SUSTAINABLE EVENTS MEETING TECHNOLOGY PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL
THE MAGAZINE FOR GLOBAL MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

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Remarkable Women Share Their Insights and Wisdom

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Publisher’s Message

Honoring Women Leading the CVBs

Welcome to Corporate & Incentive Travel magazine’s April issue dedicated to honoring 12 outstanding women who lead CVBs. Don’t miss the in-depth article “CVB Leaders” that recognizes their achievements starting on Page 18. Their work is making a lasting impact on their destinations, and as leaders of their CVBs, they have agreed to share their experiences.

I am highlighting these talented women in our industry who serve as an inspiration and motivation to others. I hope you will find their comments solid examples of success, and I thank these women for their willingness to share their experiences.

As a leading meeting planner publication serving the industry since 1983, Corporate & Incentive Travel magazine covers meaningful topics monthly to serve the industry and work toward a time when our industry will represent full gender equality, diversity and inclusion.

Also in this issue, our article “Food & Beverage Frenzy” on Page 30 recognizes that trends are moving fast and planners and chefs are working together to satisfy changing appetites. Culinary education as part of the meeting experience is increasing, with chefs weaving in options for education and interactive food and drink experiences. You can read how planners successfully provided new experiences for attendees by including exciting and innovative F&B concepts.

Last, but not least, planners looking for interesting global destinations will appreciate our story “Foreign Destinations Can Fit the Bill” starting on Page 12. It features foreign destinations that offer affordable options. While tried-and-true domestic destinations such as Las Vegas and Orlando still dominate, some global destinations are gaining in popularity. Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand are among a few that lead the way for distinctively different options.

On the domestic scene “Miami Makeover” on Page 60, and our neighbor “Canada: Foreign Yet Familiar” on Page 54 also continue to gain in popularity. Safe travels!

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher
Company-Wide Expansions Reflect MGM Resorts’ Commitment to Grow

LAS VEGAS — MGM Resorts is leading the way in meeting expectations in Las Vegas with expansions designed to accommodate client growth and unique requests. The company has invested in the expansions of its convention space, adding 875,000 sf of technologically advanced, flexible meeting space across ARIA, MGM Grand, Park MGM and Mandalay Bay. As MGM Resorts International developed its vision to grow the convention market in Las Vegas, the company saw demand that warranted expansion of the MGM Grand Conference Center. With the completion of the $130 million, 250,000 sf expansion, MGM Resorts now offers 4 million sf of meeting and convention space within a two-mile stretch on the Las Vegas Strip. That’s more than all the convention space in Manhattan combined. Coming on the heels of expansions at sister properties Mandalay Bay, ARIA and Park MGM, the award-winning MGM Grand Conference Center’s new space connects to the existing space on all three levels. With added booking flexibility, the new space allows the resort to grow with the needs of its clients and attract new business, including associations.

Sheraton Los Angeles San Gabriel Earns 2018 “Hotel of the Year”

LOS ANGELES — With more than 144 Sheraton franchises under the Marriott USA umbrella, the luxurious, world-class Sheraton Los Angeles San Gabriel has earned the prestigious honor of Marriott’s 2018 “Hotel of the Year” award.

This distinguished award is bestowed upon a hotel that demonstrates excellence across a stringent array of criteria that encompasses brand, business and corporate culture goals as set forth by Marriott International, the global leader in hospitality and hotel offerings and encompassing a portfolio of more than 8,700 properties in 30 leading hotel brands spanning 130 countries and territories. These criteria include high standards of personal service, exceptional staff training and mentoring, dominant market share, a high social reputation and high guest satisfaction rates.

“This award is truly a testament to the talented team of associates who go above and beyond the needs of our guests in order to deliver outstanding service in the burgeoning San Gabriel—Los Angeles area,” said Wanda Chan, general manager of the Sheraton Los Angeles San Gabriel. The Sheraton Los Angeles San Gabriel hotel, located just 25 minutes from downtown Los Angeles, hosted its grand opening in February 2018, unveiling 288 elegantly appointed rooms and suites, EST. Prime Steakhouse, with top-quality, imported steaks and fresh seafood, Opal Chinese Cuisine, which hosts special events for up to 120 people, the area’s first Starbucks, a 24-hour fitness center with yoga space and Sheraton Club Lounge for Marriott Rewards Guests. The property has quickly established itself as a market-leader and a destination for wedding, business, and leisure travelers in its first year of being open.

The hotel’s elegant dining, cutting-edge technology and resort-style amenities have delivered an exciting new level of luxury to one of the United States’ fastest-growing cities.

www.pyramidhotelgroup.com

Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa offers “Wine & Watercolor”

SINTANA PUEBLO, NM — Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa is offering Wine & Watercolor classes. The activity takes advantage of the resort’s stunning location beneath the 17-mile Sandia Mountain range to offer a creative journey led by local New Mexico artists. “Wine & Watercolor” takes place on the resort’s back patio featuring unobstructed views of the bosque cottonwood forest and mountains. A local artist greets participants, provides them with supplies, and teaches them how to use watercolor paints. Guests let their creativity flow to create a one-of-a-kind piece of art while sipping a glass or two of their favorite wine.

Loews Chicago O’Hare Hotel Soars to New Heights Following Renovation

CHICAGO — Loews Chicago O’Hare Hotel has completed a multimillion-dollar renovation including newly revamped meeting and event spaces as well as newly designed guest rooms. Chicago’s history and texture — its industry, parks and art, influence the elegant and dynamic design. Conveniently located minutes from Chicago O’Hare International Airport, and a short train ride from all that Chicago has to offer, Loews Chicago O’Hare Hotel is positioned to be the top choice for meetings in the Midwest. With top service, split ballrooms on both sides of the property, innovative food and beverage offerings, creative meeting breaks and more, Loews Chicago O’Hare Hotel is the ideal meetings destination.

Sheraton Americas-Houston Receives World-Wide Recognition for Excellence in Guest Service

HOUSTON, TX — Hilton Americas-Houston received the 2018 Hilton brand Award of Excellence, the only Hilton property in the world to have earned this distinction for eight straight years. The annual award is bestowed on hotels that embody excellence by providing superior guest service through Hilton hospitality. Since 2011, Hilton Americas-Houston has also been recognized as a top-performing hotel among all Hilton Hotels & Resorts properties, demonstrating the highest level of quality and service throughout the brand.

Hilton Americas-Houston was also recognized as Hotel of the Year during the awards presentation that took place at the recent 2018 Hilton Americas Leadership Conference. Criteria for the award include team member engagement, guest service scores and financial performance.

www.hilton.com

Atlantic City Convention Center Awarded Prestigious LEED Green Building Certification

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Spectra, the provider of Venue Management and Food Services & Hospitality to the Atlantic City Convention Center, announced that the venue has been awarded LEED GOLD certification. The LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system, developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), is the foremost program for buildings, homes, and communities designed, constructed, maintained and operated for improved environmental and human health performance.

More than 92,200 commercial and institutional projects are participating in LEED, comprising more than 2.2 million sf of construction space in all 50 states and 167 countries and territories. www.meecac.com
ALHI Expands its Midwest Portfolio With the Addition of Three New Hotels

BOSTON — Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI), which serves as the global sales force for an elite collection of luxury independent hotels and small luxury brands, has increased its domestic portfolio with the addition of three new properties in the Midwest. In downtown Milwaukee, the AAA-Four Diamond iconic Pfister Hotel joins the ALHI City Collection, and the soon-to-open Saint Kate — The Arts Hotel will be added to the ALHI Boutique Collection. In Lake Geneva, the AAA-Four Diamond Grand Geneva Resort & Spa joins the ALHI Golf Collection. All three Wisconsin properties are owned and managed by Marcus Hotels & Resorts, a leading hotel management company based in Milwaukee, WI. The Pfister Hotel was built in 1893 and has served as the premier downtown Milwaukee hotel for more than 125 years. On the seventh floor sits its 24,000 sf of conference and event space. Named for Saint Catherine, the patron saint of artists, Saint Kate — The Arts Hotel is expected to open in late spring. It will offer 13,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space. The Grand Geneva Resort & Spa offers 62,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space. www.alhi.com

The Langham, New York, Fifth Avenue Supports Sustainable Meetings and Events

NEW YORK CITY — The Langham, New York, Fifth Avenue participates in green meeting and event initiatives that bloom all year long. As a leader in sustainability, with EarthCheck Silver Certification, The Langham not only focuses on being green from within, but also on educating attendees at meetings and events held at The Langham to be more environmentally conscious through a variety of offerings as part of the hotel’s CONNECT Conferences program. CONNECT Conferences is a brand-wide program from The Langham Hotels & Resorts that offers planners the option of selecting sustainable solutions to offset the environmental cost of that particular event. House bottled, triple-filtered water in reusable bottles for all meetings and events, in place of individual glass or plastic disposable water bottles. Integration of green lighting solutions from SoLight, a line of distinctively designed solar lighting that combines the power of the sun with innovative design aesthetics. The option of donating flowers from each event to a local hospital after the event is completed. www.langhamhotels.com

Wynn Resorts Named Highest-Scoring Hotel Company in the World

Wynn Resorts announces that it has earned the distinction of being the highest-scoring hotel company in the world as rated by Forbes Travel Guide, outranking all other luxury hotel brands the company rates, and representing a total of 1,105 hotels in 58 countries. Wynn Resorts exceeded each and every other luxury hotel brand, including The Ritz Carlton Hotel Company, The Peninsula Hotels and Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, among others. Each resort in Wynn Resorts global portfolio was rated individually and their combined scores contributed to the top distinction. Resorts include Wynn Las Vegas, Encore at Wynn Las Vegas, Wynn Tower Suites, Encore Tower Suites, Wynn Macau, Encore Macau and Wynn Palace. “Wynn Resorts is the highest-scoring hotel company in the world for one reason and one reason only — we have the most dedicated and talented employees,” said Matt Maddox, CEO of Wynn Resorts. “Our teams in Cotai, Macau, Las Vegas and Boston are second to none, and I am grateful to work alongside them. Remarkable people yield remarkable results.” Forbes Travel Guide’s stringent and anonymous rating evaluations are based on more than 500 objective standards, with an emphasis on exceptional service. www.wynnresorts.com
Knowing How and When to Select a Prospective Client

By Jeff O’Hara

As a business owner, you look at many metrics specific to your business to determine if you are progressing toward financial goals. One of those metrics the profitability of your client base?

When we first started our corporate events business, we jumped at every new lead that came in the door, hungry for revenue and resume-building opportunities. This was great in the short term, because we didn’t have anything else competing for our time. But time is a precious resource, and one that is not renewable. As our company moved from start up mode into growth mode, our lead-chasing became a habit to break. After all, who wants to turn away business? And all of our clients loved us! So certainly more loving clients is a good thing, right?

More Is Not Always Better

More of the right kind of clients is a good thing. The kind of clients that drain your resources — especially your time — and don’t provide the relative amount of profitability are a hindrance on your growth. And when you are growing fast, your time and your human capital are at a premium. Continued growth will depend on how well you steward these resources of time and human capital.

A Startling Revelation

In the business events world, it is common to look at the profitability of an event by the gross margin it produces. That is, the revenue associated with the event less the costs of producing the event. A valuable metric for our business, though, and one that has made a world of difference is cost of sales on an event. My own analysis turned up some startling information: We were spending a lot of time in the sales process on clients that were not producing a ton of profit. This was preventing the sales team from prospecting better clients. So I set out to change that.

In our business, an enormous amount of labor goes into creating a sales proposal customized for each client’s specific objectives, and in many cases that cost isn’t considered when the client looks at your value proposition. They look at what we charge for full service compared to what they can piecemeal on the Internet. Certain segments of the market are high maintenance and low margin, and others understand the value that business events companies bring to the equation and understand the costs involved with that.

I made a decision to identify the market segments that understand our value and are willing to pay for it, and to focus our sales efforts there. We would not pursue any clients I identified as low margin, and, if they came looking for us, we would politely decline to bid on their business. This was not always well-received. However, in my view, if I approach a provider and they tell me they don’t want or cannot take my business, they have saved us both time. I call this the “Thanks, but No Thanks” (TBNT) approach.

TBNT (Thanks, But No Thanks)

Here are just a few identifiers that would trigger a TBNT response:

• Client requests proposals from too many companies. If you’re in a high-touch service business, clients who know what they are looking for will do research before sending a request for proposal (RFP), narrowing it down to two or three companies at most that are the best potential fits for them. When that list is longer than three, you know they have not done their due diligence and they may simply be looking to do just that in speaking with you. That’s not a good use of your time.

• Client refuses to schedule a call to discuss the RFP. Every event is unique, and the better our business understands your goals and objectives, the better our proposal will be. If you can’t take 30 minutes to discuss it with us, you are likely just shopping price.

• Client’s budget is unrealistic. This speaks for itself. We are a high-level service provider, and we will never be the low-cost provider in any bid situation. We are wasting our time with any work spent in the low end of the pool.

• Client’s deadline to create a proposal is unrealistic. A quality proposal requires sufficient time for the provider. Clients who don’t understand the process or don’t respect our time may not be good partners in the short or long term.

Communicating TBNT to Your Team

While these markers are specific to my business, there are some sales universals that translate across industries. Salespeople hate saying “No” to anybody, and they naturally want to win every opportunity that comes in the door. But it is worthwhile to analyze how costs play out in the sales process and to condition your team to the concept of sometimes saying “Thanks, but No Thanks.”

The fact is, every minute they spend on a low-profit group is a minute they are not spending on a high-margin group. Ensuring your sales team is aligned with your goals may require a change in your incentive plan. In our case we added a metric to incentivize client profitability in addition to top line revenue. Wouldn’t the team’s focus be clear so when we had to TBNT a client, we were not devalued for long. The only thing you cannot get back once it is lost is time, so invest your time with the preciousness it deserves. Lead your team to understand this, and you will see your profitability grow.

Proof That TBNT Can Lead to Profits

In 2016, our corporate events business was named to the Inc. 5000 list of the fastest-growing, privately-held companies in the United States. Prior to this, we had received plenty of recognition within our industry. But this first-time honor from Inc. 5000 gave me an opportunity to take stock of all that had happened and all that my team had overcome. As we had learned to identify the right clients, and to manage our cash flow, we were able to recover from major hits including Hurricane Katrina and the Great Recession, and not only survive, but thrive.

Then, in 2017, we were once again named to the Inc. 5000. The notification letter indicated that fewer than one in three Inc. 5000 recipients receive the award again. It is an honor for fast growth — something that is by definition hard to maintain.

Being honored as a member of the Inc. 5000 two years in a row was, to me, more than just a recognition of successful years. It was a culmination of having overcome all of the challenges it takes to create a successful business over two decades of hard work, buoyancy in the face of some seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and a commitment to strategy that may include saying “Thanks, but No Thanks” to certain prospects.

Whether this is your rookie year or you have cultivated a long tradition in your industry, you will never go wrong by sharing your vision with your team, being savvy about the clientele you pursue, and celebrating with your team members when they produce results well beyond expectations.

Jeff O’Hara

Jeff O’Hara, author of Have Fun, Fight Back and Keep the Party Going: Lessons from a New Orleans Entrepreneur’s Journey to the Inc. 5000 (Greenleaf, 2018), is president of PRA New Orleans, a business event management firm creating unique experiences for corporate groups. Learn more about Jeff at www.jeffreyohara.com
Allied Market Research projects that Vegas and Orlando still tend to dominate the MICE industry as top destinations overall, but places such as Cancun, Toronto, London and Singapore are grabbing an ever-growing piece of the pie. With demand for U.S. hotels exceeding supply and costs rising, foreign destinations may offer attractive opportunities. American Express M&E projects a 2.41 percent increase in North American hotel room rates for groups, but just 1.6 percent in Europe, 1.1 percent in the Asia-Pacific region and less than 1 percent in Latin America. Also of note: The CWT Meetings & Events 2019 Trends Report expects that costs per attendee/day will actually decline 4 percent in the Asia-Pacific region in 2019. But for U.S.-based meeting planners accustomed to the accessibility, logistics and ease of planning a meeting or incentive close to home, an international destination is not for the faint of heart.

