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IS THE WAY TO GO
FOR MEETINGS**

Amy Ledoux, CAE, CMP
Chief Learning &
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ASAE

**SUSTAINABLE
SUCCESS**

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**ENGAGING
MILLENNIAL
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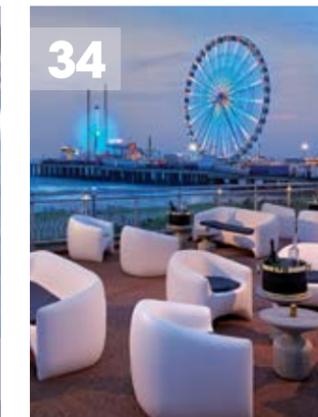
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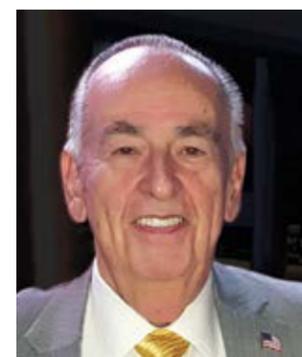
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The Impact of Coronavirus on Your Events

On a daily basis, as professional association meeting and convention planners, you are subject to updates and other information regarding coronavirus. Two big questions for planners are: Do we cancel, postpone or go ahead with planned events? How do we act on the potential impact on future scheduled meetings and conventions?

While the presence of asymptomatic carriers should not be reassuring, it is also a reminder that as meeting and convention planners, your primary responsibility is to do whatever you can to decrease the spread of all infections at events wherever they may be located.



If restrictions need to be placed on your meeting or convention or if a decision is made to postpone or cancel the event, reviewing your contract is a must. As a meeting professional, you need to determine whether there is a force majeure provision or other unforeseeable situation clause that may allow your event to be canceled without penalty. While there are numerous and sometimes complicated provisions in any contract, it is recommended that you seek legal advice as to how to proceed. Last, but not of least importance, is the ability to communicate effectively with attendees, vendors and any other contracted services.

Is coronavirus threatening to end the world travel and meeting boom? With major events being canceled across Europe, the focus is on IMEX Frankfurt. Mindful of IMEX's duty of care, IMEX reports they are carefully considering and consulting with experts on the appropriate sanitary, health and other measures. Show management assures everyone that all appropriate measures will be in place at IMEX May 12-14 in Frankfurt.

The U.S. domestic demand has been a strong revenue driver for airlines and will no doubt now be put to the test. It has been reported that demand for air travel this year will fall for the first time in more than a decade.

Let's think positively. Meanwhile, check out the features and destination reports in this issue.

Harvey Grotzky
Publisher

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Grand Hyatt Brand Chosen for New Miami Convention Center Hotel

MIAMI, FL — Following a \$600 million renovation last year, the development team at the Miami Beach Convention Center recently announced that the Grand Hyatt brand was selected as the flag for the new convention center headquarter hotel. The 800-room property, scheduled to open in 2023, will be at 17th Street and Convention Center Drive and connected to the convention center via skybridge. It will be close to shopping and dining areas such as the Lincoln Road Mall and entertainment options such as The Bass Museum, The Fillmore Miami Beach, the New World Symphony as well as the beach.

Three MGM Resorts Las Vegas Properties Named “Top 100 Hotels in the U.S.” by U.S. News & World Report

LAS VEGAS, NV — Three MGM Resorts International hotels in Las Vegas were named to the 10th edition of U.S. News & World Report’s “Top 100 Hotels in the U.S.” ARIA Resort & Casino (58), Four Seasons Hotel (62) and SKYLOFTS at MGM Grand (85) were the only Las Vegas hotels earning a spot on this prestigious list. ARIA Resort & Casino is the epitome of luxury casino resorts, featuring the award-winning Sky Suites, a AAA Five Diamond and Forbes Five-Star rated experience. The hotel also boasts celebrity chef restaurants, the first-of-its-kind public Fine Art Collection and is one of the largest hotels in the world to have earned LEED gold certification. SKYLOFTS at MGM Grand is a 51-suite hotel within MGM Grand Hotel & Casino. A winner of Forbes Five-Star and AAA Five Diamond Awards, these opulent, two-story suites are offered in a variety of sizes and designs. The AAA Five Diamond Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas is located within the Mandalay Bay complex, on the iconic Las Vegas Strip. Attendees will be captivated by the art-deco inspired rooms and suites just steps from nightlife and entertainment in one the world’s most vibrant cities.



Clockwise from top left: ARIA Resort & Casino, Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas’ Sierra Boardroom, SKYLOFTS at MGM Grand.

Shreveport-Bossier Announces New Attractions and Shreveport Hilton Renovation

SHREVEPORT-BOSSIER, LA — Shreveport-Bossier has group-friendly attractions such as riverboat casinos, horse racing, riverfront entertainment, mouth-watering cuisine and shopping at Louisiana Boardwalk Outlets. The Laugh Out Loud Comedy Club, on the riverfront in downtown Shreveport, is the latest addition. It opened last spring and spotlights local comedians and national headliners. The 2.4-acre

Caddo Common Park, which opened last fall, is a new park in the Shreveport Common District. Chef Hardette Harris opened a new restaurant in the fall called Us Up North, and other new restaurants include Sauvage and Ralph’s Place. In addition, the Hilton Shreveport hotel downtown, which is connected to the 350,000-sf Shreveport Convention Center, recently completed a \$4.8 million renovation.



Mohegan Sun Recognized Among the Top 10 Best Workplaces for Diversity

UNCASVILLE, CT — Joining leading brands and organizations, Mohegan Sun, Mohegan Gaming & Entertainment’s (MGE) flagship destination, lands among the top 10 on the recently announced “100 Best Workplaces for Diversity” by Fortune magazine. They ranked No. 6 on the list with a workforce comprised of 48% women, 49% minorities, 29% from the baby boomer generation or older, 13% with disabilities and 4% who are LGBTQ. Mohegan Sun works with several community and organizational partners for career transition, development and advancement for disabled people, including Project SEARCH.

National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals to Host 2020 Annual Convention in Cincinnati

CINCINNATI, OH — Cincinnati has been selected as the host destination for his year’s National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals’ (NCBMP) 37th Annual Convention, November 18-21. Nearly 300 top decision makers within African-American markets throughout the country will convene in Cincinnati, including hospitality professionals, meeting planners and association executives. Attendees at the Annual Convention are estimated to represent 80 groups and \$50 million in potential events. High-profile organizations in attendance will include the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Urban League, Prince Hall Shriners, National Bar Association and African Methodist Episcopal Church.



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Kaitlin Eskelson Named Visit Salt Lake's President & CEO

SALT LAKE CITY, UT — Visit Salt Lake (VSL) announced the appointment of Kaitlin Eskelson as its new president and CEO, the fourth individual to hold this position in the organization's 36-year history. Eskelson will lead VSL's efforts to improve and increase Salt Lake's visitor economy by attracting and providing support to meetings, conventions, events and leisure travelers while being a leader in environmental



Eskelson

responsibility. Eskelson's career within the visitor economy is extensive and varied, including a seven-year stint with VSL from 2006-2013 as director of tourism sales and marketing. Following her initial time with VSL, Eskelson was the director of partner relations and international strategy for the Utah Office of Tourism from 2013-2017 and, most recently, executive director of the Utah Tourism Industry Association.

JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort & Spa Set to Debut

ORLANDO, FL — JW Marriott is set to open its second location in Orlando — the JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort & Spa. Conveniently located near Walt Disney World Resort and only 30 minutes from the Orlando International Airport, this new locale features more than 50,000 sf of event space. Besides being able to visit Walt Disney World and Disney Springs when not in meetings, attendees can rejuvenate at the resort's fully equipped Spa by JW, which has 12-minute mini-spa treatments as well as full-day renewals. They can also gain some peace of mind at a poolside cabana. The resort pool also has a splash pad, perfect for kids, and the 6th Floor Kids Conservatory, which will keep kids engaged with creative crafts and games. After a long day, attendees can go to the rooftop terrace and watch the park's firework displays.



Destinations International Honors Seattle Southside Regional Tourism Authority

SEATTLE, WA — The Seattle Southside Regional Tourism Authority (RTA), the official destination marketing organization for Seattle Southside, including the cities of Des Moines, SeaTac and Tukwila, has received two honors from Destinations International: The globally recognized Destina-



McGuire

tion Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP) accreditation, and Meagan McGuire, Seattle Southside RTA vice president of sales and services, received the Certified Destination Management Executive (CDME) credential, the highest individual educational achievement in the tourism industry.

CWT M&E Shifts to Total Meetings Management, Hires New Leader for SMM Strategy

MINNEAPOLIS, MN — CWT Meetings & Events has created a specialized team focused on strategic customers within its new global operating model. Kari Wendel, global vice president, strategic customers, will lead the group, which will provide all services, including Strategic Meetings Management (SMM) and end-to-end meetings and events, under one roof to top global strategic clients. Customers will benefit from optimizing their visibility to all of their meetings spend and taking advantage of the best that CWT has to offer across all services areas, including best practices applied consistently across the enterprise, markets and regions, and ranging from product launches to incentive programs to industry-specific events. Wendel, is stepping away from a purely SMM leadership role to embrace both SMM and meetings and events for strategic customers. In her place, she has tapped Monica Dickenson, CMP, SMMC, as senior director of the newly-created Global SMM Center of Excellence (COE) within her team. Under Dickenson's direction, the SMM COE will support the entire global M&E organization to ensure advancement by county/region, continued wins with clients that are striving for SMM success, and providing thought leadership in the industry through public speaking engagements, authoring best practices pieces and sharing information on advanced SMM principles. Prior to joining CWT, Dickenson served as Head of Global Meetings and Events at Shire. She also previously worked with Amex GBT and BCD.



