the ancillary event discounts such as spa or golf experiences,” Blubaum says. “Groups are able to experience outdoor activities in shoulder months such as hiking, Tom cars, hot-air balloon rides and kayaking. We have an average of 330 days of sunshine per year. But during shoulder seasons, the weather is also still conducive to utilizing outdoor space for breakfasts, receptions and dinners.”

And while Orlando, Florida, almost always experiences peak season, due in part to the incredible weather year-round, May and September offer shoulder seasons for meeting planners. Being family-oriented, Orlando is often crowded when children are out of school, but in the month of May, families are often gearing up for school ending in early June. Likewise, most kids are back in school in September, which offers the ideal opportunity for associations to take advantage of working some and playing some, without having to deal with massive crowds. Not surprising, Orlando hotels and venues use a simple formula for pricing these two short shoulder-season months in Orlando — you pay less when there are fewer crowds. A final benefit to keep in mind is a destination's off-season vibe — once the influx of tourists wanes, the area's live-like-a-local personality emerges. Meeting attendees, who now more than ever are looking for authentic destination experiences, won’t be disappointed.

Kelli Blubaum, vice president of sales and services at Experience Scottsdale, says that visitors to the region during shoulder season have the opportunity to receive discounted room rates at resorts, as well as flexibility with dates of programs. “There is also flexibility on room upgrades for upper management or VIPs and the ancillary event discounts such as spa or golf experiences,” Blubaum says. “Groups are able to experience outdoor activities in shoulder months such as hiking, Tom cars, hot-air balloon rides and kayaking. We have an average of 330 days of sunshine per year. But during shoulder seasons, the weather is also still conducive to utilizing outdoor space for breakfasts, receptions and dinners.”

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Making a Case for Health Care Conventions

Making a Case for Health Care Conventions

Credit: American Dental Association

Health Care Conventions

Making a Case for

A

leagues and discuss the latest trends and procedures, listen to advice and tips from key decision leaders and meet with experts in the field.

Unfortunately, busy health care professionals have precious little free time these days, so the decision to attend their association’s conference or convention is dependent upon how compelling a case meeting planners can make.

Jim S. Goodman, CMP, vice president, division of conferences and continuing education with the American Dental Association, notes that a convention today must provide a strong value proposition or people aren’t going to attend.

“That means more than offering CME/CE credits that meet state re-licensure requirements,” he states. “Those credits can be attained at home by most medical professionals. Their time out of the office, which equates to lost patient visits and revenue, must be outweighed by the benefits of attending.”

He believes the key is to offer unique experiences and learning that is customized for each attendee segment.

“If you can make that happen, they will come back and bring their colleagues,” he says. “This makes for a stronger meeting and satisfies exhibitors and sponsors.”

Jeanne Torbett, CMP, CMM, president of Superior Media, Meetings & Management Inc., Jacksonville, Florida, plans conferences for the Florida Medical Association and four state medical societies — two in Florida, one in Maryland and one in Texas.

“The first step is to work with the board and get a list of topics, and then my company will take over and do the rest,” she says. “We plan everything from start to finish.”

That includes a long list of responsibilities, such as obtaining corporate support through grants and contributions, securing faculty and moderators, staffing of committees, promoting the event, obtaining entertainment as well as necessary information to meet CME/CEU requirements, posting meeting reports and follow-up, and producing an agenda and minutes from all meetings held throughout the conference.

“The biggest challenge is getting the speakers to provide you with the information you need in a timely manner,” Torbett says. “It takes a lot of organization. It’s like a 10-month process. If you get something wrong, it’s going to bite you six months down the line. You have to be so organized that everything gets done in a timely fashion or it will hurt the meeting. You can’t lose any details.”

Katie Koziol, CMP, HMCC, director, client services for Ashfield Meetings & Events, part of the Ashfield Division of UDG Healthcare PLC, notes that busy health care professionals are more selective than ever on what conventions they attend.

“Making attendance as easy as possible is therefore vital,” she says. “They want ROI, ease of access for content online and access to key opinion leaders (KOLs). Taking into account their perspectives and preferences in the format, agenda and activities surrounding the convention is key to ensure success and ROI in the health care professional’s mind.”

This past May, Alisha Cleland, CMP, meeting and event manager for Experient, Twinsburg, Ohio, organized an event for Vision Source, a group of approximately 3,000 optometrists who met in Nashville, Tennessee’s Gaylord Opryland.

“The space allowed for corporate business to utilize the outlets within the hotel for their annual hosting of new prospective members, which is an important part of any association conference,” she says.

Matt Burruss, event director, event services for Smith-Bucklin, represents five different health care associations planning their annual conferences.

“The biggest buzz I have seen is a huge growth in the live demonstrations and hands-on learning opportunities,” he says. “We’ve been asked to simulcast live surgeries and procedures into sessions recently. One of the interesting things about hands-on learning and simulations is we’ve seen people are very excited to do these and learn about them, whether or not they relate to the field of practice.”

By way of example, Burruss relates that when a recent conference offered a skin-grafting demonstration, many health care professionals outside that area of practice attended.

Another key for successful association conferences today, he notes, is focusing on providing opportunities for people to connect and dive deep.

“More physicians are looking for highly impactful, specific...
**Association Conventions & Facilities**

this conference, and it’s not just another oriented destinations, such as Orlando, are ees. Here are more recommendations:

2017 and the American Society of marked several records in 2017, most no

Jeanne Torbett, CMP, CMMM, presi

THE TECH TREND

And, integrating cutting-edge technologies into the at- tendee experience is a must-have. “The internet of things is something that is being discussed frequently as well as AI and robotic technology,” Cledel notes. “Technology needs to increase engagement. "The meeting of the day is often the main source of revenue for an association, so successful atten-
dance and number of exhibitors is key," she says. "It is impor-
tant to communicate early and connect with the destina-
tion early to discover potential partnerships and maximize benefits from the destination’s medical, corporate and gov-
ernment assets."