Seek Advice from Seasoned Professionals

"Get with someone who knows what they’re doing," says Kim Hester, senior account executive for Irvine, CA-based JNR Incorporated. "Make no assumptions that things will run the way they do at home."

Hester knows from firsthand experience the kinds of unique circumstances a program in a foreign country can spark. Hester was aboard a Windstar Mediterranean cruise two years ago when a member of her group suffered a massive heart attack just as the ship was sailing out of the harbor at Kotor, Montenegro. The captain dropped a tender boat for a two-minute trip to a nearby hospital, but as it reached shore, the guest died. "I knew if it was established that he died on land it would take weeks to get him out of Montenegro," Hester says. "But if he died on the ship, it would be in international waters, and no problem. So I got the ship doctor to document that the guy died on the water, not on land. We had the remains out of Montenegro and on the way back to the family funeral in Texas within 48 hours."

"If you don’t know how to get a body out of Montenegro, don’t be afraid to ask," Hester adds. "If you have true expertise on your side, you’ll have the resources to guide you through those kinds of situations."

Destinations for Unique Experiences

Patricia Silvio, global marketing manager for the international DMC Pacific World, says that interest in new destinations and unique experiences has increased significantly during the past few years. "The appeal for U.S.-based companies to host events overseas is the chance to experience different cultures and unique offerings from around the world," says Silvio, whose company works with a wide range of industries, such as technology, insurance, healthcare, education and finance. "They continue to value the importance of face-to-face meetings and events (M&E), but every industry sector is looking for out-of-the-box and localized experiences in M&E. For example, meeting attendees are showing a growing desire to connect with the local culture and experience the destination through the stories and experiences of the locals."

Getting There

What makes for a good international meeting or incentive destination? Several factors should play into the final choice, starting with where the attendees are based. "If it takes two stops to get there, they’re not going," Hester says. "It’s really important to have good air access. Having a group fly halfway around the world for an event means people will be exhausted for the first day or two. I make sure they understand flight distances. People get excited about going to Australia, but if they want to do an incentive for four or five nights I tell them the flight time has to be proportionate to the amount of time for the program."

Foreign Destinations Can Fit the Bill

Planners Say Many Overseas Destinations Offer Affordable Options

By David Swanson

While Italy remains a popular foreign destination, planners are also interested in alternative destinations a little more off the beaten path.
The Sydney Opera House is a popular venue in Australia. Planners say Australia is a “bucket-list destination” for many, some of whom may seek to extend their stay.

“We had 350 attendees coming from Santiago, Chile,” sagt Michael Lambert, travel account manager with Maritz Travel. “A airlift to Australia was an important consideration for an incentive trip annually for a financial institution catering to the Latin market in the Americas. Fortunately, air service to Sydney has grown considerably over the last decade. “We had 350 attendees coming from the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as from the U.S. But I could funnel them through Dallas, L.A. or even Santiago, Chile.”

Australia is still a long flight, and a bucket-list destination for many. In addition to recommending at least four nights, Lambert says planners should expect a lot of requests for extensions. “I think that’s something a lot of us don’t anticipate.” It’s also important to understand the culture of the company and how it relates to the destination, Lombard says. “It’s not about whether Morocco is better than Italy — one might work for one company, the other works for another. Some groups may want a more remote experience someplace like Cambodia or Myanmar, or I can give you a more polished experience in downtown Singapore or Bangkok.”

Clients need to understand that many destinations do not operate the way they may be used to at home. “Home is currently trendy, but amenities to which travelers are accustomed, such as air conditioning or cell phone and internet access, are not widely available.”

James LaValle, LA-based manager of MICE for the Hong Kong Tourism Board, recommends meeting planners researching their first overseas event should start with a user-friendly destination. “Hong Kong certainly is,” LaValle says. “They can go into Hong Kong with a little more sense of familiarity. It’s a user-friendly destination but has enough unique cultural appeal to be very exciting for its visitors. And with the increased focus on China lately, Hong Kong provides access to China without being in China, with all of its limitations. Negotiating and contracting in Hong Kong are very easy, there’s no taxes, VAT, GST or otherwise, and there’s no visa required. Those visas can not only take a lot of time, but can also require a lot of funds to secure.”

Costs of Various Destinations

“In New Zealand, the U.S. dollar is very strong, so it’s a great value for us,” Hester says. “Ireland and Thailand also offer great value. Vietnam and Cambodia are just plain dirt cheap. There are some places that are expensive, such as Scandinavia, but you get a lot for your money.”

Airfare can be a particular concern for planners looking overseas, but with a glut of seats flying over the Pacific today, some far-flung destinations can be cheaper than stateside options. For example: Thailand.

For sheer exoticism on a big-city scale, Bangkok is hungry for business and wants to showcase its meetings options. Software provider SDL weighed several options for a leadership summit held last year. Following events in the Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) and North America-South America (NASA) regions, Jessica Connolly, senior manager, corporate events & marketing with SDL, says cost was “the outstanding factor” in selecting Bangkok as the host for the 150-person meeting.

“Coupled with the quality and cost of the location, Bangkok was a top choice,” Connolly says. The city provides attendees a decidedly foreign place where English is a common second language, there’s a vibrant culture, and five-star hotels offer excellent value for money.” Sumate Sudasna, president of the Thailand Incentive and Convention Association (TICA) agrees that Bangkok is a great destination.

“Thai hospitality is second to none,” Sudasna says, adding that Bangkok is known as the city of smiles. “Bangkok is ideal for people who want something different but also desire American-style comfort.”

LaValle acknowledged that Hong Kong is at the upper end of the pricing sphere for the Asia-Pacific region, with Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok at the lower end. “But we are also a Tier 1 global financial center,” LaValle adds. “Compared to similar Tier 1 cities like London or New York, we’re relatively affordable.”

For Michael Lambert, travel account manager with Maritz Travel, airlift to Australia was an important consideration for an incentive trip annually for a financial institution catering to the Latin market in the Americas. Fortunately, air service to Sydney has grown considerably over the last decade.

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Costs of Various Destinations

“In New Zealand, the U.S. dollar is very strong, so it’s a great value for us,” Hester says. “Ireland and Thailand also offer great value. Vietnam and Cambodia are just plain dirt cheap. There are some places that are expensive, such as Scandinavia, but you get a lot for your money.”

Airfare can be a particular concern for planners looking overseas, but with a glut of seats flying over the Pacific today, some far-flung destinations can be cheaper than stateside options. For example: Thailand.

For sheer exoticism on a big-city scale, Bangkok is hungry for business and wants to showcase its meetings options. Software provider SDL weighed several options for a leadership summit held last year. Following events in the Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) and North America-South America (NASA) regions, Jessica Connolly, senior manager, corporate events & marketing with SDL, says cost was “the outstanding factor” in selecting Bangkok as the host for the 150-person meeting.

“Coupled with the quality and cost of the location, Bangkok was a top choice,” Connolly says. The city provides attendees a decidedly foreign place where English is a common second language, there’s a vibrant culture, and five-star hotels offer excellent value for money.” Sumate Sudasna, president of the Thailand Incentive and Convention Association (TICA) agrees that Bangkok is a great destination.

“Thai hospitality is second to none,” Sudasna says, adding that Bangkok is known as the city of smiles. “Bangkok is ideal for people who want something different but also desire American-style comfort.”

LaValle acknowledged that Hong Kong is at the upper end of the pricing sphere for the Asia-Pacific region, with Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok at the lower end. “But we are also a Tier 1 global financial center,” LaValle adds. “Compared to similar Tier 1 cities like London or New York, we’re relatively affordable.”
most expensive places in the world. I took a program to Iceland last summer and everyone had a great time — but it was insanely expensive. We went way over budget.”

Popular Destinations
Spain, Thailand and China sit atop Pacific World’s 2019 list of the top destinations based on the number of requests received. Silvio says her company finds that the destinations ranking highest all have strong convention bureaus and a clear destination development strategy as well as modern infrastructure and convenient access.

“For example, motivated by the upcoming 2024 Olympic Games, the Paris region committed to enhancing the visitor experience backed by a 23-million euro investment plan which will greatly boost France as both a tourist and MICE destination,” Silvio says. “Nearly Monaco has recently completed a major renovation of the Casino Square area, including a restored 5-star Hotel de Paris Monte-Carlo and the addition of the One Monte-Carlo conference center. Monaco also attracts incentive programs due to its location between France and Italy, giving attendees the opportunity to visit three countries in one trip.”

To look ahead for emerging MICE destinations, Silvio says Pacific World follows government investments in infrastructure and development, leisure travel trends, social media and more.

“The goal is to find emerging destinations that satisfy the needs of a new generation of planners as well as re-energize the interest of experienced travelers, all of whom are looking for new, exceptionally curated experiences.”

One country Silvio says has been showing steady growth, particularly from the U.S. market, is Peru, a country that offers three diverse regions: the coast, the highlands and the jungle, creating a range of climates, landscapes, textures and flavors.

“They’ve made important infrastructure changes and investments and have proactively courted MICE planners in the U.S.,” Silvio says. “The opening of a new convention center in Lima in 2015 was a game-changer and the city is now able to host large-scale events.”

Other places Silvio identifies as tomorrow’s emerging MICE targets include Bhutan, Namibia, the Greater Bay of South China, Bordeaux in France and Bodrum, Turkey.

For planners like Hester, up-and-coming options such as these are ripe for discovery.

“When it comes to the classic European cities, more and more people have ‘been there, done that,’” Hester says. “Quite a few places in France and Italy are getting loved to death. People are getting away from classical Europe and the traditional capitals. They want to see more of the countryside. Today people want to see Puglia, on the heel of Italy’s boot, which is like Tuscany on the ocean — beautiful, but not as crowded.”

Other European destinations Hester recommends include Northern Ireland and Malta. For meeting and incentive planners with open minds, the world is truly your oyster.
An early career in hotel sales and operations gave Tammy Blount-Canavan the foundation to succeed in the industry she’s been part of for 30 years. “I started in hotel sales and operations and then was recruited into the CVB arena, where I started in an entry-level position and worked my way around different departments and levels of responsibility. It was a good path in that I had an excellent understanding of our primary stakeholders before venturing into the CVB world, and I have walked in the shoes of nearly all the team members I now ask [them] to walk in themselves.”

The primary challenges were probably that there were more opportunities to do meaningful, cool things than there is time to do them all properly.”

Like others, she’s faced some “resistance” as a woman in the industry, but that has done little to diminish her and perhaps even made her stronger and more resilient. “Certainly there are some circles that are male dominant and female resistant,” she says, “but those circles have reduced considerably over the span of my career. At first I asked for help to open conversations from established men in those circles. Now that I’m more established myself, I feel quite comfortable bringing attention to such situations. At that point, if they’re not remedied or interested in my contributions, I simply make them elsewhere.”

In terms of her own success, Blount-Canavan thinks she owes it primarily to three critical traits: “Being a good listener, empathy and the power of persuasion.”

She sees differences in how men and women may lead a DMO, but says good leadership isn’t about gender. “I think women and men are very different, but I don’t think leadership styles are gender specific. We all want to operate in an environment of respect regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race or other factors that people sometimes think are more differentiating than they truly are.”

Her advice to the young women who may eventually walk in her shoes is straightforward: “Be patient, persistent, understanding and claim mentors. Even the most powerful of people will often take time to help someone who respectfully asks for it.”

A native of Vancouver, British Columbia, Blount-Canavan has been president and CEO of the Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau for the past seven years. She served as the executive committee of Destinations International, and in 2017 became the fifth woman in 100 years to become Destinations International’s chair.

She has been recognized as one of the 25 Most Influential People in the meetings industry and as one of the Top-25 Most Influential Women in the industry. In 2015, she was named CEO of the Year. Her background includes the executive leadership position as CEO of the Tacoma Regional Convention & Visitors Bureau, where she was also the architect and inaugural chair of the Washington Tourism Alliance. Additionally, she was on the leadership team of Tourism Vancouver for more than a decade.

Tania Armenta’s road to the CVB began in hospitality while still a student at the University of Nebraska.

“I worked in the hotel industry throughout college, which gave me a great introduction to the hospitality industry. Then, early in my career, I decided to move back to my home state of New Mexico. I had a background in marketing and public relations and was just about to go to work for an agency when someone mentioned that the Albuquerque CVB was looking to create a new public relations division. I had no idea what a CVB was, but I loved the concept of getting PR experience while promoting my home state. I thought I’d be here two or three years, but I fell in love with the industry, our organization, mission and the team.”

It’s creating successful teams that Armenta lists as one of her most significant accomplishments and a measure of her success. “I am very proud of the team we’ve assembled here. It’s a combination of veterans and new industry professionals. Their determination is undeniable, and Albuquerque and our organization are prospering due to their passion and perseverance.”

Like other jobs, she says this one comes with some challenges. “The DMO world is one of many, many stakeholders and I had to learn early on not to let the sometimes negative voices and opinions of the minority influence me too much. To stay in this industry, you definitely need resiliency and thick skin. Many of our stakeholders benefit directly from our work, so at times the lines are blurred between what is good for them and what is good for the destination.”

Armenta doesn’t see her gender as a critical factor in her career. “I’ve had moments where I’ve felt that I was not being taken as seriously as the men in the room. I think it was a combination of being female and typically the youngest in the room as well. However, I have also been fortunate to have some amazing and generous male mentors who believed in me and opened doors for me.”

While she thinks women in leadership may more readily bring inclusivity to the table, she says the core traits of leadership are the same for men and women. “I think the best leaders, regardless of gender, know their audience, speak the kind truth, are persuasive, adaptable, team-oriented and have tremendous grit and strength,” Armenta says. “At Visit Albuquerque, we have a core set of values that we strive to exhibit and share each day.”

To young women she offers this advice: “Believe in yourself, identify great mentors, stay focused and prioritize work to make the greatest impact.”

Armenta has been with Visit Albuquerque for 20 years and has led the organization for the past three. She also serves on the board of U.S. Travel Association’s Destinations Council, the Destinations International DMAP Board and the Jennifer Riordan Foundation Advisory Board, and she chairs the New Mexico Hospitality Association.

In 2012 she was named Tourism Professional of the Year in New Mexico and is a former recipient of the 40 Under Forty awards by Albuquerque Business First. She has a BA in journalism and mass communication with an emphasis in advertising and public relations and a minor in Spanish from the University of Nebraska.
gender came into play — and sometimes still does. "I could name hundreds of times where I have been the only woman in the room negotiating a deal or discussing a difficult subject within the community. I’ve also had many instances where someone around the table should be talking to me, but instead talks to someone who works for me because that person happens to be a man. It’s quite funny, actually. I’ve also faced some challenges at times with the ‘sports guys’ in the community who assume that a woman doesn’t know anything about sports or doesn’t understand how sports are so much more important than a business event (of course, they know nothing about business events if they think that!). They’ll go to my male board chairman, members of our board or members of our staff who are men in order to try to get something when they should be talking to me. That tactic doesn’t end up working for them.

Ratliff believes that women leaders face different challenges than men. "I don’t think there are any hard and fast distinctions between men and women, we’re all unique beings. However, generally I think women tend to be a little more detail focused, which can lead to an organization that has more structure and established measurable goals. Certainly, that’s not always the case, nor is it always the case that women leaders tend to be a little more perceptive about the people around them. But I think that is also often true."