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Photos 1 to 4 from PCMA Convening Leaders in San Francisco, CA. **1)** L to R: Melvin Tennant, CAE, president & CEO, Meet Minneapolis, and Jay Burress, CTA, president & CEO, Visit Anaheim. **2)** Richard Harper, executive vice president, HelmsBriscoe; Darren Green, senior vice president sales, Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board, and Brian Stevens, CEO, ConferenceDirect. **3)** Melissa Riley, vice president convention sales & services, Destination DC; Elliott Ferguson, president & CEO, Destination DC; and Chinyere Hubbard, vice president communications & marketing, Events DC. **4)** Stephanie Turner, vice president convention sales & strategies, New Orleans & Company, and Tim Hemphill, CVP, vice president sales & marketing, New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. **5)** Katherine Kertzman, president and CEO of Seattle Southside RTA, receiving the DMAP credential during the RTA's 2020 Tourism Symposium from Don Welsh, president and CEO of Destinations International. **6)** The Cincinnati USA CVB recently honored this year's Spirit of Cincinnati USA Award winners, recognizing the contributions of organizations, and individuals, to the local tourism and hospitality community.

Why Collaborative Learning is the Future of Event Networking

Attendees Build Relationships by Working With Each Other

BY SMRITI BANSAL

We've all come across iterations of the classic headline — Networking Tips for People Who Hate Networking.

For event industry professionals, networking is of particular importance. After all, it's one of the main drivers for attendance at events around the world. Still, many participants either don't love it, or just aren't very skilled at it. This is where event professionals get creative: The challenge at hand is to build a welcoming environment for connections that actively support all participants — regardless of their comfort level with socializing. In their quest to meet the right people, they've invented elaborate networking games, planned for targeted networking sessions or even incorporated technology in the form of matching software or smart badges.

Yet, attendees still walk away feeling frustrated at the lack of quality connections they've made at an event.

(TRADITIONAL) NETWORKING IS DEAD

In Event Icons episode #138, e180's co-founder and CEO Christine Renaud asserted that traditional networking was dead — or that it should be. Event networking as most of us know it is often synonymous with the uncomfortable experience of navigating a room full of strangers with the hope of somehow finding a meaningful connection.

We would never leave the content our participants consume up to chance, so why do the same with the connections they could form at our events? We're here to suggest a new way to think about connection experiences at events: What if instead of networking, event organizers planned for collaborative learning? The motivations behind networking can range from wanting to grow your network to wanting a new job. Within the context of everyday life, your participants might want to network for a number of reasons that reflect where they are professionally or personally.

So, what is collaborative learning? Collaborative learning is an educational approach that involves groups of people working together to solve a problem, complete a task or create a product. What distinguishes collaborative learning from other approaches to group-work is that each learner is responsible for one another's learning, as well as their own. Every person in the group is the teacher and the student. They all work toward a common learning goal, regardless of their level of skill or expertise. That is to say, in a collaborative learning context, what matters is what you know, rather than who you are.

NETWORKING WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING

As an organizer, you work hard to supply fantastic content and cre-

ate ample networking opportunities at your events. What if you could do both at the same time? What if you could re-imagine networking within the context of learning? In fact, a focus on learning has proven to improve the networking experience by alleviating the “ick factor” often associated with it.

In a recent study, scientists Tiziana Casciaro, Francesca Gino and Maryam Kouchaki write that thinking of networking as “an opportunity for discovery and learning makes it feel less like a chore.” That is, even the most introverted of participants might view networking as a worthwhile activity if they can focus on how it might help them boost the knowledge and skills they need in their jobs. This is why we believe that collaborative learning experiences at events are the best alternative to traditional networking.

Research shows that collaborative learning:

- Helps create a positive social support system for learners.
- Helps create communities around common learning goals.
- Encourages an atmosphere of cooperation.
- Reduces the feeling of anxiety, and can improve a learner's self esteem.

A successful collaborative learning experience has the potential to bring out each individual's unique strengths, create a positive psychological experience, and instill a strong sense of community

and belonging among the learners. Research has also shown that individuals who learned collaboratively were more likely to continue working together after a project was over and that the experience led to the formation of meaningful, long-lasting relationships.

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE ABOUT COLLABORATIVE LEARNING?

Great event planners know that their responsibilities go beyond organizing the logistical details of an event. They understand that when a participant comes to their event, they are taking out time and often traveling great distances, just so that they can learn from and connect with the people who can help them take their organization or project to the next level. An event goes from being great to unfortunate when it gives its participants a transformative educational experience — when they can acquire the knowledge they need to do their job well or find solutions to the challenges they're facing at work.

Having a star-studded lineup of speakers giving keynote addresses, hosting panels, workshops and sessions is not enough. These speakers face the impossible task of addressing the learning goal of each and every person attending the event — goals that are as different and diverse as the individuals themselves. Collaborative learning is effective because it transforms every participant into a potential source of knowledge — not just the speakers. It creates an atmosphere where participants know they can tap



into the event community; that, in a sea of thousands, they can find the one person who has the answer to the question they've been asking.

Traditional networking doesn't work because participants are placed in a room without context, without a reason to interact with each other. If a participant isn't naturally extroverted, they must swallow their nerves and start a conversation. But, a conversation about what? So participants must prepare by artfully stalking those they want to connect with on LinkedIn or they must come armed with potential conversation topics. If they're not naturally gifted at networking, they've probably read articles that tell them that the key to effective networking is giving, and how they can form lasting connections if they can find ways to help their peers. Even if they do all of the above, how can participants create meaningful connections if the context they're in is divorced from meaning?

Collaborative learning is the better

alternative to traditional networking because it acknowledges why people want to connect with each other — to learn from, and benefit from each other's expertise. More importantly, it creates a space where participants have a reason to speak with each other. The relationships formed are deeper and longer lasting because they're between people who share the same passion or are working toward similar objectives. As we imagine the future of events, how do we create an experience that extends beyond the “wow” factor of Instagram-ready installations, or celebrity appearances?

FIND OUT WHAT PARTICIPANTS WANT TO LEARN

Use surveys both pre- and post-event to find out the biggest challenges your attendees are facing or the subjects they're most excited to learn about. Curate event content based on this information. Move away from the broadcast model, where one individual teaches a large group of people; instead plan for smaller sessions where participants can actively engage with each other, and have the time and space to dive into the specific topics they want to learn about, or find solutions to their most pressing challenges.

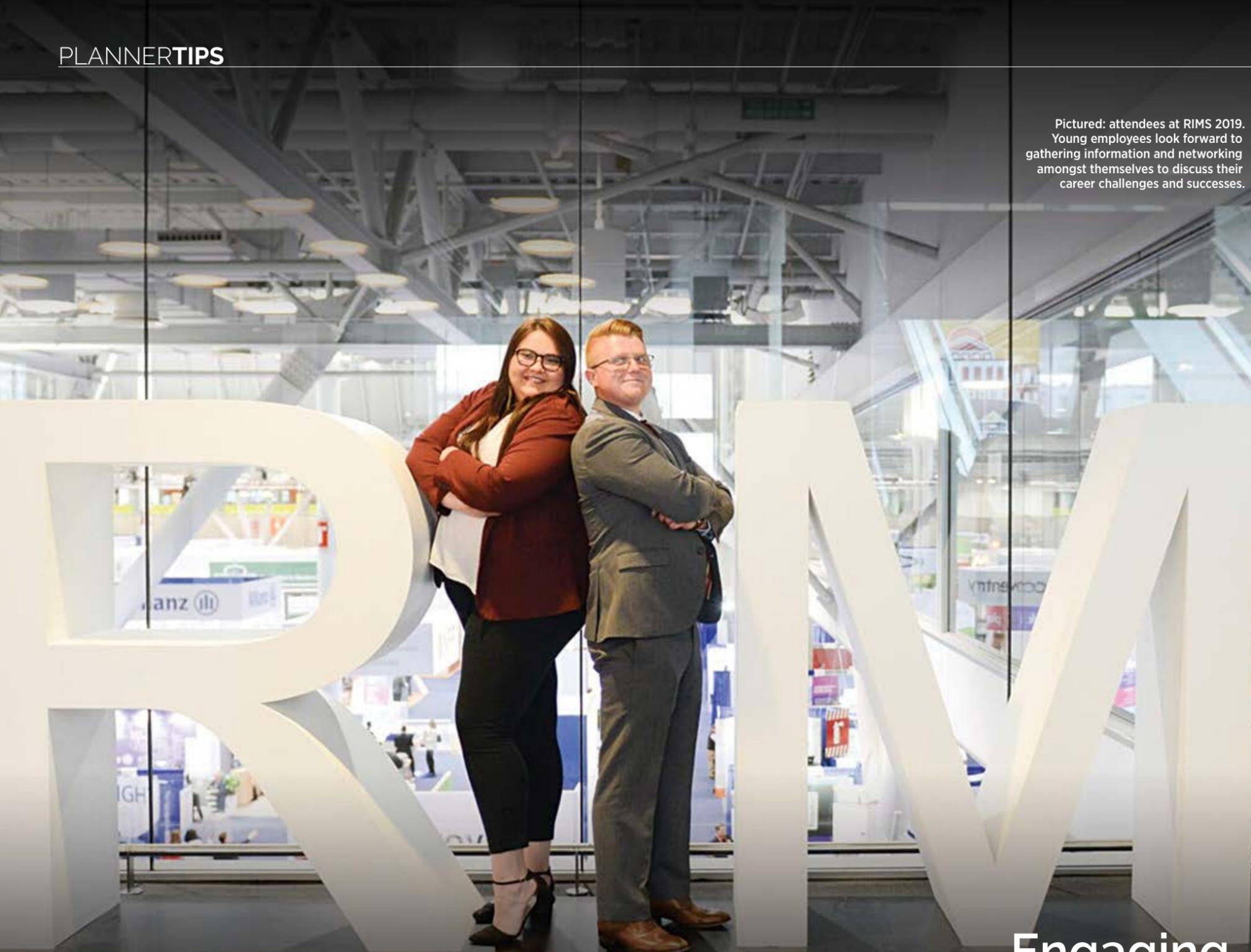
NETWORK WITH A PURPOSE

If you plan a networking session, ask participants to write down what they wish to learn on their name tag. Something this simple helps break the ice, and allows participants to form deeper connections based on mutual interests, as opposed to their job title. | **AC&F** |