SECRETS TO SUCCESS

“Bonnie Grant, executive director of PHL Life Sciences, a division of the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau that connects the tristate’s (Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware) life sciences leaders representing medical, biotech, pharmaceutical, higher ed, research, venture capital and the health care industries, says engaging physician attendees is a top priority at these conventions. "I understand that an annual meeting is often the main source of revenue for an association, so successful atten-
dance and number of exhibitors is key," she says. "It is impor-
tant to communicate early and connect with the destina-
tion early to discover potential partnerships and maximize benefits from the destination’s medical, corporate and gov-
ernment assets."

Furthermore, to keep meetings unique and interesting, she notes that it’s important to engage with a destination and leverage local resources and experiences.

Mary C. Wolski, CMP, director, conference and event ser-

Vitamin K. It’s a nice personal touch and educational approach.

We’ve also seen an increase in livestreaming of key presenta-
tions during congresses — all great engagement tactics to enhance the experience and also broaden the audience base."

Goodman is all for incorporating various technologies at a meeting if they increase the attendee experience and in-
crease engagement.

The Science of Site Selection

The San Diego Convention Center marked several records in 2017, most not-
ably hosting a record 21 medical conven-

tions, which included BIO, Neuroscience 2017 and the American Society of Hematology to name a few. It’s no surprise that San Diego is a favorite destination for health care meeting planners and attend-

dees. Here are more recommendations: Jeanne Torbett, CMP, CMMM, presi-
dent of Superior Media, Meetings & Management Inc., notes that family-
oriented destinations, such as Orlando, are popular choices. “Physicians don’t want to be away from home too often, so we put them at a place where the family would like to go,” Torbett says. “They plan around this conference, and it’s not just another

time away. The family is having a good time while they are at the conference, and they can meet up later for other favorite activities. It makes them not regret going.”

And Orlando’s not just all about theme parks — Lake Nona Medical City, “the new global destination for medical innovation,” is a cluster of health care and life sciences facilities focused on advancing medical care, research and education, providing planners access to medical demonstrations and medical speakers.

Matt Burnuss, event director, event ser-

vices at SmithBucklin, concurs that some of the best conference locations are those in proximity to health care facilities, such as the Cleveland Clinic and the Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland and global center for health innovation, which have invested in infrastructure to take advantage of their partnership. The Global Center, which offers 20,000 sq ft of meeting and event space, connects meeting plan-
ers with 45 of the world’s leading health care brands including GE Healthcare, Siemens, Philips, Cisco Systems and Cardinal Health.

Philadelphia is ranked No. 2 in the U.S. as a premier science cluster. “Half of meeting and conventions held at the Philadelphia Convention Center and City Center hotels are life science-related, and the economic impact generated with these types of booked meetings going forward is $3.2 billion,” said Bonnie Grant, executive direc-
tor of PHL Life Sciences, a division of the Philadelphia CVB, in a statement last sum-
mer. “That says something about our city.”

Alisha Cleland, CMP, meeting and event planner for Experient, feels Nashville’s advantage of their partnership. The Global Health Care Conference, held at the Nashville Convention Center and City Center hotels and conventions held at the Pennsylvania Convention Center and City Center hotels, are life science-related, and the economic impact generated with these types of booked meetings going forward is $3.2 billion,” said Bonnie Grant, executive direc-
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Mary C. Wolski, CMP, director, conference and event ser-

tices for Chicago, Illinois-based Academy of Nutrition and Di-
etics, ran the academy’s centennial conference in Chicago this past October. “Our biggest buzz is what is hot in the field of nutrition. What is the latest and greatest new idea? How can we help people eat healthier? This is a huge challenge as we are the leader in this field and people look to a dietitian as the expert,” she says. “The challenge is most of the dieti-
tians are paying their own way to our meeting and the aver-
age cost (depending on the city) is about $1,200 per person, which is steep for some of our members.”

Creating a valuable experience that one wants to attend, she says, takes a fantastic education and conference team who communicate and learns what worked and didn’t work in the conference survey; and makes sure changes are made when needed.

“Lastly, work well with all of your vendors,” Wolski says. "They are an extension of your team, and they help create the magic of your convention.”

Burnuss notes a successful conference focuses on compre-

hensive attendee engagement. "Getting them involved in discussions is important; and having message boards with permeating topics that can be continued onsite at the meet-
ings," she says. "And you should make sure people are making lasting connections. You do this with follow-up webinars or online learning after the convention."

Cleland believes that communication from all parties in-

volved is the No. 1 aspect to running a successful association conference, as encouraging communication will help the organization focus efforts on what their attendees expect, while planners try to align both expectations with the orga-
nization’s goals.

“The planner needs to know the goals of the organization to be able to communicate necessities to suppliers and fa-
cilities,” she shares. “The attendees need to be able to com-
municate what they are hoping to learn, experience or see at the upcoming convention to be sure they get the best value for their investment of time and money — and the attendee also should be able to communicate back what they enjoyed about the conference as well as what they would have liked to experience, or what they wish they would have gotten a chance to experience.”