The ability to hire well and build great teams, like the one she currently has, is something Ratliffe appreciates about her company. "I also worked with great teams in New Orleans, Jacksonville, Baltimore and Denver and still maintain many of those relationships years later. The most significant instance was halting the widespread cancellation of meetings for future years in New Orleans after Katrina. That effort required every ounce of will power in my body and the enormous heart and soul of every member of our team. I still tear up when I think of all of them."

Her advice for women entering the industry now is twofold. First and foremost, she says, they should know that the new generation of women have it easier in business than my generation had, and my generation had it easier than the generation of women before us. "So, don’t take things for granted. Make sure you carry other women forward. Remember that you’re standing on the shoulders of women who have gone before you and paved the way for you. Work hard, always be ethical, be fearless but not foolish."

Ratliff is proud of the positive growth in Irving during her time at the CVB, but some successes stand out. "I’m proud of the things we’ve been able to get done in Irving, thanks to a long-tenured team and long-tenured community leaders and volunteers," she says. "Certainly the convention center, Toyota Music Factory and The Irving Convention & Visitors Bureau." Gast’s ‘building blocks’ for DMO/community shared success are strategic. "Build a place where people want to visit, and you’ll build a place where people want to live. Build a place where people want to work. Build a place where people want to raise their kids. Where business has to be. Build a place where business has to be, and you’ll build a place where people have to visit. It all starts with the visit, and the visit starts with us."

She says her own success has largely been defined by “tenacity, persistence, stubbornness, and a willingness to continue learning, including learning from my mistakes.”

Those traits no doubt helped when issues of gender put obstacles in her way — “many, many, many times,” she says. "But that’s just a fact of life. You ‘woman up’ and just do your job and you do it to the very best of your ability.”

Gast has lived by her own words for many years. Her chairmanship of the (then) DMAI 2008 Futures Study pushed the forefront that which she continues to champion — a seat at the tables that matter for the industry. Gast is a former chair of Destinations International and currently chairs its Certified Destination Management Executive Board of Directors. She also serves on the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program board as its chair-elect and is a member of the DestinationNEXT task force as well as a DestinationNEXT facilitator. Additionally, she serves on boards for the Heritage Society, Rotary, La Cima Club, Salvation Army Advisory Council and Chamber of Commerce, and she’s a past chair of the Dallas Advertising League/AAF-Dallas. Gast has earned the designation of Fellow, Certified Destination Management Executive (FCDME). In 2016 the Dallas Business Journal recognized her in its inaugural Women In Tourism Awards. In 2015, she was honored with the La Cima Legacy Award for her contributions to the Irving community. She has also been named a Top-25 Extraordinary Mind by the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International. She is the recipient of an Irving Schools Foundation Fellowship, and in 2017 was recognized by the NAACP Irving-Carrollton Branch with the Fletcher Yates Community Service Award.

Maura Gast, FCDME
Executive Director, Irving Convention & Visitors Bureau

President, Explore St. Louis

"I’ve never really felt there was an obstacle or challenge I couldn’t overcome. It’s always just a question of how," says Kathleen Ratcliffe, who has been at the helm of Explore St. Louis since 2006.

"My first job in the industry was director of the Carbondale, IL convention and tourism bureau, which was a start-up organization. For women just getting into the industry, it’s probably a good path for developing many skills that can be applied to positions in larger organizations and other sectors. As the director of a start-up CVB with no other staff and extremely limited resources, I had to be creative and fearless in moving the organization forward.

One major challenge, she says, is that she didn’t have any real training for that job. "Every step I took was a step into the unknown, and my generation had it easier than the generations before us. So, don’t take things for granted. Make sure you carry other women forward. Remember that you’re standing on the shoulders of women who have gone before you and paved the way for you. Work hard, always be ethical, be fearless but not foolish.""
Julie Coker Graham has been in her present position since 2016, and before that held other positions at the CVB. But she says it was her first job in the industry that helped shape her career. “My first job in the industry was as a server at Wilmington, DE’s Mistek Steak, which truly helped inform my customer-first focus. I believe everyone should serve food at some point; the perspective it provides within the service industry is invaluable.” She went on to graduate magna cum laude from Johnson & Wales University in Providence, RI and during 20 years with Hyatt worked her way up from manage ment trainee to general manager of Hyatt Penn’s Landing. Like many leaders, she sees challenges as learning opportunities. “Often, women leaders believe if you keep your head down and work hard you’ll achieve success. The lesson I learned is that it’s not about working harder but working more strategically,” she says. “Hard work is part of the equation, but equally important is network ing and being strategic about business relationships and personal and professional growth.”

She also thinks that challenges, whether related to gender or something else, make you stronger. “I believe anyone you’re in the minority there will be challenges. You have to work a little harder to be heard. You’re not always afforded the same opportunities as others. You often have to fight for a seat at the table. Those challenges make you stronger and more competitive in my career, all obstacles, temporary diversions or setbacks have made me the leader I am,” she says. “They have motivated me to think more strategically, fight harder and most importantly, prove others wrong. They’ve also made me more focused on creating a path forward for those who come behind me.”

While she acknowledges that women are often considered more nurturing and better communicators than men, she says those are characteristics all leaders should have. Moreover, differences are good. “I’m a firm believer in the power that diversity of thought brings to teams, and to achieve this you need all voices and may be present at the table,” she says. “I try to make my work hard every day to cultivate a culture of mutual respect for differing thoughts and dissenting opinions. I’ve worked for some outstanding bosses — men and women — and we all bring our unique selves to the table.”

A passionate football fan, Coker Graham names the 2017 NFL draft hosted by Philadelphia as an event she’s truly proud of. “I’ve never been prouder than when Adam Schefer of ESPN said, ‘Props to the people of Philadelphia.’ That’s how you host a draft. No other city has injected that much energy, electricity, excitement in a draft. It was an amazing experience for me and my entire team to work with the NFL. It was an NFL draft hosted by Philadelphia as an event she’s truly proud of.”

Success, however, is about the team. “The team around me is the stick by which I measure success. It comes down to collaboration and inclusivity,” she says. “Throughout my career, I’ve been laser focused on ensuring I surround myself with people who think differently, come from different backgrounds and approach problem solving from different priorities and perspectives.”

As a role model and mentor, Coker Graham advises, “Bring your true self to the work environment. Often we fall into the trap of becoming someone else, make you more successful.”

She encourages young women to always ensure they have a seat at the table. “But for those moments you don’t,” she says, “identify an advocate who knows and understands your goals and vision.”

As president & CEO, Coker Graham oversaw the CVB’s role in the 2017 NFL Draft and the 2016 Democratic National Convention, which together had a combined economic impact of $325 million for Philadelphia. She has served on numerous industry boards, including the Executive Committees for U.S. Travel Association and Destinations International. In 2018, she began her tenure as co-chair for U.S. Travel’s Meetings Mean Business Coalition and began serving as the Secretary-Treasurer for IAEE’s Executive Committee. She serves on multiple boards and committees in Philadelphia, including the Philadelphia International Airport Advisory Committee and Mayor’s Cultural Advisory Committee, and chairs CVB’s Social Justice Initiative to combat homelessness.

Rachel Sacco joined the Scottsdale Area Chamber of Commerce in 1986. In 2001, she became the first president and CEO of Scottsdale’s CVB, overseeing its name change to Experience Scottsdale in 2016. Serendipity, she says, launched her career in tourism.

“After graduating from Arizona State University, I began hosting seminars at a communications company. Following a presentation one day, a gentleman approached me. He was leaving his current job and thought I would be the perfect replacement. I gave him my phone number, went through an interview and landed the position. That’s how I found my life’s work because that’s when I was hired by the Phoenix Convention & Visitors Bureau.”

Sacco says the tourism industry is one she’s absolutely recommend for women because it offers so many opportunities for creativity and collaboration. “This industry requires hard work and discipline, but on so many levels it’s about connecting people through travel, changing their lives,” she says. “I could help someone else,’ I could help each other be more successful.”

Sacco links her success to solid research, strategy and partnerships. “Every program and initiative Experience Scottsdale tackles is grounded in industry research, trends and strategies. As a membership-based organization, we rely on partnerships with area tourism and hospitality businesses. As a non-profit entity, we depend on relationships with government officials in the city of Scottsdale and town of Paradise Valley.”

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Sacco thinks women are ‘hard-wired’ for leadership. “Women, in particular, come into the world with qualities of compassion, intuition and inclusive ness, all important leadership qualities at work and home. We lead through openness, and we often surrender to the greater good in situations that require us to lead from behind rather than in front.”

Sacco is a national board member for the U.S. Travel Association and sits on the Arizona Lodging & Tourism Association board. In 2016, the Past Presidents’ Council of the Scottsdale Area Chamber of Commerce inducted Sacco into Scottsdale’s History Hall of Fame, recognizing her contributions to the hospitality industry. She was also inducted into the Arizona Governor’s Tourism Hall of Fame. In 2015, the Rotary Club of Scottsdale honored her with the Corporate Club Member Service Above Self Award for her outstanding service and volunteerism. In 2018, Arizona Foothills recognized her as one of the Most Influential Phoenixians and Most Influential in Valley Tourism.

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Julie Calvert, CTA
President & CEO, Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau

Julie Calvert loves her job. “I’m a Cincinnati native. I was born loving Cincinnati and have such pride in my hometown.”

Early work as a journalist helped shape Calvert’s career. “After receiving my degree in English (concentration in journalism) from Miami University (Ohio), I began working as a reporter in Boston, and then Cleveland. Experience in media gave me perspective in terms of what makes a good story, how the public responds to certain topics and how communications professionals get their messages across. I came back to Cincinnati and, through a variety of experiences, found my way to the Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau. Since then, I’ve been hooked. My entire career has been focused on driving awareness, building reputation, mobilizing resources and celebrating the various voices, backgrounds and viewpoints that make a community.”

Calvert thinks adapting to change is part of leadership. “The tourism and hospitality industries have been changing and evolving, as has Cincinnati,” she says. “Through my career, it’s been important that I adapt and evolve as well, whether it’s in setting priorities, managing different leadership styles or understanding the real needs of our community. Change can be seen as a challenge, but I think it’s all about perspective. For me, change has continued to bring new opportunities, has opened doors and has lead to experiences that have defined my life, and in turn, my career.”

When faced with challenges or criticism, she says it’s attitude and colleagues that make the difference. “I believe it’s critical to empower, foster and support the advocates and embrace critics. In the end, the desired outcome is the same — to be the best version of ourselves and of our community,” she says. “Many of the leaders and colleagues I’ve had throughout the years have helped shape my experience and have had a hand in getting me to this point. I’ve been fortunate. Now, as the CEO of the CVB, I feel it’s my responsibility to pay it forward and be that same type of leader for the people I work with.”

While Cincinnati was once under the radar, that’s no longer the case. “There’s a sense of reinvigorated pride that’s spreading beyond our region. I’m proud to be part of this Cincinnati team and I take pride in realizing the true impact that tourism, meetings and conventions are having on our destination. We are so honored to play our part.”

Success for Calvert isn’t an individual accomplishment. “If we as a CVB and community are performing at a high level — if we’re continuing to see real people in time where we’re realizing the true impact that tourism, meetings and conventions are having on our destination. We are so honored to play our part.”

Casandra Matej, CTA
President & CEO, Visit San Antonio

Casandra Matej is a dynamic leader who has brought significant changes to San Antonio’s $15.2 billion hospitality industry since becoming Visit San Antonio’s president and CEO eight years ago. One of her first jobs brought her to the world of CVBs. “An entry-level position in hospitality was the foundation for my career,” she says. “After graduating from the University of Texas in Austin, I joined what was then the Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau, where I gained my first experience with hotels, CVBs and meeting planning. Later in my career, I had the opportunity to work with Hyatt Hotels and Starwood Hotels & Resorts and learn from great leaders at those companies before eventually going on to serve as senior vice-president of sales and services for the Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau. These diverse industry experiences were crucial in preparing me for my current role.”

Prior to her appointment as president and CEO of Cincinnati USA CVB in 2018, Calvert served as executive director of Source Cincinnati, president of communications and strategic developments at Cincinnati USA CVB from 2001-2016. Appreciating and building on diversity is a hallmark of her career. She helped build the CVB’s Supplier Diversity Program and multicultural marketing channel and made diversity a key part of Source Cincinnati’s strategic vision. In 2019, Calvert was included in the Cincinnati 300, a compilation of the city’s top 300 business leaders, along with a spot in the Power 100, a list of the 100 most influential business, political and community leaders in the Cincinnati region. She serves on the Hamilton County Commission’s key board for Tourism and the Cincinnati Music Festival board.

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She says she’d absolutely recommend this journey for anyone, male or female, out of college and looking to move up in the industry. “Compile as much experience as you can, cultivate a heart of service and keep aiming to improve and grow,” she advises.

Being ready to take advantage of opportunity is something Matej is passionate about. “I learned throughout my career to be flexible in relation to the opportunities before me. For instance, six months after I started at the Dallas CVB, I was offered a position in Washington, DC. It was a big move for me, but I knew it was important. I took it, and it was a challenge that paid off. In this industry, you need to seize those chances.”

Matej has more than 25 years in tourism. Among her many accomplishments are joining Visit San Antonio and the San Antonio Hotel & Lodging Association and launching the city’s Certified Tourism Ambassador Program — among the largest in the nation. In 2014, she spearheaded the creation of Synchronicities, a partnership with Baltimore, MD and Anaheim, CA, designed to assist meeting professionals in maximizing return on investment. She is currently secretary for the board of directors of the U.S. Travel Association, immediate past chair of the Texas Travel Industry Association board and a member of the Texas Association of Business board. She’s also in the 2017 Class of the Texas Lyceum.

Matej received the 2015 San Antonio Business Journal’s Women in Leadership Award and the LGBT Chamber’s Ally of the Year Award in 2018.
I’m sure there has been pay inequity among people, and others in the industry, and that constant world, without a doubt. There’s no single route to a career, and I encourage others with words of wisdom. Both [men and women] bring different strengths and weaknesses are key for my happiness and success, “ Zaldua says. “Some may feel threatened by your achievements and your goals in mind.” Her challenges along the way relate to doing her job to the best of her ability. “I have two primary challenges: transition and funding. Navigating the many different personalities that change as terms expire and people move on is a constant challenge in this industry. In this line of work, we’re predominantly funded through hotel taxes, municipalities and/or agencies that have boards and oversight. As board members, council members and directors’ terms expire and new people arrive, we’re left to re-educate them on our program and its value.” She describes her leadership style as one of open communication, transparency and camaraderie. “I believe that egos need to be left at the door and everyone needs to pitch in if we want to get anything done. I value the wonderful team I’ve built around me that all collaborate and contribute to the success of this organization.” And the organization is definitely succeeding these days. “When I joined the Boise CVB, our organization was extremely underfunded and understaffed. Since then, it has become a viable business that has a healthy position in the marketplace and a defined culture of collaboration and transparency. In four years we’ve doubled the staff and nearly doubled the budget, without adding waste. We’ve been strategic and scrappy. Those attributes have allowed us to reconnect with community partners, develop local visibility and even create a national profile through our concentrated media relations work.” But success, Westergard notes, is ultimately defined by the success of the community. “If the community is vibrant, sees economic impact and my team has the tools needed to do good work, that is success to me. I love hearing how great Boise is doing and I smile knowing that we had a small part of making that happen.” The message she passes on to a new generation of women coming up through the ranks is straightforward: “Don’t be afraid to go after what you want. You’ll need to work hard, ask for help from others, show your worth and stay connected. But if you do, you’ll get there.”