Smriti Bansal is the Communications Manager at e180, the creator of Braindate — a participant knowledge-sharing experience for events that facilitates topic-driven networking. She channels her passion for and expertise in storytelling into creating content that empowers purpose-driven organizations to connect with the people they need to reach to accomplish their goals. Visit their website at e180.co or on Twitter @e180.



Pictured: attendees at RIMS 2019. Young employees look forward to gathering information and networking amongst themselves to discuss their career challenges and successes.



YOUNG LEADERS

Engaging Millennial and Gen Z Attendees

By Patrick Simms



Attendees at Oracle Applications & Technology Users Group's (OATUG) COLLABORATE 19 Emerging Leaders program, which is focused on the needs of younger members.

Those who develop programming for association meetings in most cases tend to be senior-level professionals. As such, they naturally relate to the needs and preferences of attendees within that demographic. But in devising engagement strategies for convention attendees, the younger contingent shouldn't be overlooked insofar as it is typically growing within an association's membership and represents the future leaders of the association and its field. That contingent is typically divided into two generations: Millennials (born between 1981-1996) and Generation Z (born between 1997-2012). The oldest members of the latter generation are college age or perhaps just out of college.

"Both of these segments have increased at our meetings and within our membership," observes Amy Ledoux, CAE, CMP, chief learning & meetings officer with ASAE. Similar to other associations, ASAE's discounted registration for those with a Young Professionals Membership has contributed to these members' increased participation in the annual meeting. Other factors driving the participation include ASAE's introduction of an organizational membership more than two years ago and the Xperience Design Project (XDP) in recent years. "We now have over 2,000 organizational members. Having an organization engaged

with ASAE helps engage members at all levels of the organization," Ledoux explains. "The XDP has also increased participation of millennials and Gen Z attendee segments. It's format is experiential, unique each year, co-created by and engages attendees throughout the event." ASAE has also tailored more of its educational offerings and networking opportunities to budding association professionals.

Thus, programming geared toward millennials and Gen Z is not merely a response to the growth of those attendee segments, but it also drives that growth by enhancing the value proposition for those members. In turn, the association has more to market in specifically promoting the meeting to the younger contingent.

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH), for example, shows how appealing to this demographic calls for a multipronged approach to programming. "We continue to provide hands-on education experiences, career-growth workshops and networking opportunities that we hope offer lifelong mentoring connections," says Christopher Kirbabas, director of programs.

Taking these initiatives a step further, the Oracle Applications &

Technology Users Group (OATUG), an association for Oracle users that is independent from Oracle Corporation, has created an Emerging Leaders division that is focused on the needs of younger members. Over the past four years, James Hobbs, senior director, global programs for Meeting Expectations, has worked with OATUG to launch and develop Emerging Leaders, including its offerings at COLLABORATE, OATUG's annual conference. It began with "the realization that our leadership was getting older and starting to retire, and we really needed to focus on bringing up this new organization of members into our leadership ranks. That was how we developed the program," explains Hobbs, who also reports seeing "year-over-year increases" in OATUG's younger demographic.

Hobbs notes that building Emerging Leaders has connected OATUG's present leaders to "the grassroots of how the user groups were built 25 years ago," given the introductory-level content the program offers. As far as outreach to Gen Z, Hobbs has developed a Collegiate Forum aimed at preparing college students for their tech careers. The key to reaching the students with the relevant professional interests, he says, is "having great sources that can help you get into the right departments," namely, those that teach Oracle applications. "I

partner with a group at Oracle and they help us get introductions. And, then, we start working directly with the college on the day's content. We have Oracle speakers, and we have volunteers from different companies, whether hiring managers or professional development managers, that can help them prepare for that next level of their professional careers."

EDUCATION

The most fundamental route to professional advancement is education, and a convention cannot engage younger members without at least some

"We try to be sensitive to the changing needs of the upcoming generations, but are doing so in ways that are cost-effective for us."

Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES
Vice President of Events and Exhibitions, RIMS



early-career educational offerings. Both The Risk Management Society (RIMS) and SAH have their fingers on the pulse of the content needs of their early-career attendees, most of whom represent the younger generations. "RIMS continues to build our portfolio of risk management '101' content," says Stuart Ruff-Lyon, CMP, DES, vice president of events and exhibitions at RIMS. "Our knowledge and learning department is consistently actively engaged in devel-

oping online and in-person opportunities to engage the rising risk professionals with education that will help them to advance their careers. At RIMS 2020, we will offer an expanded Career Lab for this group. In the Career Lab, you can get resume and LinkedIn advice, take a new professional headshot, and engage in soft skill-development learning opportunities." Similarly, SAH's early career members are "looking for hands on, practical education experiences," Kirbabas says. "We are hosting this year a workshop on how to write an effective book proposal. How can they perhaps turn their dissertation into a book proposal so they can get published, so they can be hired for a university position that could lead them to a tenured position?"

Learning formats should also reflect the preferences of younger attendees. In general, the younger generations like the option to customize their products and services and, in this case, they would prefer the ability to consume educational content in the manner that suits them.

"Offering varied content for different levels of understanding and in different formats is critical to attracting and retaining millennials, Gen Z attendees and other attendee groups as well," Ledoux says. "It allows attendees to create a unique user experience." With that in mind, ASAE presents "a variety of learning formats and experiences for learning based on interest, level of understanding of the topic, length of time you want to spend and more. We even have a program format called 'Open Space' to allow for onsite informational dialogues. Other delivery formats that appeal are our Express Talks, which are 20-minute, bite-sized sessions. If you need a more in-depth topic exploration, we have our 'Deep Dive' sessions that will give you a good topic overview. If you like to be entertained, we have 'Edutainment' sessions that have a message, but are delivered in a much more relaxed and fun format."

At the Risk Management Society's (RIMS) Career Lab, young members can get resume advice, take a new professional headshot and engage in other learning opportunities.

OATUG is also offering new, 20-minute session formats, as well as roundtable areas where attendees can engage in a Q&A with speakers after the session. One of the most valuable types of interactive educational experiences for younger delegates is the mentoring session.

"We take some of the more senior leaders in our membership and organization and pair them with young professionals to help them carve their path through their professional careers and become leaders themselves," Hobbs says.

TECHNOLOGY

It's commonly assumed that younger attendees prefer more technologically enabled meetings, but attendees of all ages these days are looking for a conference app, more digital materials, a social media presence, etc. And they all can appreciate cutting-edge technologies such as virtual reality. What is especially true of millennial and Gen Z attendees is that they expect virtual meeting options and on-demand content from the face-to-face meeting. After all, many of the younger millennials, and particularly Gen Z, have grown up with Skype and FaceTime, as well as instant access to information via the internet. Again, this expectation is not exclusive to these generations, but it is more pronounced among them. RIMS is one of many associations that are sensitive to this trend.

"In recent years, we have really beefed up our online content," Ruff-Lyon says. "We offer numerous online classes and blended learning, and recently launched a podcast series known as RIMS Riskcast. We try to be sensitive to the changing needs of the upcoming generations, but are doing so in ways that are cost-effective for us."

MARKETING

When it comes to marketing the upcoming convention, it is well known that a robust social media presence is essential to targeting younger members. Indeed, this effort will often snowball to positive effect as the members themselves start social media conversations about the event. Accordingly, Kirbabas says, "We have a very active presence on



Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram." Meanwhile, Ruff-Lyon notes that RIMS is "actively engaged in ramping our 'Insta-cred' with building out new things on Instagram" and is "more focused than ever on videos rather than on heavy text."

RIMS' marketing initiatives are in line with the younger generations' penchant for visual imagery that constantly captures their day-to-day experiences. And conferences, after all, are experiences whose appeal is often best expressed visually.

"At RIMS, we believe that our events are not really conferences, rather they

"We send very targeted emails outlining all of the programs that will help them advance their careers."

Christopher Kirbabas
Director of Programs
Society of Architectural Historians



are experiences. We try to market the RIMS Annual Conference & Exhibition as a true, holistic experience that offers networking and learning, combined with a bit of local flavor from the community," Ruff-Lyon adds.

Thus, e-marketing to millennial and Gen Z members should ideally incorporate images, links to videos and so on, complementing the textual message as to the value the convention brings to those members.