DEALING WITH REGULATIONS

When it comes to regulations, Goodman notes organizers need to stay informed within their respective vertical within

Gaylord Opryland is an optimal place for a convention as groups can take ad-

vantage of the Nashville music scene in their off hours or as part of their closing party, and there’s plenty of space for cor-

porate business. "Mid-level cities that are on the rise. Nashville has been blowing up in the past few years. There is a great mix of space for meetings, a variety of hotel levels and offerings at varying price points, as well as a lot of local activities attendees can partake in when not in sessions," she said. "Having a mix of all three is important to any meeting.”

Kate Kozioz, CMP, CHMCC, V.P., director of client services for Ashfield Meetings & Events, favors Orlando, Chicago and San Diego — all of which, she shares, offer large, high-quality, meeting hotels within close proximity to the convention centers, significant dining options and an overall city infrastructure with the transportation and air lift necessary to host large health care conventions.

Jim S. Goodman, CMP, V.P., division of conferences and continuing education for the American Dental Association, says venues need to provide a convention center experience that is in close proximity to ho-
tels and entertainment options is key as it makes for satisfied attendees. "More and more attendees are ‘bleisure travelers’ (combining business and leisure activities), and they want convenience and great experiences for both sides of their travel," he says. “Some cities that come to mind are: Orlando, Denver, San Francisco, Las Vegas, Minneapolis, San Diego, Chicago, and Washington, DC.”

“Digitally native health care professionals are evolving the way we all look at meetings and conventions. One example is the addition of Alexa stations throughout the convention center.”

Katie Kozioz, CMP, CHMCC, V.P., director of client services for Ashfield Meetings & Events, Sydenham, Pa.
“The attendees need to be able to communicate what they are hoping to learn, experience or see at the upcoming convention to be sure they get the best value for their investment of time and money.”

Burruss adds that regulations impact how the planners work — especially on the research side of the health care conferences. “One of the things we have been watching closely is the uncertainty of the Affordable Care Act and what will happen to regulations like the Sunshine Act,” he says. “How we interact with them will be impacted and the types of funding sources we are able to go after for our conference.”

ADAPTING TO THE MOMENT
No matter how much effort goes into conference organizing, thing still can go wrong, and a savvy meeting planner will need to adapt quickly. “Few times does everything run smoothly; however, I think to have the best chance at most everything going smoothly all comes back to communication,” Cleland says. “The meeting planner, the facility and supplier contacts, all the way down to service staff, are a team. Expectations should be set clearly and early on in the planning process so everyone is on the same page.”

In the event there is a bump in the road during the program, she adds, it’s important to be flexible and be open to suggestions from other team members.

The biggest challenges associations face continue to revolve around funding costs and budget costs, and this must all be weighed when planning an event.

“There’s a somewhat uncertain political environment with health care, and we are seeing more anxiety even though we haven’t seen the cuts yet,” Burruss says. “People are being very conservative with sending people to conferences because of what could be coming down the road. You must make sure there is great value there for people to attend.”

FINAL THOUGHTS
These conferences are important, but Koziol feels evaluating the length of conventions should be reviewed in the future. “With limited availability to be away from their practice and less sponsorship opportunities from pharma, health care professionals are more selective (about) attending as many conventions as they previously have. Virtual elements of a congress are a nice complement to live attendance so further exploration of that is an interesting and important topic to discuss and review moving forward.”

In the future, Burruss foresees the research side progressing and association conferences becoming more technical in terms of device and surgical procedures, and the new equipment being used.

“Things will become more groundbreaking,” he says. “We need to be conscious of this. The shift will slowly evolve into these technical conferences. We need to find the right spaces and facilities and target the right speakers because that’s where we will provide value for the attendees.”

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California Boasts Widely Diverse Destinations With Singular Experiences

By John Buchanan

California, like Florida, is a state that offers a long list of individual meeting destinations. But unlike the Sunshine State, which essentially offers sun-and-fun options that are largely similar, the Golden State offers a roster of unique local destinations, from the urban sprawl of San Diego and the famous sophistication and charm of San Francisco, to the less well-known but singular experiences of second-tier nations in the Americas because of its reputation and the unique offerings it has, whether that’s Hollywood or Napa Valley or San Francisco, says Phelps Hope, senior vice president, meeting and expositions, at Atlanta-based association management company Kellen, which hosted a dozen meetings throughout the Golden State last year. “The state has unique offerings, in terms of individual destinations, that you can’t find anywhere else in North America. And as a result of that, it’s always a first consideration for any meeting to be held on the West Coast.”

The local destinations Kellen used in 2017 included San Diego, Newport Beach, Santa Monica, Palm Springs, Long Beach, Santa Clara and Davis, for meetings ranging from 10 to 3,000 attendees.

“A big factor in California’s favor when it comes to association meetings is that it’s on the leading edge of major cultural and societal changes such as technology and nutrition,” Hope says. “And then there’s the fact that California is an ‘experience’ destination, meaning there are lots of kinds of interesting experiences that can be built into the meeting away from the hotel. That means that attendees can have truly unique experiences that drive attendance and also make the meeting memorable. For example, if you’re meeting in San Francisco, you can do something offsite in Napa Valley wine country; or if your association or attendees are interested in technology, you can do something in Silicon Valley. If you’re meeting in Los Angeles, you can do something in Hollywood. So California also offers a lot of unique options within or around each one of its major local destinations.”

The state also offers unique destinations that bring an outdoor element into the meeting in places such as Lake Tahoe or the redwood country north of San Francisco, he adds. “Throughout the state, you can create a good story about why any one of the many individual destinations within California is a good choice if you’re looking for a unique and interesting experience.”