Most of Westergard’s career in tourism and hospitality has been in Idaho. She was the marketing director of the Sun Valley-Ketchum Chamber & Visitors Bureau for 15 years. For four years she facilitated programs, events and constituent relations for the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce as community relations director. In her first year at the Boise CVB, she oversaw the rollout of a new website, the merger of the organization with the Boise Metro Chamber, and growth of the sports event marketing function of the CVB. Westergard serves on the boards of the Girls on the Run Treasure Valley and the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Idaho and is a mentor for Junior Achievement.

Carrie Westergard has been executive director of the Boise Convention & Visitors Bureau for four years. In her more than two decades in the hospitality industry, her work has included everything from hotels and property management to public transportation and the chamber of commerce.

“While in college I was a waitress at a resort and ultimately went into tourism there when an opportunity presented itself. Hospitality is one of those industries that gets in your blood — I think those who are in the industry know what I’m talking about. I value the wonderful team I’ve built around me that all collaborate and contribute to the success of this organization.”

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Janet Zaldua has been CEO of the Marina del Rey Convention & Visitors Bureau for six years. She discovered the tourism industry via a job as a marketing manager in a museum.

“I enjoyed the creativity and community relations aspects of the job and looked for opportunities to collaborate with community partners, volunteer, build relationships and network. From the museum, I moved to Los Angeles County and transitioned into a role in city government. I was involved in sponsorship development, marketing and events. That experience allowed me to showcase my abilities and talents, which opened doors. Eventually, I began working for a CVB, where I was able to strengthen and develop my skills in destination marketing, communications and tourism. I established meaningful relationships with industry leaders and mentors along the way, and each step was a learning opportunity that led me to a growth opportunity.”

There’s no single route to a career, and Zaldua encourages others with words of wisdom that apply to any career path. “Bloom wherever you’re planted. Give 110 percent, maintain a positive attitude and a strong work ethic. Build relationships with community partners and industry leaders. Establish your personal brand and reputation. Never compromise your standards and think long term. The right opportunity will come for the next transition in your career. And if things don’t happen as quickly as you’d like, have faith. In every step of your career, there’s a lesson to be learned that will make you better equipped for the next level.”

Starting out in a career isn’t without challenges. “When you’re first starting out, at the bottom so to speak, and you’re striving to grow and learn and leap to the next step, some people may feel threatened by your achievements and success,” Zaldua says. “Some may try to hold you back and that can be discouraging. As you move forward to the place you want to be, those conflicts become fewer. Having a mentor early on is a great way to discuss challenges and solutions is helpful. Eventually, as I became more involved in the industry and began meeting more leaders, those mentorship relationships were developed and were incredibly valuable. There were times when I bounced challenges off of them to get their perspective. It was helpful to hear about their similar experiences and how they handled it. I cherish those relationships.”

Zaldua believes that men and women communicate differently. “Women often have a strong intuitive and nurturing sense. Both [men and women] bring something valuable to the table, and finding the right balance of strengths, communications styles and talents from the staff that make up the overall team will ultimately determine the success of the organization. Building the right team and striving toward the same mission and shared goals is essential.”

Zaldua credits her predecessor at the Marina del Rey CVB with creating a strong foundation and reputation for the organization, and she’s proud of building on that foundation. “I’m most proud of working to increase our budget by more than 163 percent in five years, which has allowed us to triple our full-time staff, increase our marketing efforts, develop a dedicated group sales effort for the Marina and develop a stronger cohesive brand for the destination. I’m looking forward to continued growth.”

Everyone defines success differently. Zaldua says one measure for her is, “Being in the right place for the season you are in, in life and having passion for what you do,” she adds. “But equally important is doing something in your day-to-day life that has an impact on others — showing kindness, giving to causes that have a positive impact in the world, using your influence and success for the greater good and to strengthen and mentor others. Having balance in life and making time for friends, family and my faith are also key for my happiness and success.”

Under Zaldua’s leadership, Marina del Rey’s brand has been refreshed with vibrant and active imagery and messaging that boasts a new trademark description, “L.A’s Marina.” The organization has grown to include a dedicated sales effort aimed at bringing group business to the Marina’s hotels and event venues.
Meg Winchester took on the role of president of the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau in January 2019. A certified meeting planner (CMP), Winchester understands the important role of meetings and conventions in a city’s economy firsthand. She’s been in the industry for 30 years, starting just after college.

“I was one of the lucky ones who fell into this industry after college,” she says. “I started in the catering field and was honored to be asked to join the citywide sales team in San Diego in 1998. I feel that being in the opera

tion marketing career at a small DMO in southern Rhode Island in the late 80s, and from there worked my way up through various roles at CVBs in Rhode Island. Starting at a small CVB is a great way to learn the industry and make contacts.”

Sheridan says early on gender definitively impacted the acceleration of her career. “I was a mother of three and in interviews I was often asked about balancing motherhood and career aspirations. I’m certain this question never comes up for men. Willingness to relocate was also a challenge as I didn’t want to uproot my young family.”

That said, she has no regrets about her choices, wouldn’t change a thing and highly recommends this industry to other women. While she says leadership styles vary based on many factors, Sheridan doesn’t necessarily see those variations as gender related. “I have to say that from what I’ve observed in my extraordinary network of CVB leaders, both male and female, each one brings a different style to their organization, but they are all highly effective and successful in their roles.”

In terms of her own success that has come with leadership, she says it’s grounded in always understanding that everything that one accomplishes is the result of teamwork and hard work. “While in Providence, I was once told that my agency was the most effective economic development agency in the state. That’s what I have always strived for and hearing others acknowledge that was huge validation for the efforts of my team and board.”

Of all her accomplishments, however, it’s this new role that is at the top. “Taking on this role as president and CEO of the Greater Boston CVB is the pinnacle for me. Leading the team that sells and markets this iconic and revolutionary city is an honor and a privilege.”

“I look forward to working with industry leaders in this community to take this organization to new heights.”

There will undoubtedly be many young women who will follow in Sheridan’s footsteps in the tourism industry, and to them she says, “Be humble, listen, learn and don’t be afraid to take risks. Oh, and have thick skin because you will need it.”

“Amazon.com is an example of that organization’s highest honor. And like many women in the field, Winchester thinks her accomplishments and successes are as much a result of teamwork as they are of her own abilities.

Meg Winchester, CMP
President & CEO, Visit Spokane

This is Martha Sheridan’s first year as president and CEO of the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau, but she’s been in the industry since 1987, most recently as CEO of the Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau.

“I got hooked on the tourism industry during college when I was a tour guide at one of the magnificent Newport mansions. I started my destination marketing career at a small DMO in southern Rhode Island in the late 80s, and from there worked my way up through various roles at CVBs in Rhode Island. Starting at a small CVB is a great way to learn the industry and make contacts.”

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“A graduate of the University of Rhode Island, Sheridan has over 25 years of experience in destination marketing, including more than 15 years with the Rhode Island Convention & Visitors Bureau. She earned a BA degree in journalism from the University of Rhode Island in 1987. During her tenure there, she led a staff of 17 sales and marketing professionals, welcoming more than seven million tourists to Galveston each year. Her career path also took her to the Greater Houston CVB and San Diego CVB sales teams. Being involved with the tourism industry through partnerships and innovative collaborations has always been a priority.

Winchester graduated from Southwestern University with a BA in Journalism. She attained her CMP designation in 1998 and has been an active member of Destinations International, PCMA and many other industry associations throughout her career.

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Food & Beverage Frenzy

Whether It’s Vegetarian or Vegan, Cocktails or Mocktails, Planners are Offering Variety

By Christine Loomis

Trends come and go, and that’s as true for and beverage (F&B) as anything else. Remember when kale and cake pops were king and using liquid nitrogen to wow attendees was everywhere? So what’s trending today, and does it matter to chefs and planners? In a word — yes.

Edward Perotti, CMP, CMM, director of global events with Pure Storage, says, “100 percent, yes. It’s important to keep up with the latest food trends,” adding that he depends on venue chefs to keep on top of them.

“I communicate the look and feel of the event to the chef, then give him/her free reign to show me what can work that aligns with the event and is within the budget, etc.” One caution, he adds, “is to not go toward a trend in a business event without making sure it fits the goals of the event or even culture of the organization.”

Creativity is Returning

What really excites Perotti, however, is the creativity chefs and mixologists are bringing back to the art of entertaining. “For so long, F&B events were turnkey, and rarely did you do something” out of the box. Today, “out of the box” is becoming an everyday thing. I’m beyond excited and inspired.”

Like others, Perotti sees changes in special-request meals. “Vegetarian options have evolved to the level of fabulous meals. Now if we can just get the other special meal options to that point. When hotels have a chef that’s creative and open, and they let him/her do what they do best, the product is an experience,” he says. “Take Chef Michael at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square. He’s so creative and driven by the guest experience, and his dining experience shows it.”

And there’s no reason, Perotti notes, not to serve “special” foods to everyone. “As a work- and cost-saving measure, how about doing halal beef for everyone or gluten-free pasta as the choice for all meals? Special-request foods are at a point where the product is really good, so you can serve it to everyone and take the notion of specific food areas off the table, so to speak.”

Seafood, too, is changing. “The go-to seafood in my mind is oyster. I believe the popular, done-to-death fish like salmon, swordfish and tuna will fade away and we’ll see fish entrées made with less common catering-world fish such as cod, trout or even triggerfish. These are more sustainable and the preparation options are fun.”

“And give me bread,” Perotti says. “I’m glad to see it back. With the heritage grains, high-quality flours and ingredients and artisanal bread preparation, the idea of minimal bread options, or the notion that it’s a boring add-on, is going away.”

Chefs are also Teaching

Culinary education as part of the meeting experience is also increasing. “I’m thrilled that many chefs are weaving in options for education and interactive food-and-drink experiences. There’s a price tag for this, but it is a great way to engage guests, give them an up-levelled F&B experience and, with a little imagination, weave it into your event messaging.”

Perotti says craft cocktails as part of the dining and engagement trend at events has gained momentum but has challenges. “It’s a costly line item in budgets. And many venues don’t have the catering/mixology talent or capacity to create craft cocktails for large-scale events. Additionally, in the corporate world, shying away from full open bars to just beer and wine is on the rise due to corporate liabilities. Get guidance from your legal and human resources teams on where they stand,” he cautions, “before you give that CEO his open bar.”

As for sustainable practices, that’s core to Perotti’s job. “I’m not seeing guests or attendees asking for local. I believe they don’t because, as a planner, it’s part of my professional brand to advocate and provide local and sustainable foods. I don’t believe guests or attendees should ask, it should just be. I see this as part of my role to make it a priority for my guests, attendees and organizations. I’m a huge supporter of the communities and locations in which we host our events. We, as the planning community, have the ability to do much to help local economies as well as the environment, just within our food programs. I don’t, and will never, see a reason to NOT follow sustainable practices.”

Planner Relies on Chefs for Ideas

Jessica Rife, CMP, senior events manager with E Source, also believes in delivering new experiences to attendees, including exciting and innovative F&B concepts. “I absolutely rely on chefs and hotels to guide this discussion and bring new ideas to the table.”

She calls the Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel among the best at that. “I’m always excited to sit down with them and hear their ideas for our events.”

The top five trends Rife sees are...

Some chefs are seeing a newfound focus on beverages such as bourbon and Scotch, craft beers, molecular drinks, mocktails and cocktails with pearls, caviar and infused and injected drinks.

Farm-to-table, locally sourced foods, new plant-based proteins, mocktails and a demand for flavored sparkling waters. Additionally, requests for vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free meals are up, but she doesn’t see a decline in meat. “People like to have options,” she says. “They want more proteins and fruits and vegetables, but balance is important. They still enjoy a fun treat such as a doughnut wall.”

As for global foods, she says they can be risky to serve to a large group, yet people are branching out and embracing more global options. “Last year, we had a ramen station created by Chef Skomal at the Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel; people loved it and were lining up.”

Sharon Purewal, DMCP, managing partner at 360 Destination Group, a San Francisco-based DMC, says her clients are generally sophisticated and well-traveled, and one way to surprise them is via technology.

“We now have options like drone delivery of beverages, robot-made coffee, edible cocktail printing and molecular bites. We’re also seeing a trend in 3D dining and projection mapping on dining tables. It’s all about heightening the senses in new ways.”

Requests for special meals are up at Purewal’s events as well. “At times we may be asked to provide up to 30 percent special meals for seated dinners. If we’re doing an event with food stations, we have to make sure to have a diverse enough menu to satisfy most needs — and make sure everything is labeled.”

There’s Still a Place for Meat

While creative non-meat options are up, meat, she says, has not disappeared. “Many chefs are designing more complex and unique plant-based offerings. However, we have yet to have a group not offer a meat course. But when we do food-station events, we can take more liberty in offering a creative vegetarian station and really showcasing the skills of the chef.”

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Jessica Rife, CMP Senior Events Manager E Source, Boulder, CO

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While not new, connecting people to local purveyors of food is still on trend. “From the attendee perspective, there's definitely a greater interest in where the food is coming from,” Purewal says. “We partner with organizations like The Cheese School of San Francisco to offer interactive, immersive food experiences where guests can ask questions and learn about their food from origin to plate.”

Purewal also likes to invite local producers — farmers, winemakers, brewers, etc. — to events to mingle with the guests. “They may be at a food station to answer questions one-on-one. Or they speak to the group as a whole as their course being served,” she says.

Cocktails, Mocktails and Beer

Learning about beer and cocktails is increasingly important to attendees, too. “We're still serving a lot of wine,” Purewal says, “but there's interest in expanding the palate and learning how to pair other beverages. For example, The Cheese School offers a wonderful beer and cheese pairing. It's a great education and allows us to showcase local artisan cheesemakers and brewers.”

Additionally, Purewal notes, there's a trend of offering creative non-alcoholic drinks including “mocktails made with the freshest ingredients used in unexpected ways to create fusions people wouldn’t think of on their own.” Rheanna Binkley, venue and events manager at The Cheese School of San Francisco, which offers hands-on, interactive, educational corporate and team-building events, does see an increase in meat requests.

“Some of our regular clients keep requesting additional meat items for their groups. This may be due to the ‘keto diet’ trend. What we've noticed about vegetarians is that they're being more curious about the source of food items and inquiring about animal byproducts such as rennet, which is in a lot of cheese. It seems the trend may be the emergence of the more educated vegetarian.”

Additionally, she says, the definition of “healthy” has changed. “For decades ‘healthy’ meant low-fat, low-salt and low-veggies. With the rise of slow food challenging the industrialization of food and the value we now see in knowing where our food comes from, many of our clients are embracing whole fats, animal products and real sugar.”

It’s storytelling, however, that really excites Binkley. “We’ve noticed an uptick in themes and requests for stories to be told through food,” she says. “Whether it’s a six-course meal based on a revolutionary product launch or recreating a ‘magical cheese moment’ a client had while traveling, the opportunity to give guests a unique experience with food is what gets us excited.”

A Chef/Planner Bond is Ideal

A planner's relationship with a creative chef can drive more than menus. Shannon Wilson, owner of Know Forte, LLC, says Chef Ken at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson, is the reason she set a second meeting at the hotel. “He created a break [meal] with pecans multiple ways as we had a keynote speaker from [Canyon Valley Pecan Company]. Next day he did beef jerky five ways for break food. He was a huge hit with the attendees.”

Chefs and planners are now working together at an earlier stage in the event-planning process. The end result is a blending of food and events in which attendees have more variety than ever. Drinks, whether alcoholic or non-alcoholic, are now an important step in planning.

Rheanna Binkley, venue and events manager at The Cheese-School of San Francisco, says planners also want stores told through food.