"We send very targeted emails outlining all of the programs that will help them advance their careers and make the meaningful connections that

RIMS uses various learning formats to reflect the preferences of younger attendees. Generally, younger generations prefer the ability to consume educational content in the manner that suits them.

will help them in their career growth," Kirbabas says.

NETWORKING

As the old adage goes, "Birds of a feather flock together." One of the things young attendees look forward to is gathering and networking amongst themselves and discussing their career challenges and successes.

"They build their networks through social media. What we try to impress upon them is to meet people, get face to face with them," Hobbs says. "These are going to be the people that you'll find yourself working with for the next 30 years in some capacity, whether it be at the same company or at different companies." OATUG stages an informal gathering for its Emerging Leaders at the start of COLLABORATE, allowing them to establish connections and commence a shared experience.

A distinctive venue always helps as a conversation starter, and OATUG's Emerging Leaders will have one this year in Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino's Shark Reef Aquarium. "We have rented out the whole area for our general attendee welcome reception, but they have a beautiful ballroom within the exhibition that we've set aside for the Emerging Leaders," Hobbs explains.





“So they get a beautiful environment to hang out in and engage with the other users” of their age.

Of course, as Ledoux notes, “young professionals want to not only connect with their peers but also to interact with speakers and leadership in a meaningful way. They want to be able to ask questions, participate in a conversation and give input. They are interested in networking through co-creation of content instead of an event being outlined for them and formulaic.” The roundtable Q&As with speakers that OATUG stages are an example of providing this opportunity. SAH paves the way to connections with leadership with a “one-hour early evening reception for our early career members to meet and mingle with our Board of Directors and our keynote,” Kirbabas says. “We want to provide them access to those who have been in the profession for a longer period of time so they see where their career path can lead them and see what steps they can take to get them on that career path.”

ENTERTAINMENT

While it may be a cliché, clichés do tend to have some grounding in truth: Millennials and Gen Z typically prefer localized, “authentic” experiences when it comes to diversion at a convention. Many of them are regularly globe-trotting in search of such experiences. Thus, it makes sense to emphasize the meeting’s destination when it comes to entertainment choices. “We strive to give our attendees local experiences by hiring local opening general session entertainment, regis-

tration area entertainment, and through all of our parties and F&B experiences,” Ruff-Lyon says. “We know that millennials and Gen Z crave authentic and local flavors, so we do our best to provide them with these things. At RIMS 2020, our entire opening party is an experiential play on the neighborhoods of Denver from an art perspective. It will offer attendees social media opportunities and ‘real’ Denver art and icons.”

GOING TO THE SOURCE

There is no shortage of advice on marketing to and engaging with the younger generations in the meetings and conventions field, and in other industries. But instead of relying exclusively on these albeit useful generalizations, it is important to also use one’s own younger members as a touchstone. The input from a young professionals advisory group, for example, is invaluable in designing relevant program-



Attendees at OATUG’s COLLABORATE19 Emerging Leaders program get to meet and network with current leaders. Below, RIMS attendees are recognized for their career achievements and other accomplishments.

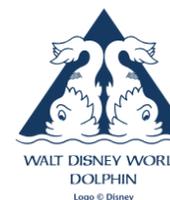
ming. “We encourage young professionals to be part of advisory groups at ASAE, as well as participate in session development and review for our face-to-face meetings,” Ledoux says. “It is an open process, and involvement is promoted by committees like the Young Professionals Advisory Group.” Ruff-Lyon also notes the effectiveness of such a group: “The best thing that we have done is to create a Rising Risk Professional Advisory Group comprised of millennial members and nonmembers to help guide the organization,” he says. And, for guidance on how to engage its Gen Z members in particular, RIMS partners with fraternal organizations, such as Gamma Iota Sigma.

There are a variety of means by which input can be solicited from these groups. “Post-event surveys, conference calls, face-to-face meetings or bringing them to our planning meetings in the summer are all ways of having them play an active role in the development of the Emerging Leaders program,” Hobbs says. Surveys are traditionally the way to gather feedback from the younger contingent of the membership that lies outside of advisory groups. “We not only have our evaluations for each engagement that attendees have with ASAE to help guide us to needs and wants, but we also have our yearly membership survey which we can segment and understand various membership groups needs,” Ledoux explains.

It is only through these channels that planners and association executives can discover the particular types of convention elements and experiences that are likely to drive engagement for their millennial and Gen Z attendees. Platitudes such as “Millennials prefer informal, interactive education” or “Gen Z look for Instagrammable moments at events” are helpful starting points, but should always remain open to revision in light of feedback from the young professionals that matter to one’s association. |AC&F|



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Cultural Connections

It's Important to Understand Global & Cultural Differences

By Maura Keller

When a conference presenter looks out on a room of association professionals, he or she is likely to see a multicultural mix of people. In fact, today's typical meeting or conference is a dramatically different place than it was just 10 or 15 years ago as the U.S. population continues to become more diverse. In addition, as more associations are going global, planners and attendees are experiencing global cultures in new ways.

In the last several decades, the United States has truly become a melting pot of nationalities and cultures. And the impact on meeting and events professionals and the associations that

they work with is evident in all facets of business. From multi-language contracts to bilingual presentations, to diversity marketing campaigns, revolutionary change is reshaping business practices to address the needs of our diverse culture.

According to Jamie Gelbtuch, founder of Cultural Mixology in New York, New York, the majority of meeting professionals and others in the industry are well intentioned as it relates to global and cultural differences. It's often not what we're doing intentionally, but rather what we are

doing unintentionally that can create a non-inclusive environment.

"By taking the time to do research around cultural differences up front, we can slow down our thinking and planning just enough to prevent critical mistakes," Gelbtuch says. "Even learning some basic do's and don'ts at the initial stages of working in a new culture may help meeting professionals understand more quickly what is going on and reduce the chances of unintentionally causing offense."

Tom Morgan, principal consultant at Morgan Intercultural in Fairfield, Iowa, says event planners these days need to operate with a global mindset. We live in an ever-more globalized

and interconnected world. One way or another, these days pretty much all business is global.

"Whether dealing with global attendees at U.S. events or with events occurring outside the U.S., event planners increasingly find themselves working in multicultural environments, doing their best to communicate across cultural boundaries, encountering differences in everything from communication and negotiation styles to time perception, to business etiquette to conflicting values about the meaning and purpose of life itself," Morgan says. "You don't have to plan an event in Berlin or Beijing to encounter those kinds of differences. Even event planners operating in their own U.S. home towns are dealing with cultural differences aplenty."

Meeting planner Kerry Painter, CCFE, CEM, CMP, director/general manager of the Raleigh Convention and Performing Arts Complex, stresses that hospitality is the art of making guests feel welcomed and appreciated.

"Every day, our industry is tasked with creating welcoming, engaging experiences that further the goals of our clients, but this can only happen when attendees feel safe and included. By being respectful to global cultures, we work to ensure that attendees will spend their energy where it matters most: connecting and growing," Painter says.

MISTAKES TO AVOID

Morgan says that differences in values orientations — ways of seeing power, hierarchy, identity, time, space, communication, context and relationships — lead to daily misunderstandings.

"These cultural differences are a much greater factor in the success or failure of all our business transactions, and meetings and events, than most people realize," Morgan says. "One of the misunderstandings a lot of people have when it comes to the subject of intercultural differences is the idea that memorizing a checklist of customs and etiquette rules is all you have to do to prepare for cultural differences in your work. If you rely only on that approach, chances are you're not really well prepared for cultural differences at all."

For example, as any event planner knows, there are variations around the world in eating etiquette and dietary preferences and restrictions, and so



forth. Since many, if not most, events involve providing some sort of sustenance for guests, the competent event planner will want to get cultural dining differences right.

"But an over-reliance on superficial do's and don'ts lists one may find online can lead the inexperienced event planner down the wrong path," Morgan says. "A quick Google search, for example, yields many oft-quoted rules of dining etiquette in India: We're told, for example, that Indians do not usually use cutlery for eating food, preferring instead to eat with their fingers. While there's a lot of truth to this in the context of many or most Indian homes in India, it's important to understand that any etiquette rule we might learn may not translate well to an event we're planning in, say, St. Louis, Missouri."

Morgan recommends that the globally minded event planner must go beyond the superficial rules and deeply comprehend the cultural context in which the event is occurring.

"Chances are, guests of Indian origin at a formal event in the west would themselves be adapting to western norms and would be expecting to be using the cutlery provided," Morgan says. "The inexperienced event planner relying on internet research would have been misled. The expert event planner would instead try to find out about the actual people attending the event — what their norms and preferences are and what they are actually used to doing."

Some meeting professionals also fall prey to the idea that country and

Experts suggest taking the time to do research about particular cultures and/or countries to ensure planners don't unintentionally offend someone or make a critical mistake.

culture are the same thing, which results in stereotyping. In fact, Gelbtuch points to a recent study of four work-related values across 32 countries in which they found that more than 80% of the differences in the values were found within countries, and less than 20% were found between countries.

"Another mistake is believing that cultures that seem similar on the surface are actually the same," Gelbtuch says. "In an ever-globalizing world, similarities in language, appearance, behaviors, or even many foods often mask much more substantial differences in values, traditions or beliefs that play important roles in the respective cultures."

For example, personal space is a reflection of culture and may impact the design or layout of meeting spaces. As Meret Scheidemann, assistant, marketing & communications at Cultural Mixology points out, Americans normally tend to prefer standing 3 feet away when having a conversation with a new acquaintance and may leave an empty seat between themselves and the next person when choosing a seat in a room to respect this invisible boundary. On the other hand, in Latin American countries, such as Argentina, people tend to stand very close to each other when talking to strangers or new acquaintances.

tances, only 2.5 feet away, and may take a seat right next to someone else.