HITTING THE TRIFECTA

Colleen Flood, CMP, director of marketing, membership and meeting services at the Alexandria, Virginia-based Airport Consultants Council (ACC), agrees with that assessment. “We rotate our annual meeting, for about 200 attendees, between the East Coast in odd-numbered years and the West Coast in even-numbered years,” she says, “and as of 2019, when we go to Palm Springs, it will be the first time we will have used California for three consecutive West Coast meetings.” ACC held its 2017 meeting in San Diego. In 2015, ACC used one of the state’s most unique and beloved destinations, Newport Beach.

“When I started my job here four years ago,” Flood says, “one of the first things I said was that we should take our conference to Newport Beach. I was already very familiar with the area. It’s just a gorgeous place. And our attendees just loved it.”

The hotel she used was the Fashion Island Hotel located in the heart of the iconic open-air shopping, dining and entertainment district that is the cultural centerpiece of Newport Beach. ACC’s 2019 meeting will be in another charming and iconic destination, Palm Springs. The hotel will be the Omni Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa, an historic property that has defined the destination for decades.

Kellen’s Phelps Hope has high praise for Palm Springs. “It’s another destination that is very unique,” he says. “And the city has done a top-shelf job over the last few years in promoting the destination and helping planners bring meetings there. It does offer some challenges in terms of getting people there from the East Coast, but once you get them there, you can be sure they’re going to have a fantastic experience.”

Flood explains why, as of next year, California will have attracted three annual meetings in a row from ACC. “One of the reasons for that is that California performs well for us in terms of attendance,” she says. “And some of that has to do with air service into the state. A lot of it also comes down to the cost-effectiveness of California destinations and the level of response we get to our RFPs, and then the level of support we get from the local CVBs when we go on site visits.” As a result of such extraordinary support, Newport Beach and Palm Springs, both second-tier destinations, beat out Las Vegas and Phoenix for the 2015 and 2019 meetings.

Yet another important factor in California’s dominance as a destination is its commitment to the meetings market and its formidable infrastructure. Says Hope, “California aggressively pursues meetings. California welcomes meetings. And because of that, the state is progressively developing and building new hotels and regularly renovating older ones, so the hotel product it offers is very good. The state just has a progressive mindset when it comes to meetings, and that is evident in the way the state maintains its meeting infrastructure.”

LONG BEACH

A local destination that Hope finds particularly compelling is Long Beach, which hosted Kellen’s largest meeting, for 3,000 attendees, last year. “Long Beach is a very interesting destination and it’s a good indication of what you see going on in California now,” he says. “It’s a very progressive destination within the greater Los Angeles area, but yet most planners are not very familiar with it. It’s close to L.A. and Los Angeles International Airport, but yet it’s off by itself and very...
unique. It also has a very good convention center and unique attractions like the historic Queen Mary ship, which is in Long Beach Harbor and a wonderful offsite venue. There are also very unique local events like the Long Beach Grand Prix that can be incorporated into a meeting as a unique kind of activity. The Queen Mary attraction, permanently docked in Long Beach, offers hotel rooms, restaurants and 65,000 sf of meeting and event space.

ANAHEIM

When it comes to major association meetings, and especially citywide conventions, Anaheim is among the state’s most prominent local destinations. Sue Sabatke, CMP meetings director at the Madison, Wisconsin-based International Dairy Deli Bakery Association (IDDBA), hosted her organization’s annual citywide conference there last year for 10,280 attendees.

“We like to be on the West Coast, and we had been to Anaheim before,” Sabatke says. “One reason we like Anaheim is the density of the hotels around the convention center. San Diego has a similar kind of density, but it does not have the amount of exhibit space in its convention center that we require. And in San Francisco, space is allocated in the Moscone Center based on your room block, which presents a challenge for us there, as well. So that makes Anaheim the best option for us.”

IDDBA used a total of 18 hotels at a range of price points. “And we like the fact that right there at the convention center, you have a Marriott and a Hilton,” Sabatke says. “We went as far away as the Hyatt Regency in Orange, which is just a couple of miles away from the convention center. The important thing to us is that for a meeting our size, in Anaheim you can build a very well-rounded room block that is very convenient in terms of the convention center.”

She and her attendees also liked the concentrated convention center district around the convention center, including its Grand Plaza. “It’s a fabulous area,” Sabatke says, especially for doing outdoor events in the plaza.

Another benefit Sabatke finds in Anaheim is the amount of broad-based talent available in Southern California, particularly in greater Los Angeles. “I didn’t have to fly people in, and that was a huge plus for me,” she says. “For example, we booked the celebrity chef Giada de Laurentiis and Jim Belushi and the Board of Comedy. And we had Arnold Schwarzenegger and Magic Johnson of the L.A. Lakers as keynote speakers. And all of them live in the L.A. area. So that was a huge plus for us in terms of using Anaheim. The fact all of them were local saved us a lot of money and trouble from a logistics perspective.”

When it came to offering a unique inducement for attendees to visit the trade show floor on the meeting’s final day, Anaheim offered a unique option — free tickets to Disneyland. The city meets IDDBA’s needs so well that it’s going back in 2023.

SAN DIEGO

Another of California’s major convention destinations is San Diego.

“San Diego brings a couple of unique things to the table,” Hope says. “For one thing, there is a lot of military history and infrastructure there, so if your association in any way has ties to or interest in the military, you have some very good options. It’s also close to the border, so if you want to offer pre- or post-meeting excursions, you have a very good option for doing that right across the Mexican border.”