“Locally inspired is not enough any more,” Vaughn says. “It’s about customization. We ask more questions to learn about the concept, the purpose and end goals for the event. We then translate the information into the décor and cuisine. We like to say, ‘Your story, our flavors.’

He sees an intersection of global cuisine, healthy eating and environmental responsibility. “Our menu designs have an intensified healthy balance to them, offering cuisine from around the world with an emphasis on plant-based accents and environmentally conscious, sustainable ingredients. As an example, we’ve developed a vegan, gluten-free cauliflower ravioli that's extremely versatile to design around.”

One trend that's increasing he says is buying and using unusual but usable fruits and vegetables. Blemished produce is perfect for pies, purees and sauces, and Clark says, helps decrease food waste. “One reason for the trend is that this produce is now much easier to get from national suppliers.”

Mushrooms have a new popularity according to Clark, including mushroom jerky, which he calls a great

What the Chefs Say

David Daniel, executive sous chef at JW Marriott Orlando, Grande Lakes

Storytelling, Daniel says, has become increasingly important. “Locally inspired is not enough any more. It needs to be story-driven also.” Other trends he sees include more plant-based substitutions, nutritional notes on menus and cleaner presentations. “As for beverages, he sees a focus on bourbon and scotch, craft beers, molecular drinks, cocktails with pear caviar and infused and injected drinks.

Interactivity also continues to trend. “I believe we have a great opportunity in focusing on executing events with an interactive and social approach of guest perspective, involving the guest being a part of the meal and interacting with the food.”

Sustainability is paramount. “Anything disposable should be compostable,” Daniel says. The property partners with Harvest Power, which converts food waste to energy. In the past, the program has diverted as much as 195 tons of food waste from landfills.

Michael Vaughn, executive chef at Hilton San Francisco Union Square

Vaughn also points to storytelling, “It’s about customization. We ask more questions to learn about the concept, the purpose and end goals for the event. We then translate the information into the décor and cuisine. We like to say, ‘Your story, our flavors.’

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Chris Clark, F&B director, Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel

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Edward Perotti, CMP, CMM  
Director of Global Events, Pure Storage  
Pacifica, CA

“Stand-alone break food. Mushroom- and truffle-infused spirits and cocktails are also on the rise, as is growing mushrooms in-house. “They're not only a cool display piece but a great show when your action-station chefs are clipping and cooking in front of guests.”

Infusions are also trending. Clark says butter infusions and CBD-infused snacks and drinks, such as sparkling waters, are also gaining popularity. “And no, these will not get you high.”

As for global cuisine, Clark is seeing a rise in authentic Oaxacan and Michoacan cuisines from Mexico, which notably pair insect protein with spirits. “There’s mezcal and insect pairings and the taste is way better than you can imagine,” Clark says. “Dried and seasoned crickets — ‘chapulines’ — and pisco are another trending pairing.”

Among the front-and-center beverage trends are low- or non-alcohol options, flavored seltzers and local cold-pressed juices. Additionally, he says, IPAs are out, lagers are in and milk bars are a thing. “Almond, cashew, coconut and oat milk sharing real estate with half-and-half, low-fat and skim milk will soon be the new norm.”

One sustainable practice gaining traction is straw alternatives — straws made of bamboo or durum-wheat pasta. Clark notes, “Some places are making their own pasta straws now.”

Doug Connor, senior vice president, Centerplate  
Chefs at venues managed by Centerplate are seeing an increase in special-request meals. “Our guests are more diet-conscious than ever before, and it’s our responsibility to offer something delicious for everyone. In time, the market for plant-based meat will not be just vegans or vegetarians; it will be meat-eaters, too,” Connor says.

Among the major trends Connor is seeing include fermented foods such as kombucha; adding more seeds to foods; exotic citrus including yuzu, bergamot and pomelos; and herbs such as lemon verbena, savory and caraway flower.

Matt Walbaum, executive chef, Levy Restaurants  
Walbaum says convention center menus have evolved in keeping with expectations. “Before you might have seen the same vegetables on your plate year round. We now bring in local and seasonal ingredients and prepare them with real care and expertise. Meeting planners want their guests to get a true sense of the city they’re in, so we keep that in mind when designing our menus and seek to celebrate the local market in our menus.”

He says he’s also seeing more Thai, Vietnamese and Indian foods. “Plant-based protein options are growing among vegetarians but also among those who are thinking about the health and environmental impact of their diets,” Walbaum says. “Craft beers and coffee roasters with signature proprietary blends are popular in our centers. Fresh-baked goods from in-house bakeries are a point of difference at Levy’s convention centers.”

Walbaum also notes that some Levy centers have gardens or bee farms onsite — living walls are a trend and reducing food waste is a priority. While keeping up with trends is important, he says, “There’s something magical about taking classic dishes and adding a new twist. Turning those dishes into something new and spectacular is truly rewarding and a whole lot of fun.”

$375 MILLION CONFERENCE CENTER OPENING IN 2020 IN LAS VEGAS

Planners expect venue chefs to keep up with the latest trends, and many give the chefs the ability to come up with a meal plan that follows those trends.

Edward Perotti, CMP, CMM  
Director of Global Events, Pure Storage  
Pacifica, CA

Doug Connor, senior vice president, Centerplate  
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C&IT
Sustainable Events

Going, Going... green!

‘Sustainability’ is the New Buzzword as Planners are Working to Reduce the Environmental Impact of Meetings and Events

By Maura Keller

Turn on the television or open a newspaper, and you will be hard-pressed not to find information on “sustainability.” The green movement has embraced the business world and captured the attention of the corporate meeting and events industry like never before. From sustainable presentation strategies to “farm-to-table” menu options to eco-friendly material distribution, “going green” is causing meeting and event planners to take notice and change the way they’re doing business.

A New Business Model

Casey Carignan, meeting and event planner at Exact Sciences in Madison, WI, sees the concept of sustainable meetings growing — not only through increased communication between companies and event venues, but through heightened awareness of the carbon footprint company events can leave behind on host sites.

“Convention centers are also working towards a brighter future by hiring dedicated sustainability staff members to increase accountability,” Carignan says. Whether it’s recycling or donating leftover materials or purchasing more generic materials to reuse for multiple events, many companies and event centers are taking steps in a more sustainable direction.

Sustainable events also are becoming more prevalent in the events community. In fact, the growing awareness of the importance of sustainability is one of the biggest trends Rachel Andrews, director of meetings and events, marketing for Cvent, has seen in recent years. As sustainability practices have become more commonplace around the world, Cvent has seen these practices blend into meetings and events as well.

“Business events involved more than 1.5 billion participants across more than 180 countries in 2017 alone and the industry is not slowing down. Think of the global environmental impact that events can have at that kind of scale,” Andrews says. “If we don’t start thinking sustainably now, meetings and events can have a detrimental impact on our future.”

There is a much more prevalent desire to address the environmental impact of our events — both as event planners and from the hotel and venue side as well, Andrews explains.

“Beyond the obvious things like plastic cups or bottled water offered onsite, the travel and commuting involved to shuttle attendees, and the energy needed to host large conferences and events is astronomical,” Andrews says. “As this awareness has grown, so has the willingness to make adjustments to how an event is organized and executed.”

Trends such as reusable water bottles, water bottle filling stations, and prominent recycling centers and containers are popping up throughout event venues. Additionally, food stations are now offering smaller portion sizes in an effort to combat food waste at large events.

According to Julie Blank, director, strategic accounts at Brightspot, more clients are inquiring about ways they can ease into sustainability. While many clients are quick to note that no additional budget is available to support the effort, many like the idea and want to participate in small ways.

And while five to 10 years ago “going green” felt like a fad, as Blank explains, today we have a better understanding and a greater public focus on the importance of reducing waste, conserving natural resources, improving both air and water quality and protecting ecosystems and biodiversity.

“The biggest trend is that people are acknowledging that events can produce a lot of waste and a large carbon footprint, and they are starting the sustainability conversations with event partners,” Blank says.

The Art of Giving Back

Companies recognize that incorporating environmental elements into a meeting or event is more than just ‘green’ business — it’s good business. Exact Sciences is a great example of the many companies focusing on community service both in their local communities and in the communities surrounding their larger events.

Clean the World and put together hundreds of hygiene kits for a great cause. “We’ve also seen area event organizers host donation drives as part of their events,” Andrews says. “Adding a corporate social responsibility element to our events is a major focus for us. Not only does it offer your attendees a great way to give back, but the opportunity allows for more engagement and networking among them as well. It’s a win-win.”

Sarah Sebastian, meeting planner and owner at Rose Gold Collective, an experiential agency, says finding a local charity to tie into an
“Companies looking to incorporate more community service components should consider using the arrival or departure day for engagement opportunities since attendees might not always have set plans.”

Casey Carignan
Meeting & Event Planner
Exact Sciences Corporation
Madison, WI

Sebastian stresses the important role that meeting and events planners play in incorporating sustainability into the meeting and events they plan — regardless of the size. “We should all consider the waste and ways we can leave a space or community better after an event,” Sebastian says. “Even if our clients aren’t asking or bringing it up, it is up to us and our business to be aware and thoughtful of the impact we have. We have buying power.”

Sebastian always ensures the meetings or events her firm plans don’t have Styrofoam products being used. “We are producing higher-end events so we have control on what the glassware looks like, what items we are asking for — so I think we should all have that mentality and ask questions to our venues and vendors. What are they doing to cut waste?” Sebastian says.

One of Carignan’s favorite sustainability examples was when meeting attendees were offered a stainless steel water bottle — both as a welcome gift and as a method to reduce the use of plastic water bottles. By implementing this with a group of 100 attendees at a three-day meeting, with the average attendee consuming 2.5 bottles of water per day, Carignan and her team could prevent the use of 750 plastic water bottles.

“Strategy presents a great opportunity for increasing logo awareness while potentially saving money through the one-time cost of an environmentally friendly water bottle,” Carignan says.

Go Paperless

Many of Brightspot’s clients have implemented paperless meetings. Advances in technology have made it easy to get rid of the 100-page binder full of speaker bios, agendas and PowerPoint printouts. And, asBlank explains, an ‘app’ is a great way to ensure that everyone has the most up-to-date meeting information and no reprints are needed as agendas change.

Not sure your audience is ready to go paperless? Blank recommends printing a small agenda that can be folded and slipped into the back of a name badge as a baby step. Also print an app download instruction card that can be sent with pre-event documents or handed out at check-in.

“My favorite way to help ease people into app usage is to set up an onsite app concierge desk,” Blank says. “When getting checked in, we ask if the attendee has downloaded the app. If the answer is no, we direct them to the app concierge desk where we have staff available to help download and use the app. People want to participate, they just need someone to help make it less intimidating.”

At Cvent’s recent internal company-wide event, the company gave away customized S’well bottles that more than 1,400 employees could use throughout the day to fill with water rather than using plastic and paper cups. “Conference or event swag is also a big ticket item. Many of these swag items are cheap and end up in the trash and landfill,” Andrews says. “By giving our employees S’well bottles rather than other less expensive branded tchotchkes that wouldn’t be used, we were able to reduce our waste, while also giving our team something that they would use every day.”

And because food waste is a considerable issue for meetings and events of all sizes, at Cvent CONNECT, the meeting planners also work closely with the catering and banquet teams to present buffet items in a way that reduces overfilling — and thus, wasting — of food during meal breaks.

Luckily, more hotels and venues are offering other programs to avoid food waste. For example, hotels will take food that hasn’t made it to the show floor and will package and distribute it to approved providers who deliver to local food banks. “Such programs are increasingly becoming a priority for venues and planners alike,” Andrews says.

Ask the Right Questions

Working with suppliers, vendors and destinations who are using “best practices” in green meetings also is important to many meeting and event professionals’ overall sustainability vision. Whether it’s a facility, ground transportation, use of rental goods, audio/visual and even entertainment, stewardship is key to being as carbon-neutral as possible.

“Collaboration throughout the industry is also helping drive growth — other individuals in this field can help you determine what materials and/or goods your meeting may be able to donate after the event,” Carignan says. “It’s a question I believe every meeting planner should be asking to see what options there may be.”

When choosing a ‘green’ locale some key questions that should be asked include:

- Going ‘green’ with the 3 Rs (Recycle, Reuse and Repurpose), means meaningful goals — What are your next action steps?
- Have you transitioned overhead lighting and A/V equipment to ‘green’ bulbs to reduce impact on energy consumption?
- What percentage do you recycle, and are containers visible for guests to use and sort waste?
- Do you research and source locally grown produce, goods and products during menu planning?
- Shel Horowitz, owner of Going Beyond Sustainability and author of Guerrilla Marketing Goes Green, specializes in green and ethical marketing strategies. He recommends meeting planners include green features in the venue evaluation criteria such as:
  - Does the venue promote using solar, wind and geothermal for water, heating and/or electricity?
  - Does it promote using water-saving faucets and shower heads?
  - Does it have windows that open?
  - Does it have key-activated, in-room electricity that shuts off when the room is empty?
  - Does it have super insulation?
  - Does it have lots of oxygen-releasing plants in the atrium?
  - Does it use natural rather than chemical pest control?
  - Does it have earth-friendly landscaping with walking trails?
  - Does it use full-spectrum LED or vintage incandescent lighting?
  - Does it utilize natural sun-light where possible?

“Attendees will actually feel better at a venue like that, too,” Horowitz says. “Fresh air and natural light create a sense of well-being — and they’ll want to come back for their next conference.”

Blank suggests checking with CVBs and choosing a destination that supports sustainability, has great access to public transportation or allows attendees to walk to local restaurants and shopping areas. “Choose a hotel that recycles. Better yet, choose a green-certified hotel,” Blank says.

Other suggestions include placing recycling bins in the meeting space, collecting and recycling name badges, not using pre-set water at the functions and using water bottle refill stations.

Horowitz also recommends meeting planners encourage transportation sharing. “It’s pretty easy for meeting planners to set up a web page to match people needing and offering rides,” Horowitz says. “A car consumes almost as much fuel with the person on board as it does with four, and the other resources consumed, such as time, impact on traffic flow, parking, etc., are constant no matter how many passengers are in the vehicle. Thus, if a driver gets three riders, the environmental impact is reduced by nearly 75 percent. If people are flying in for the event, coordinating airport pick-ups to maximize vehicle occupancy is another green option.”

Horowitz suggests planners also put green messages in the app theme lends itself to it, encourage the organizer to incorporate green speakers into the platform — and green messaging in the program. “This could include all the steps they’re taking to reduce the footprint of the conference, so attendees can share the story too.”

The biggest trend is that people are acknowledging that events can produce a lot of waste and a large carbon footprint, and they are starting the sustainability conversations with event partners.”

Julie Blank
Director, Strategic Accounts
Brightspot Incentives & Events
Irving, TX
“Fresh air and natural light create a sense of well-being — and [attendees] want to come back for their next conference.”

Shel Horowitz
Owner
Going Beyond Sustainability
Hadly, MA

and everything else the organization is doing beyond the conference, as well as things the attendees can do to reduce their own impact at the conference and when they get home,” Horowitz says. “And suggest green side trips such as a local organic farm or recycling center.”

Down the Road

Meeting planners who take steps to become more environmentally friendly often find that the benefits of “green business” go far beyond contributing to a healthier planet. They also make for a healthier bottom line.

And while consumers may be getting tired of the green speak continually being discussed throughout a myriad of industries, experts agree the green movement is here to stay.

Also, if handled correctly, embracing the sustainability within the meeting and events industry can be a powerful advantage in today’s environmentally focused economy.

While strong environmental initiatives are beginning to gain traction within the meetings industry, attendees also are demanding companies show the steps they are taking to become more sustainable and renewable. How can they do this? Companies can train meeting and event planners to think about sustainability through all facets of the meeting and events planning process or be trained to put sustainability frameworks into practice to capitalize on current demands for “green” products and services.