And, in the rush of meetings and events, Painter says it can be hard to remember the power of the little details or gestures that may seem small to us but are impactful for others. “Given the nature of the work, I think the majority of planners are sensitive to cultural differences and that most people, especially frequent international travelers, are relatively forgiving of any cultural misunderstandings that might arise when abroad,” Painter says. “However, it goes a long way to honor the customs of those visiting from abroad — to show appreciation for them by preparing for their visit and being thoughtful about their needs and expectations.”

When assessing a plan for international attendees, even the smallest elements are impactful. For example, power can be an issue since voltage output can vary from country to country.

“Without proper attention to power sources, a venue’s operations team, vendors or attendees may need to scramble at the last minute to get the right adapter,” Painter says. “Or, if unprepared for a large group of attendees with strict religious or cultural dietary needs, a portion of the audience may be frustrated that they missed important programming while searching for meals

offsite — even more of a challenge for someone who does not speak the native language or has accessibility needs.”

CUSTOMS TO CONSIDER

When working with a Japanese business association focused on building U.S. relations, Painter and her staff spent time researching and practicing their proper business etiquette. This exercise, which they replicate often,

“Another mistake is believing that cultures that seem similar on the surface are actually the same.”

Jamie Gelbtuch
Founder, Cultural Mixology



brought to light the importance of handing business cards with respect. “We knew to present and accept business cards with both hands, to bow when giving or receiving cards, and to not write on them,” Painter says. “This simple demonstration of respect, which required no words and took only a few minutes to learn, made a lasting impression with our clients and attendees.”

Gelbtuch says it’s important for meeting professionals to remember that culture exists on many levels, and when striving to make attendees from different cultures feel comfortable, it is equally,

if not more, important to consider the “culture” of the industry, occupation or even generation of attendees, which can all override national cultural differences.

“Think about your own culture first. Although it may seem counterintuitive, I often recommend that people read a book or resources about their own culture,” Gelbtuch says. “It brings many of the invisible, out of awareness aspects of culture to the front of our minds as

we generally don’t think that much about cultural differences until we are the proverbial fish out of water. This exercise also reminds us of the danger of stereotypes because, as we do this research, we inevitably realize that there are aspects that don’t necessarily apply to particular regions or individuals within a culture.”

Also be sure to look for uncomfortable moments as you interact with attendees and planners throughout the process. These are our mental cues about differences and potential opportunities to adapt. One way intercultural consultants help their clients includes giving them assessment tools that can measure the individual’s unique cultural profile. “When a client asks for our help at Morgan Intercultural, we’ll usually employ assessment tools to measure the individual’s or group’s cultural profiles,” Morgan says.

Let’s say a particular event planner — let’s call her Mary — grew up in the U.S. and works as a meeting planner in a large Midwestern city. Mary knows that, for a particular large event she has coming up, she is going to be working with clients from Japan.

What’s the first thing the intercultural consultant does? “Find out more about Mary’s cultural profile, and help her to understand the unique cultural lens she is looking through,” Morgan says. “As it turns out, one of the most important things we can do is to help the client increase his or her cultural self-awareness. Most of us can be much better at understanding the cultural lens we are looking through.”

Planners should operate with a global mindset and they must understand that, as more people are interconnected, pretty much all interactions, especially in business, are global.

The next thing Morgan might do is to help Mary to understand the overall cultural profile of the countries that will be represented in the meeting she’s organizing. Then, it becomes possible to identify what interculturalists call the “culture gaps” between Mary’s cultural orientation and that of the cultures with which she will be working.

“Once we’ve done that, we may notice that, for example, Mary tests as having a more direct communication style, Mary has a strong preference for “saying what she means, and meaning what she says.” But the people she’s working with who come from Japan may be more used to a more indirect communication style,” Morgan says. “If Mary uses her usual more direct style, it’s possible that she will come across as being a bit too blunt for her Japanese meeting participants. If, on the other hand, Mary works on modifying her style a bit, and uses a little bit more indirect style, she may find her communication with her Japanese participant goes more smoothly.”

When Painter and her team anticipate site visits with clients from other countries or cultures, they conduct preliminary research and educate

the team so they feel empowered to address any potential pressure points early in the process. “We’re fortunate to work in an industry where our counterparts are eager to share their experience with others,” Painter says. “Helping each other understand the finite details will help deliver a more robust and inclusive event. Don’t be afraid to reach out to colleagues and partners who have hosted similar groups or attendees for their feedback. Cultural sensitivity training also is another great option. We’ve engaged our HR department and third-party consultants to help our staff better understand the perspective of some of our groups.”

Speaking more broadly, meeting professionals also should seek opportunities that are intentional about being inclusive and diverse. Collaborating on an event is an effective way to have internal staff work closely and, in turn, learn from their counterparts.

For example, some things you can



JULIET JARMOSCO

learn about include how people from other cultures value time. Some may be more punctual while others more relaxed when it comes to being somewhere on time. And, when communicating with someone who isn’t fluent in English, make sure to adjust your English to fit the person who’s listening. You want them to be able to comprehend what you say, so make sure you use words and phrases they will understand. This means refraining from using slang, jargon or buzz words.

Also, according to research by CT Business Travel, the French prefer to

“We’re fortunate to work in an industry where our counterparts are eager to share their experience with others.”

Kerry Painter, CCFE, CEM, CMP
Director, General Manager
Raleigh Convention and Performing Arts Complex



shake hands lightly, as do the Japanese and South Koreans. And while pre-business conversations may be customary in Brazil, this is not the case in Russia or Switzerland. Also, while spoken communication techniques are important, it’s how you convey your message that’s really important. This means understanding subtle, non-verbal communication, such as body language.

To learn about these and other global nuances, cultural organizations or the country’s embassy are an overlooked resource. Many of these institutions exist specifically to educate people about their country or culture.

Meeting planners everywhere

Tom Morgan, standing, principal consultant at Morgan Intercultural, recommends that globally minded event planners go beyond the superficial rules and deeply comprehend the cultural context in which the event is occurring.

increasingly find themselves working in multicultural environments, encountering differences in everything from communication and negotiation styles to time perception, to business etiquette to conflicting values about the meaning and purpose of life itself. “What is easy and intuitive within one’s own culture can be clumsy, ineffective or incomprehensible in another,” Morgan says. “The cost of operating without what we call a ‘global mindset’ are incalculable. Intercultural incompetence slows us down, destroys trust, damages reputations,

kills deals, ends international assignments prematurely, even causes entire ventures to fail.”

This is why global cultural diversity within the meetings and events industry is a topic that is not going away anytime soon. Morgan says that operating with a global mindset is being well prepared to deal with cultural differences on more than just a superficial level. “Globally minded businesspeople — let’s call them ‘global leaders’ — are capable of shifting perspectives, empathizing and decoding culturally diverse situations accurately,” Morgan says. “More than that, global leaders are able to exhibit culturally appropriate behavior in many different cultural contexts.” |AC&F|



THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

Smart Meeting Management Tools Make Planners' Lives Easier

BY PATRICK SIMMS

While the culture of technology has always bred the desire to have the “latest and greatest,” practical needs should really be the buyer’s guiding principle. Within the dizzying array of meeting management tech tools on the market, the newer, trendier products will not always have the features most conducive to a given planner’s work. The “smart” meeting management tools, then, are those whose functionality, ease of use and price point are most appropriate to the individual planner’s duties, tech savvy and budget.

Part of the services provided by Kellen, a leading association management services company, is to help clients select the best meeting management software. “While we love new technology and seeing what’s on the market, it’s always going to roll back to what’s appropriate for our client,” says Martin E. Bay, CMP, vice president, meetings operations and procurement with Kellen. “With our associations, we’re not always looking for the latest, greatest technology; it’s a very slow process for us. I would never say our clients are on the cutting edge of using technology, but they’re using it consistently and correctly.”

Thus, the smart selection and use of tech tools is what’s important, and that process begins with a needs assessment. The following review focuses on case studies of products that have matched the meeting management needs of various planners, covering functions as diverse as registration, abstract management and exhibit floor management.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Planning a meeting entails basic project management responsibilities, from allocating resources to task tracking to spend reporting. Megan Ogden, CMP, director, meetings & events, National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), has found Smartsheet an effective tool for such purposes, superior to the Excel spreadsheets her team had been using to manage the planning of NACE’s annual conference. “Whereas in Excel you can only put a comment in a cell, with Smartsheet, in each row you can add attachments and comments. For example, you can put another copy of the contract in a certain row,” she explains. “I also use it to communicate with our suppliers.” With regard to the general session, for example, Ogden uses Smartsheet to communicate with her A/V company in real time, adding logos to be used for the screen, scripts for the confidence monitor, special A/V requests and so on. The tool has been so effective that “now our entire marketing department uses it for our production schedule,” she adds.

ABSTRACT MANAGEMENT

Ogden also oversees the call for papers for NACE’s annual conference, and CadmiumCD’s Abstract Scorecard has proven itself to be an ideal tool for the process since 2014, when her team first adopted it. “We collect about 425 conference proposals, and it streamlines the entire process for us so we’re not manually entering data using a web form, and then translating it into



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content that is easy for our conference committee reviewers” to digest, she explains. “It’s an automated system that also generates the average scores for the proposals versus using Excel spreadsheets and manually computing those scores.” Abstract Scorecard thus both saves time and improves quality control. “Not only do we internally have success with the product, but our users, the actual proposal submitters, provide positive feedback,” she notes.