The Airport Consultants Council held its annual meeting in San Diego last November. A key factor in the selection of the destination was its air interface. “Our members come from all over the country, as well as internationally,” Flood says, “so it’s very important for them to be able to get to the destination conveniently and cost-effectively.”

The hotel was the historic and quaint Rancho Bernardo Inn. “We look for a resort setting for our annual conference and it was just perfect,” Flood says. “They offered a great package that made it more affordable for our attendees than other properties that responded to our RFP. For example, we got a very good room rate and we also got a food and beverage discount. One very important factor was that they were very enthusiastic about having the program. As a result, we also got some very good concessions with things like upgrades for our board members.”

Flood gave high marks to the hotel’s room product, meeting space and F&B. “The rooms are beautiful,” she says. “It’s an older, historic property, so they are large. In fact, they’re the largest regular hotel rooms I’ve ever been in. They’re just awesome. The meeting space is absolutely perfect for a program of our size and configuration. We used the Aragon Ballroom for some events, and when you step out in the hallway from the ballroom, you get beautiful views of gardens and greenery. And finally, the food and beverage at Rancho Bernardo Inn was among the very best we’ve ever had. The hotel has a great culinary team. And what they present is not your typical hotel fare. It’s really special.”

SAN FRANCISCO

Emily DeYoung, senior director of educational programs at the Washington, DC-based Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), hosted her organization’s 2017 annual leaders conference for about 500 attendees in San Francisco last July for the third time in recent years.

Why such loyalty to the world-famous City by the Bay? “Everybody loves going to San Francisco,” DeYoung says. “It’s a highly desirable destination because there is a vibrant and rich culture there. It’s also a very beautiful city. And it’s a place where a lot of things are happening, it’s a cutting-edge place.”

The city also fits CASE’s unique culture. “About half of our attendees are involved in university fundraising,” DeYoung says. “So as part of the
“Everybody loves going to San Francisco. It’s a highly desirable destination because there is a vibrant and rich culture there. It’s also a very beautiful city. And it’s a place where a lot of things are happening. It’s a cutting-edge place.”

“The Hyatt Regency was just a perfect fit for us. It could accommodate our entire meeting within the hotel. And it’s also located in a very interesting and appealing area, the Embarcadero, in terms of things to do. And it’s very walkable.”

A highlight of last year’s meeting was a general session keynote address by Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman. “That is the kind of speaker we generally use, because thought leaders as attendees are a core of our conference,” DeYoung says. “So for example last year we had David Brooks of the New York Times.”

THE CHALLENGE AND THE PAYOFF

Because of its perennial popularity, California also presents a challenge for planners, Hope says. Planners sometimes have difficulty getting the room blocks they need at rates that their budgets can accommodate. “And it’s a seller’s market now, which makes that challenge even more of a factor in first-tier destinations,” he says. “But that just means second-tier destinations become more of a factor, and California offers a long list of second-tier destinations that offer an excellent experience at a more affordable cost. And despite any challenges it might offer at some times of the year, California is just a great choice when it comes to meetings, because it offers so many unique options. The weather, year-round, is perfectly suited to meetings, especially if you want to do outdoor events. And depending on the time of year, and which local destination you select, you can get good value. Then there’s the fact that you’re going to generate good attendance. So when you add it all up, California is hard to beat.”

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education hosted its 2017 annual leaders conference for about 500 attendees at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco, which offers 72,000 sf of meeting space and a 17,000 sf exhibit hall.

At the forefront of experiential trends, Long Beach’s latest evolution can accommodate anywhere from 100 to 5,500 people within 40,000 sq. ft. of “wow.” Introducing The Cove, a totally expandable outdoor street enclave that morphs into a high-octane atmosphere and embraces the food truck culture. With conversation hubs, encouraging networking, selfies, and just plain fun, it creates a connection that promotes a sense of community. Permanent LED stage lighting, renowned artist street murals, stylish furniture and much more can save you up to $100,000 in rental costs. There is no limit to your imagination. The Cove allows you to make your next event unconventionally unforgettable.
When Kim Mydland was in the midst of planning a second meeting for the Radiology Business Management Association at the famous Broadmoor in Colorado Springs in 2016, one of her board members approached her with what could have been a challenging request. At a previous conference at The Broadmoor three years earlier, he had enjoyed his room so much that he wanted to stay in that exact same room again. Of course, he didn’t remember the room number, but he was bringing his wife to this next conference and wanted her to experience the room he had raved about so much.

“My other hotel, I would have been afraid to make such a request, but sure enough, The Broadmoor had the records and made it happen,” said Mydland, who was the director of education and meetings for the 2,300-member association at the time. “That kind of service is what (has drawn) us back to The Broadmoor and Colorado Springs over and over again.”

Colorado is a particularly desirable destination for conferences because of easy air access from most of North America and the enormous variety of communities, meeting facilities and accommodation choices around the state. But of course, the greatest pull are the Rocky Mountains themselves, a wonderland any season of the year, and very popular for convention attendees who bring along family or tack a few vacation days on to end of the conference.

Meetings in the Rocky Mountain State often come with their own terminology. For example, “front range.” That’s the area where the Rockies meet the Great Plains on the eastern side of the state. So if you are meeting in Boulder, Fort Collins, Denver or Colorado Springs, you’re meeting on the Front Range.

If you’re meeting in Aspen, Vail or just about any of the mountain resorts, you are on the Western Slope or the west side of the Continental Divide.

If you’re from anywhere below 4,000 feet in elevation, you’re considered a flatlander. Own it!

And this is perhaps the most important terminology to understand, if you have not been to Colorado in a while: A pharmacy and a dispensary are two different businesses in this part of the world. The first sells pharmaceuticals, the other sells a certain kind of plant that redeﬁnes Rocky Mountain High. And if someone suggests edibles, it’s not necessarily an appetizer for your event.