“Sustainable practices are now the norm in our everyday lives,” Andrews says. “We are used to dividing trash into multiple bins at the local Starbucks. Food and beverage labels at grocery stores highlight sustainable practices to encourage awareness. It often takes that kind of broad implementation for something to find its way into other industries such as meetings and events. When we expect a certain level of sustainability in our personal lives, we then expect that in our professional setting as well.”

Of course, with growing awareness about the effects of humankind’s current habits on wildlife and oceans, hotels and venues are becoming more interested in committing to new initiatives to help reduce waste. “If every company eliminated just one unsustainable component from their meetings, such as plastic straws, plastic water bottles or Styrofoam cups, we could significantly impact the carbon footprint of corporate events,” Carignan says.

And while the meetings and events industry is still in the very early stages of making meetings and events truly sustainable, Andrews says event planners need to drive awareness and ask for more sustainable options from our partners and vendors. “Many hotel and venues offer a variety of green initiatives — it’s our social responsibility to ask about them,” Andrews says. “There is so much opportunity and as sustainability practices become even more ingrained into our daily lives, I have no doubt that it will continue to positively impact the meetings and events industry.”

C&IT

The Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby has undergone a $12 million re-design, the final stage of a $150 million renovation project, the largest makeover in the resort’s history. It has completely transformed into a sleek, contemporary space featuring new food and beverage options and offer an inviting area for guests to relax or network. A recipient of the prestigious Meetings & Conventions Hall of Fame Award, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. The resort offers more than 331,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 86 meeting rooms, and 2,270 guest rooms and suites which feature the Westin Heavenly® Bed. Attendees can also relax in the luxurious Mandara Spa, indulge in one of our 17 world-class restaurants and lounges or enjoy our unique Disney Differences.

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TheMeetingMagazines.com
Meeting Technology

For years, partly because of its ever-increasing ubiquitousness and complexity, and partly because of the value of their always-limited time, meeting planners have had a love-hate relationship with technology. Today, however, meeting technology is in the midst of an innovation revolution that will ultimately transform the meeting industry from an isolated, business byproduct to a core element of its bottom-line success.

And that result will hopefully prove the credibility of a slogan in use since the Great Recession: “Meetings mean business.”

What meeting planners want most today, both in terms of their own needs and the needs of their companies, is greatly improved integration of individual technological components, or tools, into a fully functional, seamless platform.

The fact that such integration does not yet exist to the extent it should is a “frustration point,” says Carolyn Pund, CMP, CMM, senior manager, Global SMM & Technologies, at San Jose, CA-based enterprise technology giant Cisco Systems. “A challenge we, as meeting managers face now is that we don’t have full integration of event data into our marketing tech stack so that information can be shared across business systems. So there is a lot of data sitting in a lot of disparate systems across the company. And I do not believe that the vendors in the event tech space fully understand how important this is.”

“For example,” Pund says, “a vendor might sell the same product into six organizations of the same company, but [the vendor doesn’t] have the capability of tying that data together on the back end for them. So things like data integration across multiple systems within the same product, and then moving that data into the company’s tech stack are real issues that need to be addressed.”

Allie Magyar, a former meeting planner who founded and now serves as CEO of the Vancouver, WA-based event technology provider Hubb, whose major clients include Microsoft, Tableau and Kronos, agrees with Pund’s assessment.

“As meeting planners adopt more and more technology, having easier to use software, where information and data can be transferred back and forth, is of utmost importance.”

Why has it been so difficult to accomplish that kind of integration? "Technology innovation has actually been very slow in our industry," Magyar says. "So there are a lot of companies with legacy platforms that were built before the evolution of application programming integration (API) was a thing. And that helped meeting technology companies with their sales. Until now, we’ve had a closed system that said, ‘You have to use us for everything. There is no other option.’ And what meeting planners are now starting to find is that all-in-one solutions aren’t focusing across [the integration of] 10 different products, because they can’t. They’re finding, too, that while all-in-one solutions might meet their needs with half of their products, they’re not meeting their needs with the other half. They’re also finding that the process is more complex and takes more time than it needs to if you have the right solutions in place and just need to integrate them.”

The Key to Progress: Open-API

As a result, Magyar says, the trend now is toward open-API solutions that allow individual technology components to function more seamlessly with each other within a custom-tailored platform that consists of best-in-breed tools. For example, Hubb works with open-API Swoogo as the best-in-breed staff registration tool. As a veteran global meeting manager at one of the world’s top technology enterprises, Pund points out that in order to be effective, an API integration “is most valuable when data is shared bi-directionally.”

“API implementations need to be collected and mapped between the integrated tools for the information to be valuable in both systems and offer conclusive reporting. That’s the best practice for shared data,” she says.

Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, Brian Ludvig, senior vice president of sales at meeting industry technology leader Cvent, agrees that improved integration of tools and functions is a valid and important objective.

“Right now,” ludvig says, “planners can get something for registration, something else for a mobile app and something else for keeping track of the budget, but what they really want is an integrative approach. They don’t want to import and export data from place to place. They don’t want to have to work in multiple systems. They want fluidity of data, so there is less manual manipulation of it. That’s what they do today. The bottom line is they want the data connected. And that’s what we’ll see in the next generation of API, which will allow different systems to talk to each other. The urgent need for full integration is “a big burden,” Ludvig says. It also now relates to compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). “We’re now in a GDPR world.”

Chris Soto, president of CTC Events and Productions in Fairfax, VA, is a Cvent customer. And he agrees that better integration of technology across the meeting industry is badly needed. “That would save us a lot of time because even though our different events are each unique, there is a lot of overlap in terms of planning.” He says, “And better integration of functions would definitely be an improvement. That’s really what is most needed right now. For example, we need to be able to reduce the amount of data entry required to use technologies like Cvent. And often, you have to re-enter the data for multiple meetings. The need to repeat yourself is time consuming, so we definitely need to reduce the duplication of effort that we see now.”

Related Issues of Functionality

Along with a need for integration of functions into a platform is the need to also have technology do more than it has so far.

“The most innovative corporate users of meeting technology now use it for far more than just efficient planning or an improved attendee experience onsite,” Ludvig says. “They use it in order to assess and improve upon the bottom-line business results of their meetings and events.”

He continues: “What we’re seeing now is a deeper form of integration into business operations. For example, you’ll see people from the marketing side want things like information on registrants at a customer conference integrated into their customer relationship management (CRM) systems or marketing automation systems. They want to be able to do things like ask, ‘What people went to my conference, what did that yield?’ How did that impact our new customer pipeline? More and more companies are realizing that integrating meeting activities, such as engagement levels, increases business success.”

That kind of innovation, he says, will be a major driver of the future of meeting technology.

Pund, meanwhile, sees a need for easier deployment and use of meeting tools. “What we’re seeing is app-ification of products, such as engagement features like messaging and people want everything on their web-enabled, so that they’re not constantly having to download another app taking up space on their device,” she says. "They want everything on the cloud. That means instant access. It means you don’t have to wait for your software to update every time you open it. And that’s something that is going to happen now.” It, too, she says will revolutionize how other meeting technologies work.

And a third issue of debate is the...
“As meeting planners adopt more and more technology, having easier to use software, where information and data can be transferred back and forth, is of utmost importance.”

Allie Magyar
Founder and CEO
Hubb
Vancouver, WA

“all-in-one” technology platform versus one that is custom-created by the corporate user from an array of best-in-breed components. Again, somewhat surprisingly, Cvent does not take the position that it will be all things to all people. It is focused on building a system that allows for integration, and even working relationships, with innovative niche providers of specific new tools that enhance the overall process. However, Pund notes, for now at least, the well-established, consolidated platform trumps the idea of one-off proprietary tools. “Until we get to a place where we can have a way to merge data from multiple tools easily, being on a consolidated platform is best,” Pund says. “And from an enterprise perspective, when it comes to brand and data from multiple tools easily, being on a consolidated platform is for security and data privacy.”

The Holy Grail: Big Data, AI and Analytics

In the long run, the single-biggest and most important innovation in the use of meeting technology will be the deployment of big data, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to literally transform the meeting industry with knowledge derived from analysis. Meeting planners and their corporate superiors will be able to know, with certainty, whether a particular meeting was successful and why. And that knowledge will be based in attendee data so granular and complex it can only be imagined today. Meanwhile, the attendee experience onsite will be taken to levels that also transform meetings for them.

“Those kinds of capabilities are ever evolving,” Ludwig says. “You see more and more technology offerings now that have them as their cornerstones. But we’ve just seen the tip of the iceberg so far. There are just so many cool things that are going to come along in the next few years that they can’t even be imagined yet.” Examples include the use of augmented reality (AR). “We’ve barely scratched the surface of what AR can do at meetings,” Ludwig says. “For example, what if I was able to hold my phone up at a live event and as I’m looking at a speaker, or the trade show floor, or at other attendees passing by, get real-time contextual information about [that person or] those things? That is game-changing stuff in terms of how meetings can be conducted and the experience attendees can have. That kind of capability is already happening. It’s just not happening in the meeting space yet.”

Another example Ludwig cites is the use of AI. “For example, you now see things like a chat box inside an event app. It has the AI that says, ‘You’re at an event, don’t you think it might be cool if you could have someone on stage hold up some information? ’” says, “In the future, AI will allow you to provide even more kinds of live contextual help to attendees.

That sort of capability relies on pretty sophisticated technology, but because it’s constantly becoming more talented, it’s only a matter of time until we see it being used around meeting and events.”

Ultimately, such technology will allow attendees to find directions within a convention center, get information in real time about an upcoming session, or get information on a speaker while he or she is on stage. The possibilities are almost limitless in terms of practical benefits to attendees.

Cisco and other large technology companies are also doing those kinds of things at its meetings. Meanwhile, Hubb introduced such capabilities at a major meeting last year for a Fortune 100 company.

Magyar sees an ever-increasing focus on the quest for and use of data. “Every time I talk to a client, I ask them ‘What data have you collected and why?’” she says. “I always ask ‘Why?’ And what they tell me is they’ve been collecting all of this data, but they don’t know what to do with it. So I think that in looking at the evolution of the meeting industry over the next few years, we won’t just be focused on data, but we’ll also be focused on the intelligent use of it. And that responsibility can’t be put on meeting planners. It has to be the tech team in place for years. And that technology can seem too difficult for meeting planning organizations are having the growing conflict around big data and attendee privacy. “That’s a big deal,” Pund says. “When you’re trying to understand someone’s behavior, or predict it, and you’re getting so much information about what that person needs from a ‘personalization’ perspective — which is a good thing — there are some attendees that say, ‘I want you to know what I want.’ But then there are others who say, ‘I don’t want you to know anything about me. Stay away.’ So especially in light of the privacy debate that’s going on right now, there needs to be a balance between how and what you gather and permission to use that data. And the crux of the whole thing is what people opt in for. In other words, when you opt in for one thing, it doesn’t mean you’re giving a company carte blanche to assume you’re opting in for endless offers, invitations or marketing messages. They have to give you permission for specific uses.”

Managing Tech: The Dedicated New Job

Given the preceding entrenchment and complexity of meeting technology, there is also a purely practical trend in terms of its use. And it is based on the understanding that meeting planners are not technology experts, nor do they want to be. Their basic role in planning and sourcing a meeting has not changed much in the last 50 years. As a result, more large companies and large third-party independent meeting planning organizations are opting to designate a meeting technology manager or team that functions on behalf of all meeting planners within the enterprise.

That is happening because using technology can seem too difficult for someone who doesn’t have the technology tools to manage it.” Ludwig says. “And it is a genuine trend now.”

Magyar sees it as a major trend with her clients. “We’re involved with a lot of high-tech clients, so it’s just more natural for them to talk in terms of doing that,” she says. “So at this point, almost all of our large enterprise clients have had a digital strategist or event tech team in place for years. And that will start to trickle down now into all other industries.”

And once again, Cisco was at the forefront of that innovation. It has had meeting technology teams in place for a decade, Pund says.

The Final Frontier: New Capabilities

Although there is now at least one meeting tool or app available for any imaginable kind of need, there are still a few pieces that planners would like to see that have not come to full fruition yet. One is related to the production side of meetings, Soto says. “We now see things like projection masking. With that technology, you can transform a ballroom with video technology

“More and more companies are realizing that integrating meeting activity data, such as engagement levels, increases business success.”

Brian Ludwig
Senior Vice President of Sales
Cvent
Tysons Corner, VA
and create an experience, whereas before you had to spend a tremendous amount of money on physical design and decor. In other words, projection masking creates virtual decor. And, Soto says, the use of projection mapping is already a bona fide trend. It will just get better as next-generation technology evolves.

On his wish list is a greatly improved capability to do virtual site visits to hotels and other meeting venues around the world. “We do some international events, and we have one coming up in Barcelona,” Soto adds. “Right now, we have to get on a plane and go to Barcelona to do a site visit. I think, and I hope, that in the future, technology will allow us to do a site visit from our desks.”

Chris Soto
President
CTC Events and Productions
Fairfax, VA

Planners say eventually that big data, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning will literally transform the meeting industry with knowledge derived from analysis.

Knowledge Is Power

The most important aspect of the future of meeting technology will be the ability to use data to transform events from a bottom-line business perspective, Magyar says. “Instead of basing your events on whether attendees smile when they leave or not, you’ll actually have real data on how you’re moving the business forward through sales momentum, integration of marketing tools and so on. Technology will be perceived as a business-impact tool. And that’s the thing that will really start to demonstrate the value of meetings and events to the organization.”

Ludwig concurs with that sentiment. “Ultimately, the future of meeting technology lies with actionable data on attendees,” he says. “And that horizon is tied to big data and artificial intelligence. If you look at Google or Amazon or Facebook, they now know everything there is to know about you and what you do. One day, and it will be probably a decade from now, meeting planners will be able to know that much about their meetings and their attendees. And once you can get that information and make it actionable, the value of meetings and events will increase dramatically. And if we can prove that meetings are working, then companies will hold even more meetings.”

C&IT
Networking to Win

Why Meeting Planning Affiliations Make a Difference

By Ron Bernthal

Business and professional networking is widely recognized as the "lifeblood of the meetings industry," writes Joan Eisenstodt and Mitchell Beer, CMM, from a chapter in Professional Meeting Management (Kendall-Hunt), a textbook from the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) Educational Foundation. The textbook is used not only by many industry professionals, but also by thousands of students in university management programs. Other industry professional organizations may offer their own educational materials.

"At its best, networking is about bringing colleagues and professional partners together to share information, ideas and opportunities, secure in the knowledge that if the substance is sound, commercial success will follow," Eisenstodt and Beer say.

Join a Planning Organization

There is no better way for planners to begin to network and exchange ideas than by joining professional organizations within the meetings industry, many of which are listed at the end of this article. These organizations offer many of the opportunities mentioned above, as well as educational components and accreditations that can be very important to a planner's career.

"Meeting planner certifications demonstrate that a professional knows the critical core competencies needed to be successful in his or her role," says Prof. Amanda Cecili, Ph.D., CMP, director of the Tourism, Events and Sports Management graduate program at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. "It should give colleagues the confidence and peace of mind that individuals with certifications and designations value career development and education/training."

"It is important to note that certifications require continuing education," Cecili explains. "In order to continue using the CMP designation, for instance, one must dedicate time and resources to evolving with the profession. I am currently not a planner, but an academic who teaches meeting management. However, I continue to see many job postings with 'CMP Preferred' or 'CMP Required' in the position requirements. Obtaining a CMP from a professional organization will give planners a significant advantage when looking for a position or promotion."