SPEAKER MANAGEMENT

It’s generally advantageous when a tech tool can be used for more than one meeting management function. For example, Ogden’s team also works with CadmiumCD for speaker management, via the Conference Harvester. Functions include collecting speaker bios and photos, presentation materials, contracts, financial disclosures and travel requirements, as well as session scheduling. “It allows us to migrate all the accepted proposal information into the tool so the speakers are not resubmitting their bios or their photos,” Ogden explains. “All of the proposal information is migrated into the speaker system, and it allows us to sort speakers into different groupings. We can send notifications regarding PowerPoint deadlines, additional A/V request deadlines, etc.” She adds that CadmiumCD has “excellent customer support,” a valuable complement to any tech product.

“Not only do we internally have success with the product, but our users, the actual proposal submitters, provide positive feedback.”

Megan Ogden, CMP
Director, Meetings & Events
NACE



the American Transplant Congress, a citywide convention whose speaker and moderator management needs are extensive, to say the least.

OASIS supports functions such as notifying submitters, inviting speakers, collecting their information and scheduling their sessions, showing them completion status and sending reminders for the various tasks they may have. Fagan particularly appreciates the “ability to upload membership lists in order for us to have a crosscheck of membership features.” She says, “They provide us administrative access so we’re able to generate a lot of different reporting. That’s such a big functionality because in working with medical meetings, we

“Smart” meeting management tools are those whose functionality, ease of use and price point are most appropriate to the individual planner’s duties, tech savvy and budget.

need to get very granular sometimes with our reports, and they provide a lot of great features for us to do that.”

The ability to integrate with event apps is also a welcome feature in a meeting management tool. OASIS allows integration between the speaker management portal, abstract tool and the event mobile app Fagan’s team uses, ATIV Software EventPilot. EventPilot, she feels, offers “good scheduling features for a medical meeting.” She says, “It provides the ability for abstract viewability, which is extremely important for a medical meeting when you are looking to build your schedule among many abstracts being presented at one time. You can add in keywords to search, look at the program by day, search by speaker and search for exhibitors. The app also connects to our Twitter account, so there’s a Twitter feed at the bottom of the app. That’s great for sharing and networking.”

For onsite presentation management, AH currently partners with PSAV, utilizing its Content1. “The software allows for onsite capabilities where speakers can walk into a Speaker Ready Room and their presentation is filtered out into that room,” she explains. Speakers use the tool to upload and

access presentations, and can make changes in real time so all participants have the latest version.

EXHIBITOR MANAGEMENT

A2Z has been a frontrunner in the area of exhibitor management, offering features such as floor plan management, an exhibitor portal, booth and sponsorship contracting and more. A relatively new tool in this space is Blueprint by Freeman, introduced a few years ago. “It’s a really impressive product that’s not as expensive, and it’s got a lot of features we like so we’ve been rolling it out,” Bay says.

Blueprint’s online floor plan management program allows all stakehold-

TOOLTIME

The following is an overview of some event management features of popular AMS programs:

iMIS

- Registration for events of all types and sizes.
- Ability to offer flexible pricing based on registration date, membership type and other demographic information.
- Automated reminders and thank-you emails.
- Ability to create a microsite with agenda, registrant directory, Twitter feed, and more.

NetForum

- Registration including pricing, categories and coupons.
- Manage session tracks.
- Make booth assignments.
- Abstract and speaker management.

YourMembership

- Create personalized registration paths that only display relevant tickets and event sessions.
- Incorporate early bird pricing, coupon codes and membership-only pricing into registrations.
- Automated schedule confirmations, reminders and thank-you emails.
- Event badge printing.

I4A-Membership

- Registration.
- Abstract submission.
- Ecommerce.
- Export utility for QuickBooks.
- E-marketing.

Impexium

- Handles multiple registration types.
- Automated onsite registration and badge generation.
- Manage room details and speaker information.
- Exhibit management, including sales and booth assignments, online payment collection, real-time reports and interactive floor plans.
- Integrates with leading mobile event management apps.
- Abstract management and presentation scheduling.



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ers — organizers, exhibitors and attendees — to access a live copy of the floor plan in real time. With Blueprint Pro, the plan can be embedded in the event website. Booths are tagged as “sold” or “pending” on the floor plan, ensuring sales staff and exhibitors have the latest information. Sponsor logos and banner ads can also be added. The tool can be used to send invoices to exhibitors, who book and pay for booth space in Blueprint via its ecommerce platform. The system accepts all major debit and credit cards, and invoice payments, from exhibitors in more than 135 currencies. Attendees can use the online floor plan to bookmark booths to visit, as well as share contact information with exhibitors. The tool also integrates with a registration system, CRM and other applications.

AMS EVENT MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Association management software (AMS) has a built-in registration tool and typically other event management features. But selecting the best AMS hinges on a variety of factors beyond meeting management, as these are intended for overall association management. Thus, in some cases, it may be preferable to pair the AMS with separate event management products. Kellen first determines the best platform for its clients’ member databases. “That is going to determine a lot of what we do with meetings management,” Bay says. For most large clients, Kellen works with iMIS, but also selects from other AMS products, including NetForum, YourMembership, internet4associations (I4A) and a new one called Impexium.

Regarding the latter product, Bay comments, “We like Impexium, which

Some of the best exhibitor management programs include A2Z and Blueprint, which offer floor plan management and more to ensure sales staff and exhibitors have up-to-date information.

is one of the new kids on the block, because it not only does registration but also offers some of the things Avenetri does, such as booth sales and call for abstracts. It’s got a lot of neat features to it. But you would only use those features if you’re using it for the client member database in the first place. If you’re using iMIS for the member database, you wouldn’t go over to Impexium and try to use their tools for registration because it’s not set up to do that.”

DEDICATED EVENT MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Arguably the major player in this space, Cvent, recently won the “Best Overall Event Management Solution Provider” award from MarTech Breakthrough last August. There were more than 2,500 nominations from all over the world. According to James Johnson, managing director at MarTech Breakthrough, a leading market intelligence organization, Cvent “continues to grow and innovate. With two decades in the meetings and events industry, they now offer the most comprehensive end-to-end meetings management platform in the market.”

An example of that growth and innovation came at the end of last year, when Cvent partnered with miMeetings, a leading provider of managed ground transportation solutions for meetings and events. According to Cvent, planners can now source, select and compare multiple ground trans-

portation vendor bids and negotiate pricing directly within the Cvent platform; eliminate transportation errors with patented flight validation through real-time FAA connectivity; and leverage comprehensive post-event accounting and reporting by incorporating ground transportation spend directly into Cvent's budgeting tools.

Cvent is one of several event management products Bay considers for Kellen's clients. "I like Cvent as a registration tool but it doesn't necessarily have all the other tools built into it that you would want," he notes. "So, if you've got a conference that is going to be selling booth space and has an educational component so that you'd want to do a call for papers, Cvent is not your tool; you'll have to use Cvent plus other tools and then figure out how to integrate them."

Bay adds, "With Aventri it's all built into the same software." Aventri offers abstract management, barcode scanning, lead retrieval, booth appointment setting, a booth sales module with a floor plan, an event website tool and other features. One of Aventri's advantages, Bay says, is that it works easily with multinational groups, utilizing multiple payment gateways and many different languages."

He continues, "It's also 'extremely user friendly. We've got a tremendous 24/7, 365-day support team via email, online and telephone calls," he says. "And it's very intuitive, whereas the meetings module within an AMS might not be intuitive because it wasn't built to be an event management system; it was built to be a membership database, but they're trying to offer this registration module on top of that."



CVENT

"It's a really impressive product that's not as expensive, and it's got a lot of features we like so we've been rolling it out."

Martin E. Bay, CMP
Vice President, Meetings Operations and Procurement, Kellen



abstract management and processing system such as Precis.

Other event management tools on Kellen's list of options include Expo Logic, with functions including online/onsite registration, face rec-

Technological advances have made life much easier for meeting planners. Dozens of tasks that had to be performed manually can now be done with the push of a button.

ognition, badge printing, session tracking and lead retrieval; and Swoogo Event Management, an up-and-coming product. Swoogo offers features such as registration with conditional logic-based questions and branding for registration pages; integration with Event-Mobi; marketing tools such as Google Analytics site tracking, social widgets and CRM integrations; and Swoogo Live mobile check-in for attendees. Swoogo's latest capability, introduced last year, is 1:1, a networking function that allows organizers to enable attendees to schedule one-on-one meetings within the

convention. Added in response to customer requests, the tool also reports these meetings in order to ensure an attendee is not double booked.