Denver

In November 2015, Denver voters overwhelmingly approved a major expansion of the Colorado Convention Center, which is already more than 2 million sq ft of enclosed space. Although the design phase is underway, a completion date has not yet been set. The expansion will include an additional 80,000 sq ft of ballroom and meeting space; and 100,000 sq ft of prefunction and service space that also will include a 50,000-sf outdoor, rooftop terrace. Lots of floor-to-ceiling windows promise to take advantage of the 300 days of sunshine Denver enjoys. Videostreaming and increased Wi-Fi capacity also are part of the planned renovation.

That’s good news for all, with the possible exception of groups like the Public Library Association (PLA), a division of the American Library Association. Melissa Faubel Johnson, CMP, coordinated the group’s first conference in Denver in 2016. Nearly 8,000 people attended the conference held in the Colorado Convention Center and all went ﬂawlessly.

“Since the center currently ﬁts our needs so well, I do have concerns about expansion,” says Faubel. “It could mean that we would have to ‘share’ the facility with another group in the future, which is not ideal.”

The PLA used 17 hotels in the downtown area, all within two or three blocks and easy walking distance from the convention center, which was a huge selling point for PLA members.

“There is so much to do in the downtown area,” Faubel says. “The overall city package and accessibility from across the nation ﬁts our needs very well.”

CNN’s Anderson Cooper was the opening session speaker. Faubel expected about 5,000 of the 8,000 attendees to attend the event in the Belco Theatre, which seats 5,000. Faubel and those on the ground in Denver were worried about the potential for an overflow crowd and managing such a large throng of people.

“I worked with my event manager at the center, as well as their in-house security team to develop a plan for ushering attendees into the theater in order to ﬁll all the seats,” she says. “PLA staff, along with the ushers and center staff, did a fabulous job of maximizing the seating and the opening session was a huge success.”

That was the biggest stressor Faubel had during the entire event. She praises Lindsey Richeaux, CMP, senior event manager at the convention center, for her timely responses to all needs and overall thoroughness in planning this event. Faubel calls her the best planner she’s ever worked with at a convention center.

MORE DENVER HIGHLIGHTS

If you like your meetings with that new carpet smell to them, plan a meeting in late 2018 at the Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center in Aurora, the fifth Gaylord Hotel in the country. Construction is underway on the project, which will bring 1,501 guest rooms and 485,000 sq ft of meeting and convention space to the Denver metro area. In addition, the 65-acre property will include eight dining venues, an indoor/outdoor pool complex with lazy river and water slides, along with numerous basketball and tennis courts. The Grand Lodge will celebrate nature in the way Colorado intended with an indoor lake, winding pathways and waterfalls, 125-seat lobby bar and spectacular views of the Rocky Mountain National Park from Estes Park Visitor Center — Visit Denver says this is “where wild meets life.”

The Colorado Convention Center expansion promises to take advantage of Denver’s 300 days of sunshine, with lots of floor-to-ceiling windows.

Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center’s Grand Lodge will feature an indoor lake, waterfalls and walking paths when the resort opens late 2018.
Colorado Springs

Colorado Springs has 14,500 guest rooms with more than 5,000 designated as convention guest rooms. Between Colorado Springs and Pikes Peak, you’ll find 450,000 sf of meeting space and more than 50 unique attractions and activities. For some overwrought host an event at the U.S. Olympic Training Center or get your cowboy on at the Colorado Springs rodeo Series, complete with a chuckwagon dinner.

Located about 80 miles south of Denver International Airport, Colorado Springs has its own airport and numerous direct flights from Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas and Los Angeles via American, Delta, United and Allegiant. However, Myland with the Radiology Business Management Association (RBMA) reported that several of their attendees had to skip the last day of the conference in order to make connections and get back home before the wee hours of the morning.

The 2016 meeting of the RBMA was the third time the organization has met there, in part because of the geographic diversity of its members, says Myland. RBMA has members from Alaska to Maine to Hawaii to Florida. “The Broadmoor is a little more expensive than other places we’ve been, but our attendees often report that they feel as if we are the most important guests on the site,” Myland says. “I’m always impressed with the overall cleanliness and abundance of fresh flowers that make everything feel special.”

The 784-room Broadmoor also offers three Wilderness Experience properties: The Ranch at Emerald Valley, Cloud Camp and Fishing Camp. And in fall 2016, The Broadmoor opened The Estate House, a lavish 12,000-sf hilltop mansion designed during the 1920s that is perfect for small private parties and receptions. Overall, The Broadmoor features 185,000 sf of function space, including the 60,000-sf Broadmoor Hall and 62 meeting rooms. Broadmoor amenities include three championship golf courses, a year-round tennis program, a Forbes Five Star spa and fitness center as well as 26 retail boutiques. There are more than 20 restaurants, cafés and lounges, including the Penrose Room, Colorado’s only Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond restaurant.

Myland notes that Colorado Springs is a destination where a lot more spouses and family members join attendees, in part because of The Broadmoor and in part because Colorado Springs has so much to offer. The lack of public transportation in the city doesn’t seem to inhibit attendees from getting out and experiencing the area’s many attractions. With its extensive conference presence in Colorado Springs, and abundant parking is not an issue for those who rent their own vehicle.