Cecili went on to say that "having a CMP puts you in a unique peer-group, and in a community that genuinely values professionalism and wants continued personal and professional growth. It is a great goal to achieve for planners at any stage of their career."

Designations Can Boost Pay

According to a recent salary survey, event organizers with a CMP increase their salaries by 11 percent. Several organizations, including Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and PCMA, offer products designed to help planners study on-the-go and on their own schedule.

"I believe that meeting planner affiliations are important as it keeps meeting planners up-to-date as to what is going on in the industry, provides continued education and networking opportunities available among professional planners and suppliers," says Elizabeth A. Kretchmer, CMP, CMM, HMCC, a strategic meetings manager and coach and speaker with Strategic Meeting Manager, LLC. "Professional affiliations/organizations are an important asset to both planners and suppliers because the focus is within the industry and provides information that no other industry is able to offer."

Kretchmer says being an active member of MPI has definitely been a big advantage as her career progressed. "My local MPI chapter has provided me with a wonderful network of meeting and connecting with a variety of planners and suppliers who I can collaborate with both on volunteer committees and work professionally," she says. "I consider my industry contacts my friends, and I find that if I am ever in need of seeking an industry planner/supplier for assistance or advice, I can easily contact them. I find that serving on MPI committees both nationally and within my local chapter, enables me to expand my network of contacts plus work with the best industry professionals within the MPI community."

She says attending events and conferences gives her another way to link up. "I reconnect with so many industry contacts/friends due to my affiliation with MPI, and on the committees or projects we have worked on," Kretchmer says. "It is always fun to catch up with my industry people at industry events to catch up on what is going on within their lives, plus exchange ideas or information on a professional level."

One of the major milestones for many corporate meeting planners has been the accreditations received through the various organizations to which they belong. "Having obtained my CMP, CMM and HMCC has allowed me to be more respected and recognized in the industry. With these three accreditations, I have been able to use my knowledge and experience to move forward in my career as a strategic meeting manager, plus serve on MPI international committees," Kretchmer says. "I also find that throughout my career, people recognize me as an accomplished meeting professional, and I find myself more credible within the industry. Therefore, being an active member of MPI has helped me tremendously throughout my career in the meeting planning industry in enhancing
Lifelong Contacts and Friends

Even for the many men and women working for the professional organizations, working with outside suppliers and corporate meeting planners for private firms brings an opportunity to form lifelong friendships. “Finding the right-fit industry affiliation is like finding a best friend, or several thousand friends,” says Jessie States, CMP, CMM, director of MPI Academy at MPI’s Dallas office. “For many corporate planners, as well as the staff of meeting organizations like MPI, the organization is your family, your confidant or your support system. It’s your career path and your educational and professional development. It’s your friend-rate on a service, product or venue. It’s your future boss, next client or new employee. And most importantly, it’s your advocate, giving you the tools you need to prove your worth to your organization and measure the business value you drive for your business, organization or group.”

States continues, “When I think of our industry’s fearless leaders; men and women who have worked their ways to the tops of great companies or who have started their own successful businesses, I see people who volunteered for, and actively participated in, their professional associations and who have been rewarded with massive networks and communities, necessary and timely education and, ultimately, the leadership training that propelled their careers.”

“Professional affiliations/organizations are an important asset to both planners and suppliers because the focus is within the industry and provides information that no other industry is able to offer.”

Elizabeth A. Kretchmer, CMP, CMM, HMCC
Strategic Meeting Manager
Positive Thinking Coach & Speaker
Strategic Meeting Manager, LLC
Highlands Ranch, CO

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Jessie States, CMP, CMM
Director, MPI Academy
MPI, Dallas, TX

“The right-fit industry affiliation is like finding a best friend, or several thousand friends.”

“I have grown my circle of colleagues and friends, which is invaluable.”

Seasholtz appreciates having the opportunity.

“What is great about PCMA is they take the risks that some planners are sometimes afraid to take. Staging at Convening Leaders, breakouts offline away from the host hotel, mixed seating room sets, meal creativity, corporate social responsibility (CSR) opportunities and volunteerism. Not everything is a home run, but what is great is that we get to see what works, what didn’t work and learn how to either make adjustments or implement it for our size of budgets,” Seasholtz says.

For Seasholtz, the international component of her own business, and with the PCMA organization, is what she thrives on. “PCMA has a fantastic forum for members to use when they need to ask a question. It is international brainstorming between planners and partners. Using the forum has helped me with understanding cultural nuances, find supplier partners that are recommended by industry colleagues and seek feedback on questions in regards to sponsorship” she says. “For example, I may have the opportunity to assist with an event in Kenya. Utilizing the forum has given me a network of individuals...
Get involved on the local level. This—PCMA and other meetings organizations—If you are attending a national conference for the first time, such as Convening Leaders, you may not have even imagined yet. “Through volunteering at your local chapter or through the global organization, you meet and work with people in a different way that allows you to connect with them on another level,” Pinkowski says. “Friendships, partnerships and relationships form that provide potential for longer term business and interaction. Volunteering can build skills that you might not find in your day job, like presentation skill development by introducing a speaker at a chapter luncheon or a supplier putting on a planner ‘hat for a trivia night.’ “The opportunities are endless so figure out what you want to do and go for it,” Pinkowski says. “When I joined, I was involved with the MPI St. Louis Chapter’s education committee to impact chapter programming, which led to other committee and director positions. Before I knew it, I was president of the local chapter. It was an amazing learning experience, so I’ll say it again. Get involved! You will develop personally and professionally, which will move your career in ways you may not have even imagined yet.”

Advice for New Planners

As a meeting planner, Seasholtz offers her recommendations to those just starting out in the industry, on how to get the most out of your exciting career.

• Get involved on the local level. This will help grow the network of professionals around them. That network will be great for career development and ongoing support. Getting involved is as simple as attending local events.

• If you are attending a national conference for the first time, such as Convening Leaders, sign up for a mentor program. This program gives new attendees a mentor who has attended the conference in the past or repeatedly. By partnering, the new attendee has a contact and connection right away. Also, the mentor can introduce them to their circle of colleagues, check in with them during the conference to ask how it is going. It also gives the attendee a contact so they are coming to the conference knowing someone.

• Lean in. Young professionals should feel empowered to introduce themselves at events, strike up conversation and work outside of their comfort zone.

• PCMA and other meetings organizations offer scholarships to attend various events to which I encourage young professionals to apply. This will automatically put them in a group of similar individuals and therefore a great way to build a network.

Approximately 4,000 industry professionals from around the world gathered for PCMA Convening Leaders 2019 in Pittsburgh January 6-9 for three days of education and inspiration aimed at driving economic and social progress through business events. Sessions covered innovation, design, leadership and technology. Celebrities Billie Jean King, Geena Davis and Steve Pemberton were among 138 experts, advocates and industry leaders to address the group.

“We built this conference around the theme ‘Disrupt + Deliver’ because that’s what the industry needs and wants,” says PCMA president and CEO Sherrif Karamat. Convening Leaders was held at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center and generated an estimated $6 million for the Pittsburgh region. The PCMA Foundation raised more than $300,000 through onsite fundraising projects, including its annual Party With a Purpose.

How to Join

For corporate planners interested in affiliating with one of the major professional meetings organization, contact information is below:

Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) www.gbta.org

Meeting Planners International (MPI) www.mpiweb.org

Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) www.pcma.org

International Association of Professional Conference Organizers (IAPCO) www.iapco.org

International Congress & Convention Association (ICCA) www.iccaworld.org

Remember to Volunteer

Corporate planner Sarah Pinkowski, CMP, meetings supervisor at Enterprise Holdings, says meeting planners can gain a lot of knowledge and make additional industry contacts through volunteering at headquarters or local chapters of whatever organizations to which you belong.
Our Neighbor Brings to Mind a Single Idea for Planners, But It Has a Lot More to Offer Than Clichés

By Sara Churchville

W e had to change from Mounties — [they’re] not sexy enough,” says Chantal Sturk-Nadeau, executive director of Business Events Canada. “It’s not just the landscape and nature. That was not resonating enough with [attracting] meetings. We had to change the story: Why would you choose Canada over the US? Why and how?”

So Business Events Canada (BEC), a division of Destination Canada, set out to organize strategic partnerships with meeting organizations such as Meeting Professionals International (MPI), the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) and incentive houses. BEC also created priority economic sectors to align with certain cities and lure meetings that would lead to foreign investment — and the other way around.

“It’s a long game to attract the C-suite, not just the day-to-day of where meetings are hosted to grow business in Canada,” Sturk-Nadeau says.

Montréal

Just an hour and a half from New York City by air, Montréal feels like a European getaway but with a much more favorable exchange rate. Even in the heart of winter, the 2.5-mile Promenade Fleurie-Montagne walkway calls on attendees to bundle up for a walking tour from the river to the mountain thanks to clear signage all along the route.

For foodies, there is dry-aged beef at Maggie Oakes in the 1970s beer can, Sergeant Pepper beef, Lady Madonna trout and 17 years, a Fortune 100 company, in August was looking for a "new and exciting destination that would motivate, be easy to work with and have cultural areas" for an incentive meeting of some 400 attendees and their spouses.

Montréal fit the bill, and not just anywhere in Montréal: Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth. "We did a site inspection, and it was the best value for that fit. One property would have been a better value dollar-wise, but the flow wouldn't have worked. It was important to get that ‘wow’ factor.”

That factor involved, as it so often does, getting the food and beverage (F&B) right by spending time with the chef to “touch on things Montréal is famous for and that we know our people like”: Results: buckets of fresh, hot French fries made with different types of potatoes; a make-your-own poutine station with various gravies, cheese curds and pulled pork; and a grilled cheese night with various cheeses and fillings in a panini maker.

At the welcome reception, performers from Montréal-based Cirque Eloize put on a show in the hotel’s 21st-floor C2 Space, with its windows that overlook the city, a roof deck, patio and cocktail was based on a Beatles song. There was soup in a large, flat pastry in the shape of the rodent’s tail to which any number of sweet toppings and/or fillings can be applied. As a team-building exercise, curling was the sport of choice, with a cake the shape and color of a yellow submarine. The G7 meeting reminded me of this,” a planner summed up. “If you think of something it’s a hotel can’t do, Frontenac can do it.”

So, in魁北克的 Old Québec, the Hotel Manoir Victoria, with 156 rooms and meeting/banquet space for 175 attendees. The onsite restaurant, Chez Boulay-Bistro Boréal, serves cuisine it describes as “Nordic” — local Québec fish, duck terrine, blood pudding and bison tartare.

Another hotel, The Relais & Châteaux Auberge Saint-Antoine has several meeting rooms as well as jazz nights at its Bar Artéfact.

The Québec City Marriott Downtown is, like the rest of Old Québec, within walking distance from the Québec City Convention Centre. The center can accommodate up to 9,000 attendees and connects by underground walkway to the Hilton Québec and Delta Hotels by Marriott Québec. After a day of meetings, attendees can amble over to the Plains of Abraham or Le Musée du Chocolat, which offers history and artifacts of chocolate making going back 200 years. Get the chocolate, of course, at the adjacent chocolatier, Érico.

Planners looking for an unusual incentive space can do as a Portland, OR-based IT start-up did for its September event: Canadian “queses de castor” — large, flat pastry in the shape of the rodent’s tail to which any number of sweet toppings and/or fillings can be applied. As a team-building exercise, curling was the sport of choice, with a cake the shape and color of a yellow submarine.

“[The IT start-up attendees] were looking for something a little more exotic, boutique, with a full buyout, that has more character than a generic hotel,” the planner says of the group. “They chose Québec City as the right mix of a small, walkable place but at same time enough variety about the property.”

Some of that variety included La Revanche, a snacks, beer and board games spot in the old city, as well as a nearby Bea’s Tail food truck serving up Canadian “queses de castor” — large, flat pastry in the shape of the rodent’s tail to which any number of sweet toppings and/or fillings can be applied. As a team-building exercise, curling was the sport of choice, with a cake the shape and color of a yellow submarine.

The monastery has a chapel area that can be used as a team-building exercise, curling was the sport of choice, with a cake the shape and color of a yellow submarine.
meeting space, along with a restaurant, catering and banquet menus that can provide, as it did for this group, a potlouise dinner. “We were surprised how affordable things were,” the planner noted. Still, he acknowledges that the language barrier, lack of “lift” comparable to other cities and weather unpredictability can be a challenge for some. “Québec has a very rich and palpable personality; take advantage of the fact that it’s a unique destination — language, food, people, history — do the best to unearth and share that,” Planner tip: “The safety net of a local DMC helps with transfers, so you don’t have to do it in Québécois French.”

**Ottawa**

With 192,000 sf of meeting space 20 minutes from Ottawa International Airport, and a bridge leading directly to the 492-room Westin Ottawa and gigantic CIF Rideau Centre shopping mall, the Shaw Centre is probably Ottawa’s most obvious draw for meeting planners. It can and will host anything from a Parent & Child Show to a Cannabis and Hemp Expo (complete with a bake lounge) with the same degree of verve. The center’s four levels all overlook the city’s Rideau Canal, which during the summer, transforms into the Rideau Canal Skateway. Attendees can glide along the world’s largest skating rink — it’s 4.8 miles long — for 24 hours a day in season. The Delta Hotels by Marriott Ottawa City Centre offers just more than 24,000 sf of meeting space. Though it’s not specifically offered as such, an enterprising planner might find the outdoor rooftop terrace just the thing for a small gathering in kind weather. Chef, Def Leppard and Michael Bublé are just a few of the common spaces and an ornate restaurant, LOUIX LOUIS, that makes for a perfect meeting as we’ve ever had. We are now choosing to serve dinner at the Fairmont Chateau Laurier.

In the planning stages, the hotel didn’t take advantage of the bind he was in, he says, and he didn’t feel put upon even though the hotel had the upper hand in negotiations. They were responsive, contracting went completely smoothly and they returned emails. It also didn’t hurt that the hotel looked completely different — “night and day” — from when he’d last seen it in 2015, thanks to a $55 million renovation of the common areas, lobbies, restaurants and the addition of 8,000 sf of meeting space in a dedicated wing, all within walking distance of the Vancouver Convention Centre. And on the attendee front, no long lines at the check-in.
no complaints about the rooms — even though the rooms were of varying layouts and square footage. “They must have been that good, that clean, that fresh,” Gross speculates.

He organized a president’s dinner onsite in the British Columbia ballroom for 400 people using standard menus with only slight changes — “there was zero push back when we asked for surf and turf.”

The group also ate at the onsite restaurant, Notch8 Restaurant & Bar, which serves “very modern/slightly upscale, Canadian-gearred farm to table,” including fresh Dungeness crab. “I heard the greatest compliment: ‘I would go to it even though it’s in another hotel,’” he says. He also steered attendees to Chambar, a Belgian and seafood restaurant in Downtown Vancouver; and the sustainable seafood restaurant Blue Water Cafe.

Attendees had plenty of time to take in many of the sights of the region. They took the North Shore tour, visiting Stanley Park with its rainforest, Grouse Mountain, and Capilano Suspension Bridge Park; went on a Discover Vancouver bus tour that included the Olympic Village and some popular craft beer spots; made time for the Sea to Sky Gondola sightseeing tour; and browsed in the Museum of Anthropology and the Botanical Garden at University of British Columbia. By far the most popular outing, requiring a second round for foodies, was the tour of the Granville Island Public Market.

Now, there’s talk of returning in 2022. “Vancouver as a destination; go for it and don’t look back,” Gross says. “When it comes to activities, live music and nightlife, it’s the best total package destination we go to. They really understand group business.” Most of his attendees are not from big cities, he says, so a place like Toronto strikes them as too big. But “nature in Vancouver with a strong urban core really speaks to people.”