Not only are new event management tools regularly popping up in the marketplace, but existing products are often undergoing enhancements. Thus, it pays to keep an eye on these developments with the goal of optimizing the work of convention planning, and perhaps switching to a more promising product. Bay says his team is "always looking for new options" in event management tools. "We

get invited to tech conferences and we send someone to the big [meeting industry] shows, such as PCMA Convening Leaders and Expo! Expo! Those events are great for discovering new technologies." |AC&F|



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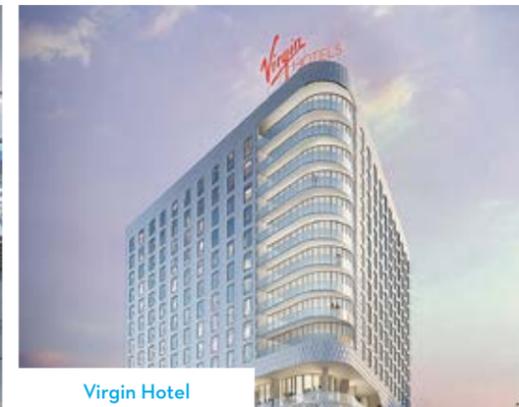
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SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

Going Green is the Way to Go for Meetings

BY DEREK REVERON

Sustainability is becoming a routine part of the planning process for conventions and conferences, and there are several reasons for the trend:

- It's getting easier to plan eco-friendly meetings because more convention centers, meeting venues and hotels are implementing their own practices.
- Sustainability is becoming more cost-efficient, especially for basic practices that don't require long-term planning.
- Sustainable meetings are increasingly important to maintain and grow association attendance and memberships, especially among millennials, who care deeply about the environment.
- In addition, planners who don't embrace environmentally friendly meetings will lag behind their peers and miss an opportunity to burnish their professional and organizational brands. As a result, more planners are turning to

sustainability. Most commonly, planners are taking the basic step of choosing convention centers and hotels with sustainable practices.

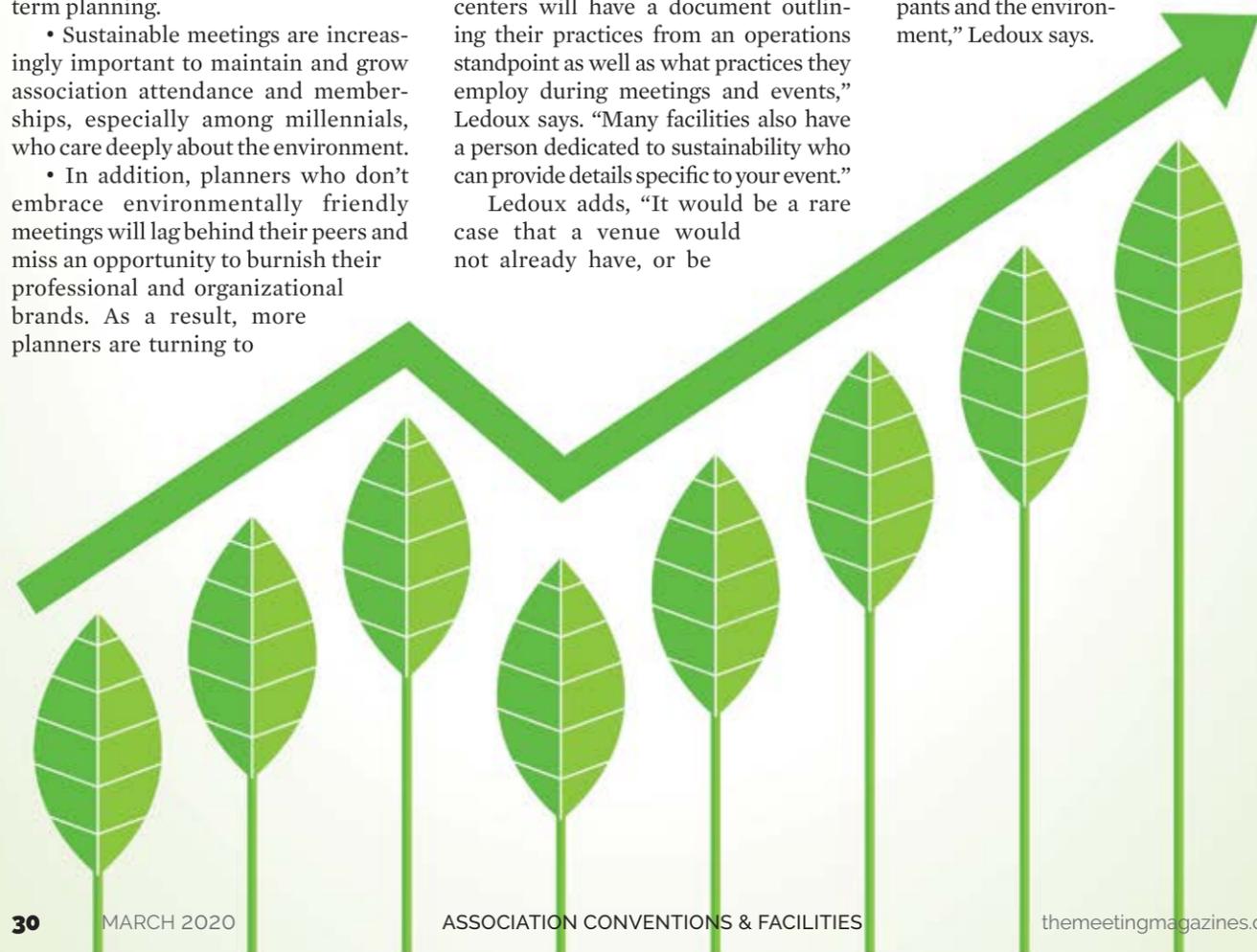
ASK ABOUT PRACTICES

According to Amy Ledoux, CAE, CMP, chief learning & meetings officer for ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership, planners should ask venues and properties about their sustainable practices. "Most hotels and convention centers will have a document outlining their practices from an operations standpoint as well as what practices they employ during meetings and events," Ledoux says. "Many facilities also have a person dedicated to sustainability who can provide details specific to your event."

Ledoux adds, "It would be a rare case that a venue would not already have, or be

willing to implement, sustainable practices. If they don't already have practices, then the stakeholders may need to help pay for certain sustainable products or processes to meet requests."

Planners should also determine whether facilities and hotels under consideration have LEED certification. "It's the most recognized global standard for high-performance buildings that are efficient, cost-effective, and better for occupants and the environment," Ledoux says.



START WITH RFPs

Many planners go further than exercising a preference for environmentally friendly convention facilities and incorporate sustainability requirements into RFPs. According to Nancy Zavada, CMP, president of MeetGreen, a sustainable conference management agency, "Absolutely, start with the RFP and vet the list of potential vendors based on their sustainability practices among other factors. As with anything else, everything is negotiable. The event organizer decides on their priorities and negotiates the full package."

Charlotte Grant, marketing and communications manager for the World Cocoa Foundation (WCF) and planner of its annual Partnership Meeting, agrees that planners should include sustainability in RFPs. "We challenge our suppliers early on during the RFP/selection process to make strong commitments on sustainable practices," Grant says. "The RFP contains a list of non-negotiable requirements, such as usage of non-disposable glassware and silverware, and low-meat F&B options. We then work with vendors to have them add additional commitments."

Grant adds that sustainability commitments must be part of the WCF's final contracts. "Lack of commitments and practices are definitely a deal-breaker criteria for us when selecting a hospitality partner," Grant says. "For my team, it is especially important to ensure that our events reflect our values and do not negatively impact the environment."

COMMUNICATE EXPECTATIONS

Elisa Perodin, CMP, CEM, senior vice president of association events, strategic events, meetings & incentives for MCI USA, a provider of strategic meeting, convention and expo solutions, also communicates sustainability expectations early in the planning process. "Make it a priority and major determining factor when selecting venues and suppliers," Perodin says. "Integrate sustainability commitments and concessions into contracts."

She adds, "Require suppliers to sign a sustainability Code of Conduct agreement as well, which identifies in writing the minimum expectations



for the purchases suppliers make on behalf of your company or clients."

Grant suggests that planners treat negotiating sustainability needs the same as bargaining other meeting requirements. "Our approach is to come with practical requirements and set these forth during the contracting process when we have leverage to generate change," Grant says. "Also, indicate the importance of this request as part of the selection process. If they don't have any sustainable practices in place, ask what they will do to put them in place."

Grant urges planners who don't negotiate sustainable meeting elements to do so. "Only by raising our collective expectations as planners will we have real impact on the industry, so I think we should always come from a position of high expectations," Grant says.

More planners are helping their associations to meet sustainably as they realize that even relatively small- and mid-size conventions can have an impact. MeetGreen estimates that a five-day conference with 2,500 attendees uses at least 60,000 plates, 87,500 napkins, 75,000 cups and 90,000 cans or bottles.

SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP

For its part, ASAE vigorously practices sustainability at its conventions and encourages other associations to do the same. According to Ledoux, "From an organization perspective, we discuss and practice sustainable tactics with our partners. If we make it a pri-

The backdrop at the World Cocoa Foundation's 2018 Partnership Meeting was donated and the material was transformed into tote bags. The bags were then sold to support Brazil's underprivileged communities.

ority, the partners we are working with will as well," she says. "I think this is impactful because we are leading by example, and hopefully those practices implemented with partners will remain in place for many other groups as well."

CREATE A POLICY

According to MeetGreen, associations of every size should have sustainability policies. "Draft an event sustainability policy to ensure that green practices are incorporated into all meetings," according to MeetGreen's website. "This process should be finalized and communicated to all stakeholders."

Once the policy is completed, MeetGreen advises, planners should take the following steps for each meeting:

- Confirm event-specific priorities and measurement targets. This could be a first action step for the sustainable event team.
- Establish areas of responsibility for staff and vendors and determine how to communicate this information to all stakeholders.
- Communicate opportunities and impacts. Include strategies to implement before, during and after the meeting, including attendee outreach and education.

POLICIES VARY

Sustainability policies among associations range from basic to comprehensive. For example, the American Public Health Association (APHA), has a sustainable policy which states, “APHA is committed to reducing the environmental impact of the annual meeting and finding ways to be eco-friendlier and responsible, and help minimize the meeting’s impact on the environment. Each year we implement more green initiatives, hoping to make our meetings more eco-friendly than the year before.” In addition, APHA looks for conference venues that are energy-efficient, use renewable power, diverts waste from landfills and avoids non-compostable materials such as plastics.