**Mountain Resorts**

Molly Lydon, CPS, assistant to the president and CEO of the Iowa Bankers Association (IBA), is starting her 25th year planning meetings and events for the organization. For most of that time, the mid-winter management conference has been held at a Colorado ski resort. Steamboat and Vail have been extremely popular with attendees, who often bring family with them, but after a FAM trip to Telluride, Lydon decided to shake things up a bit and head to the southwest corner of the state.

Tucked in at the end of a box canyon, Telluride is surrounded by a number of the “fourteeners” that Coloradans are so proud of — 54 mountains peaks over 14,000 feet in elevation. Once a thriving mining community, Telluride all but disappeared off the maps until hippies discovered the mountain town in the ’60s, followed by snow-skiing enthusiasts in the ’80s. The Old West history here is fabulous, and much of the original charm remains in the community of 2,400. Just walking down the wooden sidewalks in the old town is entertainment in itself.

The problem with Telluride is that it’s not as easy to reach as many of the other mountain resorts in Colorado. The municipal airport is no longer serviced by commercial aviation, thus Montr?se Regional Airport, about an hour away, is the closest airport for those arriving by air.

Alaska Airlines’ Brett Vorderlund and his group of 63 bankers from Iowa, who found the connections from Des Moines through Denver to Montr?se manageable in about a half day’s travel. “We received such good rates on lift tickets and shuttle transportation from the airport that it more than made up for any additional expense in airfare,” Lydon says.

The group always meets over the Martin Luther King holiday weekend — a good time for bankers to be away from the office — but also at time when many slopes in Colorado are packed with others enjoying the three-day weekend.

“I don’t ski, but many of our attendees were quite pleased that the slopes were not as busy and the lift lines were not as long as Beaver Creek or Vail had been,” she says.

Lydon personally enjoyed the ice rink and outdoor pool at the 784-room Broadmoor, which debuted in April 2016. The 249-room hotel features the Colorado Convention Center, 16th Street Mall, Pepsi Center, Sports Authority Field and Denver Art Museum.

The ambitious undertaking commits to zero net emissions by 2030, 30% or less waste to landfill by 2030 and zero net operating impact to forests and habitat. More information is available at www.epicpromise.com/zerofootprint.

Aspen. Would you like something other than white linens for your banquet events without the up charge? Thanks to a re-model at the St. Regis, several shades of silver linens have been added to the selection. New Wi-Fi capabilities can be pinpointed to the specifications of each group without unique group passcodes. And because summer is as great as winter in Aspen, the hotel has a new fleet of bicycles available to conference guests who might take advantage of downtown to explore the Aspen community or ride the Rio Grande Trail.

Telluride was such a positive experience for this small association, that they’ve planned to return. **MORE MOUNTAIN RESORT HIGHLIGHTS**

Vail. The former Vail Cascade Resort and Spa reopened in early 2017 as Hotel Talisa. Vail, the only true ski-in/ski-out luxury resort in Vail. Just a few steps away from the best biking and binging trails in Vail Valley, the hotel features exclusive amenities and first-class service, including the Hotel Talisa Altitude Concierge to assist guests in adjusting to Vail’s 8,000+ feet of elevation (see box on page 48).

Last summer Vail Resorts Inc. — with Colorado properties in Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge and Keystone — announced that the company will aggressively pursue a comprehensive sustainability commitment called “Epic Promise for a Zero Footprint.” The ambitious undertaking commits to zero net emissions by 2030, 30% waste to landfill by 2030 and zero net operating impact to forests and habitat. More information is available at www.epicpromise.com/zerofootprint.

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The Madeline has 100 guest rooms with ski-in/out services. A number of IBA members chose to extend their visit to Telluride on the front or back end of the conference. This experience was enhanced by the city and hotel printing out the vouchers for airport shuttle and ski lifts in advance and shipping them to IBA offices in Des Moines. Lydon then packaged them with other conference registration materials and shipped them to individual attendees in advance, thus eliminating check-in lines and registration congestion onsite.

Telluride was such a positive experience for this small association, that they’ve planned to return.
Most Americans live well below a 1,000-foot elevation. The average elevation in Colorado is 6,800 feet, and many mountain resorts are much higher than that. If your attendees fly to the mountain destination, which they are most likely to do, an increase of 7,000 feet or so in just a few hours can take a harsh toll on the body, no matter the age, fitness level or the number of times they’ve traveled to high altitudes. Altitude sickness is serious business and can be deadly. Symptoms include dizzi-ness or lightheadedness, nausea, difficulty sleeping and fatigue or weakness. The following tips are among the most important pieces of information planners can share with mountain-bound attendees.

**Advance notice:** Include information about the potential for altitude sickness in premeeting materials, including the symptoms and steps to take in advance to prevent any effects.

- **Hydrate:** Advise your attendees to begin drinking extra fluids — specifically water — at least one week ahead of time to minimize the potential for altitude sickness. Once onsite, continue to provide plenty of water everywhere and encourage attendees to drink it.
- **Alcohol:** Advise attendees to go easy on the alcohol, especially in the first few days. Assist in limiting alcohol consumption by limiting the number of complimentary drinks served at receptions or dinners. Instead of two drink tickets, make it just one. Better yet, make it a cash bar only. Nothing slows down alcohol consumption more than self-pay.
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- **Meals:** In planning menus, minimize heavy carbohydrates, especially the first day or two. Talk with the caterer about your concerns — they work with flatlanders often and know what to do.
- **Activities:** If any strenuous activities are offered, schedule those toward the end of the conference, allowing your guests’ bodies to acclimate to the altitude. Also remind any independent athletes in the group, such as those who run each morning, that they may want to shorten their run or workout for a few days.

**Humidifiers:** Many mountain resorts have humidifiers in each room because they help combat dryness and altitude sickness. Advise your guests to use them.