Calgary

“Nothing says Calgary better than the Stampede,” says one planner who held his annual convention there in August 2018 with 900 franchisees and families of a U.S. auto industry company.

The ‘hot-diggity-dog’ excitement of the rodeo held in this city in the Mountain Time Zone infects some 1 million people every July. His group stayed in three hotels connected via walkway to the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre — the Hyatt Regency Calgary, the Fairmont Palliser and the Calgary Marriott Downtown Hotel.

His group does a charity 5K walk every year, working closely with Tourism Calgary to find “a safe and interesting route” that included the Calgary Tower, home of the Sky 360 Restaurant & Lounge, which revolves once per hour 510 feet up, the scenic walking path along Bow River and Canada Olympic Park. The dream of the Olympics is still alive as the city mulls bidding to host the 2026 Olympics.

BMO Centre at Stampede Park, the larger of the city’s convention centers, offers 500,000 sf of event space. Plans in 2016 to create even more meeting space by demolishing the Stampede Corral have so far come to nothing; one of the local hockey clubs plans to play a “Comal” series in the space this year. And the $245 million, oval-shaped architectural marvel that is the Calgary Central Library opened late last year, levitating over a public plaza below and beckoning with meeting spaces and conference rooms.
O
ver the last decade, Miami has been transformed into a wildly popular meeting, convention and incentive destination that generates robust enthusiasm from both planners and attendees. Today, it offers a world-class combination of first-class hotel rooms, dining options, offsite venues and activities that add up to a memorable experience.

“Miami is unique as a meeting destination,” says William Talbert III, president and CEO of the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau (GMCVB). “We offer year-round good weather. We’re the easiest destination to get into and out of. We also have venues nobody else has. We’re on the water. The city of Miami is on Biscayne Bay. Miami Beach is on the bay and the Atlantic Ocean. So we have unique waterfront venues that no one else has. We have 25 miles of beautiful beaches. But we also say, ‘We’re more than a beach.’ There’s no other place like Miami. For a long time, we were clearly a cultural wasteland. But today, we’re one of the top cultural destinations in the world. We’re a world-class city and a world-class meeting destination.”

One factor strongly in Miami’s favor as a meeting destination is the convenience of Miami International Airport (MIA) and the formidable airlift it delivers. “A lot of meeting planners who have not been here don’t really know that MIA is a ‘downtown’ airport,” Talbert says. “If you’re going to downtown Miami, the first stoplight you see is when you’re in downtown. If you’re headed to Miami Beach, the first stoplight you see is when you’re in Miami Beach. How many destinations can say that?” And, he adds, the convenience and brevity of airport transfers are more important than ever before to many planners. In addition, Talbert stresses, MIA is served by 109 airlines, meaning it offers convenient airlift from virtually anywhere in the U.S. or around the world. “It’s the only airport that is served by more than 100 [airlines].”

“A Bustling City, Perfect for Meetings”

One planner chose Miami for the first time to host an annual sales meeting in January.

The planner chose the 615-room Hyatt Regency Miami, which features more than 100,000 sf of meeting space, including the 16,000 sf of space in the adjoining James L. Knight Center. The City of Miami owns the center, but Hyatt manages it.

The planner used the hotel for breakfast and lunch buffets daily, as well as a welcome reception and awards banquet on two evenings. The planner also staged a welcome reception and awards dinner on the hotel’s outdoor terrace, which overlooks the Miami River and offers sweeping views of downtown Miami and the upscale Brickell district.

“A highlight of the meeting was a team-building exercise on the beach in Key Biscayne, after which attendees dined at landmark local seafood emporium Monty’s in Coconut Grove. “[Miami is] a bustling city. It’s very popular, especially during the winter. It’s just a perfect location for a meeting,” the planner says.

Surprise! Miami can be budget-friendly, says Andrea Kinney, the St. Augustine, FL-based director of global accounts for site selection/sourcing provider HelmsBriscoe. She has, on average, used Miami as the destination for a meeting once a year for the last six years. Her most recent was a four-day, three-night healthcare meeting for 75 attendees in October. “This particular client is based in Florida and they do all of their meetings in Florida,” Kinney says. “So they rotate destinations throughout the state.”

For their Miami meeting, they used the new 275-room Atton Brickell Miami.

“One of the primary reasons for the selection of the hotel was that the client needed a hotel that was particularly budget-friendly,” Kinney says. “And the Atton really fit the bill for them because the client wanted to get a lot of value for their money, even though budget itself was not an issue. The Atton is not

New and Refreshed Venues Put This City Back Atop the List For Some Planners

By John Buchanan

The new Miami Beach Convention Center is a totally reimagined facility . . . [N]ow you have a sense of place. You have a world-class facility that lets you know you’re in a place called Miami Beach.”

“Miami, with new hotels and a rebuilt convention center, is sizzling as planners are again choosing the city to host events.”

William Talbert III
President and CEO
Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau
Miami, FL

The Atton Brickell Miami has six meeting rooms, including one on the top floor with dazzling views of downtown Miami and Biscayne Bay.

By John Buchanan

Miami, with new hotels and a rebuilt convention center, is sizzling as planners are again choosing the city to host events.

The Atton Brickell Miami has six meeting rooms, including one on the top floor with dazzling views of downtown Miami and Biscayne Bay.
“The Atton is not only brand new, but it’s beautiful. And the prices are fantastic because we were holding the meeting in October before the high season starts.”

Andrea Kinney
Director of Global Accounts
HelmisBriceo
St. Augustine, FL

Kinney points out that Miami, despite its reputation as expensive, can be budget-friendly. "One of the things I love about Miami is that it can accommodate all kinds of budgets, especially if you're meeting in the off-season," she says. "But there is still a perception among a lot of meeting planners that Miami is too expensive. But that's just not true. You just have to know the market and go at the right time of year."

Kinney and her client were very happy with the Atton, which characterizes itself as designed with "an air of Miami cool and seaside elegance."

"The room product is excellent, partly because the hotel is new," Kinney says. "But the design, which is sort of minimalist-modern, is very interesting and trendy. So my client loved the property."

The hotel hosted all meals, whether a buffet or plated. "Attendees were very pleased with the food," Kinney says. "The hotel has limited meeting space, so the maximum group size it can accommodate is probably 100 attendees. But the space they have is excellent. And again, it's new. They have a meeting room on the top floor that has fantastic views of downtown Miami and Biscayne Bay."

The Big News — Miami Beach Convention Center and a New Convention Center Hotel

Although Miami is in the midst of a genuine renaissance as a destination, both in terms of its eclectic hotel inventory and its new status as a genuine culinary capital, the most important news for meeting planners is the $620 million makeover of the Miami Beach Convention Center. The reimagined and updated facility reopened in September.

"It was a very old, out-of-date building," says GMCVB’s Talbert. "It was a box, with no sense of place, with an asphalt parking lot with no trees across the street. The new facility is a totally reimagined facility. In addition to (a completely renovated structure), we’ve added a 60,000-sf ballroom, which also has 20,000 sf of pre-function space. And now you have a sense of place. You have a world-class facility that lets you know you’re in a place called Miami Beach."

In November, voters approved construction of a new convention center hotel. The 800-room property will be the next step in the total transformation of Miami as a destination for major meetings and citywide conventions. There is no flag designated yet, but Talbert says, "I think the flag will have an ‘H’ in it."

Local development powerhouses Terra and Turnberry Associates are overseeing the hotel’s development. Turnberry Associates owns the legendary Fontainebleau Miami Beach and acclaimed JW Marriott Miami Turnberry Resort & Spa. The grand opening of the convention center hotel is scheduled for 2022.

A “Miami First” Hotel Evolution

Perhaps the single-best indicator of Miami’s status as a meeting destination is what Talbert calls its unique “Miami first” preeminence. It applies to the new EAST, Miami, the Faena Hotel Miami Beach and Atton Brickell Miami. “Ours is the first EAST hotel outside of Asia,” Talbert says. “The Faena is the first outside of Argentina. And the Atton is the first property from that brand outside of Chile. What that means is that three major and very prestigious international hotel brands chose Miami as the location of their first properties outside of their home regions. And that means that Miami is red-hot as a destination.”

The Forbes Five-Star, AAA Four-Diamond Faena Hotel Miami Beach is the most acclaimed of Miami’s new hotels. The 169-room property, with 22,000 sf of meeting space, was designed by Hollywood director Baz Luhrmann, who directed The Great Gatsby, and his set designer wife Catherine Martin. It combines old Hollywood glamour with Art Deco elegance, executed with a tropical beach ambience. An adjacent $1 billion Faena Arts District also features a Faena Forum venue and an amphitheater, as well as a more intimate Casa Faena boutique hotel.

The EAST, Miami features 255 rooms, eight suites, and 89 one-, two-, and three-bedroom residences, as well as 20,000 sf of meeting space. The EAST serves as an anchor of the new Brickell City Centre, which features upscale shopping, dining and entertainment. "The EAST is a fantastic property," says Brian Whitt, vice president of sales at local destination management company CSI DMC. "And Brickell Center is one of the most gorgeous shopping areas I’ve ever seen, anywhere in the world. And there are a lot of great food options. For meeting groups, it offers a unique experience."

Offsite Venues

To truly take advantage of Miami as a meeting destination, Whitt says, planners should stage a meal or event at one of its unique offsite venues. "One that really delivers the ‘wow factor’ for smaller groups is the legendary Versace Mansion
“The EAST, Miami is a fantastic property. And Brickell Center is one of the most gorgeous shopping areas I’ve ever seen, anywhere in the world.”

Brian Whitt
V.P. of Sales, South Florida
CSI DMC
Hollywood, FL

[now renamed The Villa Casa Casuarina] on Miami Beach, he says. “You can do a beautiful dinner on the pool deck, in this incredible space, for up to 130 attendees. It’s just a totally unique experience in a phenomenal venue.”

He also favors the Seafair Mega Yacht, anchored in downtown Miami near the InterContinental Miami hotel and offering more than 20,000 sf of event, dining, and entertainment space.

“The Seafair is an incredible experience for meeting groups,” Whitt says. “You’re on this amazing yacht, with amazing food. You can do events for up to 600 attendees. But what’s beautiful about it is that it’s built in individual sections, so we’ve also done smaller groups of 100 attendees on the yacht and no one would think they were lost in the space.”

World-Class Dining

Just as important as the evolution of its hotel inventory in lifting it to top-dog status as a meeting destination is Miami’s now internationally celebrated culinary scene. Whitt also has a short list of his favorite restaurants.

“For something that’s new and also intimate,” he says, “there is something better than Stubborn Seed, Jeremy Ford’s new restaurant. Ford was the winner of season 13 of TV’s Top Chef. His eight-course tasting menu is absolutely off the hook; an absolutely incredible dining experience in a very intimate space that only holds about 50 people. But you can also do a buyout of the entire restaurant and create a really memorable experience for a larger group.”

A little-known local landmark Whitt singles out for praise is The Forge on Miami Beach. Among well-heeled citizens of Miami, it is a landmark. “The Forge enjoys legendary status in Miami. It’s primarily a steak house and it has the most famous wine cellar in Miami. It also has classic old school elegance. And it’s a hidden treasure, since it’s not well known to anyone who doesn’t live in Miami. You can do a group of 90 or 100 there if you use the main dining room, but if you want a truly special and memorable experience, you should do the Garden Room in the basement wine cellar for about 20 people. You’re surrounded by incredible bottles of wine that are actually owned by celebrities who spend time in Miami and come to The Forge for dinner.”

Whitt’s third choice for a truly memorable meal and unique Miami experience is Juvia, located in the Lincoln Road Mall pedestrian dining and entertainment complex in Miami Beach. It offers a fusion of French, Japanese and Peruvian cooking styles, studied and meticulously crafted as a result of decades of training within each culture by its trio of chefs. “For its view, Juvia is incredible,” Whitt says. “The patio is just absolutely amazing for a dining experience. And the food is exceptional.”

Activities

When it comes to things to do, Whitt also offers a short list of personal favorites.

“A really cool activity unique to Miami is the Pan Am International Flight Academy pilot training facility, where meeting attendees can spend time on flight simulators that train commercial airline pilots,” he says. “You can book up to two dozen individual simulators for Boeing 737s, 757s and 777s. You get to be an airline pilot for a day. And we’ve had people do things like ditching with a raft into the water. Then they had lunch with airline pilots. Attendees flipped out over the experience.”

CSI DMC also tout shark-tagging as a unique Miami experience. “It’s incredibly memorable,” Whitt says. “We work with the University of Miami and the best shark experts in the world. And attendees actually get to go out and put satellite tags on sharks.” Ideal group size is 20.

Given all that Miami has to offer, Kinney, of HelmsBriscoe, urges meeting planners who have not been there recently to go on a site visit. “Planners who haven’t taken a look at Miami lately should definitely do it, because an opinion that was applicable years ago is no longer applicable,” she says. “And that is particularly true of cost and budget concerns. It is no longer out of reach. And it is a fantastic destination that is very exciting.”

Whitt, for his part, highlights the multicultural sizzle of Miami as its primary allure.

“Miami is a melting pot of cultures,” he says. “It’s an international destination. And you get that kind of feel here that you just don’t get in most other major U.S. cities. And you also get an incredible energy and flavor that are conducive to having a great meeting that attendees will remember.”

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LaKota Hotels & Resorts recently named Christine Imbrogno director of sales and marketing at LaKota Oaks in Norwalk, CT. Imbrogno brings 23 years of hospitality sales and marketing experience to the operation. Imbrogno’s mission is focused on accommodating conferences and celebratory social events from the surrounding Fairfield and Westchester County areas and from Manhattan.

PRA is pleased to announce leading industry veteran Bill Drew has joined the PRA San Diego team as the general manager. Drew is responsible for local strategic direction and developing new business opportunities, increasing revenue streams and managing the San Diego team.

Visit San Antonio welcomes three new employees to its Destination Sales and Experience teams. Colleen Buchanan, CMP, CTA, has accepted the role of destination sales manager. Buchanan joined Visit San Antonio in January 2017 as a destination experience manager. Molly Hernandez will serve as a destination experience manager, while Estelle Rodriguez has joined the Visit San Antonio team as a destination experience coordinator.

The San Francisco Travel Association has named Rory Davis as senior manager of sports and entertainment sales. His primary responsibility is securing new sports- and entertainment-related business for the San Francisco Bay Area, venues and hotels.

The Los Angeles Airport Marriott has added Ryan Wollman as director of group sales. In his new role, Wollman maximizes group revenue and profitability through the sale of guest rooms, catering and tours, and for directing, managing and coordinating all group sales activities.

Incentive Solutions, Inc. has promoted Mandy Freeman to vice president of account management after 11 years with the company. She began her time at ISI in sales in 2007 before transitioning into account management.

Roberts Event Group, a Hosts Global member, hired Rachele Canazaro as program & event coordinator. Canazaro’s experience in coordinating and planning events stemmed from multiple internships, student government events and numerous private outings.

CSI DMC welcomes Maureen Carter to its National Sales Team as vice president of national sales for the West Coast region. Carter brings with her more than a decade of client relations and meeting management, with her most recent role as national sales director of the five-star, five-diamond resort, The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, CO.

The Lodge at Sea Island, surrounded by two championship golf courses and twice named the #1 Hotel in the U.S. by U.S. News and World Report, has introduced new meeting and event space, sleeping rooms, a pool, pool house, and 18-hole putting course. Now with 57 sleeping rooms and more than 11,500 square feet of meeting and event space, The Lodge is the perfect location for your next incentive trip, board of directors, or intimate corporate meeting. An all-new state-of-the-art Golf Performance Center debuts in early 2019, adding even more opportunities for an exceptional experience.
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