**Registration/gift bags:** Higher altitudes are naturally dry, so help your guests offset the potential for chapped lips and dry, itchy skin by including bottles of water, hand lotion and lip balm in the gift bags.

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Altitude Sickness Prevention

Debuted a $1 million renovation of the lobby and bar area in late 2016. The new bar called Antler Hall features many high-end cocktails and a wide selection of beers from Colorado's numerous craft breweries. Beaver Creek is accessed through the Eagle-Vail airport. The Osprey Fireside Grill at Beaver Creek features a casual slope-side atmosphere. Olympic and World Champion alpine ski racer Lindsey Vonn has contributed to the breakfast menu. The Osprey, which can seat up to 100 people, can be bought out for an event.

**Crested Butte.** The Crested Butte Mountain Resort completed an overhaul of AV equipment and internet access throughout the property in 2017. Also, a new year-round “umbrella bar” on the Ten Peaks meeting and event site provides additional pre-function cocktails and better restrooms for any events in an adjacent tent, which can accommodate 250 in a sit-down dinner.

**Estes Park.** You know the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park as inspiration for Stephen King’s “The Shining” starring Jack Nicholson in one of his most legendary roles. If that’s not reason enough to book a meeting here, a new event pavilion features a 250-seat glass-door auditorium and more than 8,000 sf of banquet space. The hotel features a total of 41,000 sf of meeting and event space. Estes Park, located 90 minutes north of Denver, is the east entrance of Rocky Mountain National Park and known for the country’s largest concentration of wild elk.

Also in Estes Park is a new 33,000-sf Events Center with the capacity to accommodate 3,700 people. It is part of the Estes Park Event Complex, which also includes the 25,000-sf indoor-outdoor pavilion, 42-acre fairgrounds and full-service conference center.

**Keystone.** The Keystone Resort and Conference Center is the largest freestanding meeting venue in the Colorado Rocky Mountains. The facility offers planners everything they need for meetings, including a total of 100,000 sf of meeting, event and exhibit space. Two flexible ballrooms, one of which is circular, are on the ground floor. Two ground-level loading areas provide easy access for exhibits and large displays. Keystone provides attendee lodging in 1,200 units in Keystone Lodge & Spa, West Keystone, River Run Village and Ski Tip Lodge. In addition, Keystone offers two golf courses — Keystone Ranch Golf Course and The River Course at Keystone.

**Steamboat Springs.** The Steamboat Grand Hotel has recently improved its wireless system using Ruckus Wireless that can now accommodate 2,000 devices during meetings. An expanded pool deck for outdoor functions plus new carpeting and paint refreshes the entire property. The Rendezvous Lodge, also in Steamboat, received a major exterior makeover in late 2015.

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Meetings and events take on a special energy at The Broadmoor. The magnificent Rocky Mountain setting will inspire your people. World-class golf, spa, dining and more will refresh them. The unique venues and activities of our new Broadmoor Wilderness Experience properties will challenge them and change their perspectives. The 185,000 square feet of meeting space is flexible enough to meet your most demanding requirements. And amidst it all, The Broadmoor’s legendary tradition of quality and service will ensure your event is a success. Contact us today and start planning your meeting now at broadmoor.com.
Sharon Crow was named director of sales at Boise Centre in Boise, Idaho. She most recently was director of event sales for Holiday Inn Northwest Arkansas NWA Convention Center.

JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa, Phoenix, Arizona, has appointed James Anderson director of sales and marketing. He was most recently director of group sales for Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center in Grapevine, Texas.

Visit Seattle has promoted Kelly Saling to vice president, convention sales. She most recently served as Visit Seattle’s director of sales.

Blair McSheffrey was named vice president of global and hotel sales for Sonesta International Hotels. Prior to joining Sonesta, he served as the vice president, hotel commercial performance at InterContinental Hotels Group.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort has named Emily Engel as group account director, responsible for the mid-Atlantic and Midwest regions, as well as associations in the Northeast. She was a senior sales executive at Marriott Marquis Houston. Lindsay Hardee was promoted to group sales manager. She most recently was catering and convention services coordinator for the resort.

Courtney Ingersoll was named national sales manager for the Greater Birmingham Convention & Visitors Bureau in Birmingham, Alabama. She most recently was corporate sales manager for Hyatt Regency Birmingham – The Winfrey Hotel.

Visit Spokane has named Ruth Fitzgerald as director of sales, supporting the sales effort in Illinois, Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. She was director of sales at Hotel RL Spokane at the Park.

Jason Koteff was named national sales manager for Visit Charlotte. He previously served as director of national accounts, mid-Atlantic region for Team San Jose.

Todd Ryan was appointed regional director of sales and marketing for Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants’ 16 mid-Atlantic area hotels. He most recently served as area director of sales and marketing in eastern Canada for Starwood Hotels & Resorts.

Lindsay Gulley was named convention sales manager for Visit Wichita. She previously served as executive director of market development for the March of Dimes Foundation.

AC&F FITZGERALD KOTEFF CROW ANDERSON SALING MC SHEFFREY ENGEL HARDEE FITZGERALD RYAN INGERSOLL RYAN INGERSOLL GULLEY
Host to the 2028 Olympic Games, L.A. is well-equipped for any world-class production. With new state-of-the-art venues such as the $1.4-billion Lucas Museum of Narrative Art and the $2.6-billion Los Angeles Stadium and Entertainment District both set to open soon—L.A.’s vision continues to lead the industry. Even better, we’ll help you produce the perfect event, from start to finish.

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