Another organization, the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), posts advice for attendees on its website on “Ways to be greener while attending the GBTA Convention.”

The site’s advice includes, “Recycle your paper, plastic and glass in the receptacles in each meeting room/pre-function area. Take public transportation to and from the convention center.”

Some associations, including the The Pacific Northwest Clean Water Association (PNCWA), also push to improve sustainability efforts for each convention. The PNCWA eliminated its registration brochure for the

group’s conference in Boise, Idaho, which attracted 971 attendees. The move saved an estimated 39,000 sheets of paper, the equivalent of nearly two trees, MeetGreen estimates.

The Boise Centre (BC), which actively promotes sustainability, hosted the PNCWA conference and partnered with the organization to create a sustainable meeting.

For example: Meals were served with reusable cutlery, dishes and linen napkins. Water was provided in reusable bottles with a glass or compostable

“It would be a rare case that a venue would not already have, or be willing to implement, sustainable practices.”

Amy Ledoux, CAE, CMP
Chief Learning & Meetings Officer
ASAE



cup. Plastic straws were not available, preventing an estimated 1,000 feet of plastic from polluting the environment. Some meals included foods that were locally grown, organic, sustainably harvested or ethically produced. Unserved food was donated to the Boise Rescue Mission. An attendee cleanup activity along the banks of the Boise River resulted in removing the equivalent of nine large bags of trash. All sustainable practices were communicated to attendees before the conference via email and onsite via the BC’s electronic signage.

BEGIN WITH THE BASICS

As stated, planners experienced with sustainable meetings suggest beginners start with choosing LEED-certified convention centers, venues and hotels because they already have sustainable programs and may be more likely to help implement meeting-specific practices. When possible, send RFPs only to LEED-certified convention centers and conference facilities.

Eco-friendly facilities are getting easier to find as they discover that sustainability gives a competitive edge in booking meetings. Whether a venue is LEED-certified or not, check their sustainable features online to determine which match the meeting’s requirements and which may be negotiable.

Ask vendors and suppliers about their policies for recycling, energy reduction and consumption, material reuse and donations of leftover food and materials. “Most venues have arrangements with local charities and can usually facilitate the pick up or delivery of unused food,” Ledoux says.

Finally, determine upfront which sustainable efforts could add to the budget.

COSTLY? NOT REALLY

Planners need not spend big bucks to implement basic sustainability efforts. Zavada says there are several relatively easy and inexpensive practices that are environmentally impactful as long as planners follow the “Three Rs” — recycle, reuse, reduce.

“Choose a meeting venue that is close to accommodations, shopping, mass transit, restaurants and nightlife to cut down on taxis, shuttles and rental cars,” Zavada says. “Reduce first before recycling. For example, do you really need a conference bag and handouts?”

Have attendees use the recycling program and containers for food, beverage and meeting material waste that many convention centers provide. “It is important to know what the venue

Here’s a tip: Provide water in pitchers and ask attendees to bring refillable bottles or thermos containers. A five-day conference with 2,500 attendees can use as many as 90,000 bottles.

practices are and make attendees aware of them,” Ledoux says.

Other suggestions include using reusable and recyclable cutlery and glasses and providing condiments in bulk to avoid discarding small plastic packets. “We ban single-use plastics and individual condiment packaging and ensure our venue can provide reusable glassware and silverware,” Grant says.

Another option is having the venue or caterer use biodegradable products for plates, cutlery and glasses. According to Ledoux, “The variety and quality of these products have made them more readily available and at a lower cost.”

Still another option is to reuse or recycle meeting signage to reduce waste, and create décor and theme materials using sustainable and recyclable materials. For example, the stage backdrop at the WCF’s Partnership Meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil was printed on a material that was donated to an association of women entrepreneurs in the country who make handbags with recycled textiles.

ASAE TIPS

Ledoux says ASAE takes several measures to recycle at its convention. “We worked with a sign vendor back in the early ’90s to create a sign with a large plastic pocket for the insert,” she says. “This was done so signs could then be reused at future meetings. We also worked with our general contractor to create elements for our meetings like mobile registration carts, that we can use at all major meetings to brand with meeting-specific graphics.”

Ledoux adds, “For tote bags, we moved from event branding to organization branding on the bags so we could use any leftover bags at other meetings and not have to donate or throw them away. Also, you can keep things green by buying biodegradable badge holders and paper, as well as recycling badge holders by placing collection bins and reusing those holders for another meeting.”

Planners can also email badges for proofing and printing onsite to reduce carbon emissions due to postal delivery of badges. Ledoux also suggests using apps and websites instead of paper to provide registration and housing information and distribute meeting programs.

According to Grant, “We can fight waste by limiting or eliminating paper



and unsustainable goodies distribution. We ask our partners to avoid distributing paper documents and unsustainable goodies, and propose alternatives such as featuring their brochures in the event app.”

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

It’s getting easier for planners to use eco-friendly foods, drinks and dinnerware because more people want to eat healthfully and sustainably. Tips include using caterers who have thorough knowledge of local third parties that can provide sustainable food, providing vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options, serving smaller portions, and offering foods that were produced locally using environmentally sound and humane practices. Also, provide water in pitchers and ask attendees to bring refillable bottles and thermos containers.

TRANSPORTATION

Vehicle use, especially for large conventions, consumes huge amounts of fuel and generates carbon emissions. To curb those emissions, eliminate some transportation options after attendees arrive. Urge them to share taxis and carpool. “Instead of providing transportation for attendees, some organizations are encouraging them to utilize public transportation,” Ledoux says. “The use of pedicabs to and from events is a trend I have seen but is mostly applicable for smaller groups.”

Ledoux adds that many transportation companies, like venues, have their own sustainability practices regarding transportation. “Some have limited idling time for vehicles, use group routes so fewer buses are needed, and run buses on clean fuel.”

Planners should also ask about sus-

ASAE uses biodegradable badge holders and paper for badges. They also use organization branding on tote bags, not event branding, which allows them to reuse leftover bags.

tainable airline policies. “Some airlines have instituted an option for attendees to indicate if they want to pay to help make their trip carbon neutral,” Ledoux says. “This often costs less than \$10 depending on the trip distance.”

Many association efforts depend at least partly on attendees to help implement eco-friendly initiatives. That’s why it’s important to educate attendees about actions they can take to make meetings more sustainable. Zavada says, “Educate your participants so they know what is being done on their behalf. They will be excited to participate if they are involved and proud of the organization and their commitment.”

Attendees will also appreciate knowing how suppliers contribute to meeting sustainability. “Be sure to promote the steps your suppliers are taking on your behalf to use sustainability practices,” Perodin says.

SUSTAINABILITY ABROAD

Planners should be flexible about their sustainability expectations when meeting in foreign countries. According to Grant, “Some nations are more advanced than others on sustainable practices, so I would recommend being demanding, but realistic, and remain aware of local constraints and customs.”

Whether meeting domestically or abroad, more planners are seeking sustainable meeting solutions. It’s now possible for planners to ensure all their conventions and conferences have at least some eco-friendly practices. |AC&F|

ATLANTIC CITY



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A Sure Bet for Meeting Success

BY KEITH LORIA

Atlantic City carries the nickname “America’s Playground,” which is fitting since there’s plenty of fun things for people to do, which is something that those planning meetings and conventions appreciate about the New Jersey hot spot.

While many people consider Las Vegas to be the gaming mecca in the U.S., heading west can be a chore for those on the East Coast. Thankfully, Atlantic City contains some of the biggest and most luxurious casino resorts

around, and they offer plenty of world-class dining and fabulous entertainment. “Atlantic City is a beach resort destination that offers world-class entertainment, dining and shopping, as well as being the second-largest gaming destination in the country,” says Sandi Harvey, vice president of sales for Meet AC, the city’s DMC.

That’s why those planning corporate events or company-wide meetings are gravitating to the area more

regularly, especially since the area has rebounded strongly following the devastating “Superstorm Sandy” in 2012.

“Attendees can do it all under one roof — meet, eat and sleep,” Harvey says. “Attendees are also able to utilize the added amenities the casino properties offer, such as the gym, indoor pool, spa and much more. In addition, attendees can explore the array of dining and entertainment options just steps from the meeting room.”

Atlantic City also offers a variety of attractions, such as the Steel Pier amusement park, which added The

Wheel a few years ago; the Ripley’s Believe It or Not museum; the Absecon Lighthouse; plus arcade games up and down the world-famous Boardwalk.

Allison H. Sargent, founder and CEO of Allison Sargent Events in Montclair, New Jersey, has spent the last 28 years planning meetings and events nationally, with a client base that includes customers from the corporate and nonprofit world. “It’s a historical place for meetings in New Jersey because, 35 years ago, there wasn’t really anywhere else in the state for big corporate meetings,” she says. “It’s really stayed a consistent place for groups to go and be entertained.”

That history, which starts with the Boardwalk that everyone enjoys, helps draw groups as well, says Paul Steinmetz, director of the Fort Lauderdale, Florida-

based The American Meetings Network, a global meeting planning organization that does about 700 meetings a year, many of those in Atlantic City.

The company represents a lot of pharmaceutical companies, which choose to hold their annual meeting in Atlantic City because they are on the East Coast. “Atlantic City has gone through the lowest of the lows and the highest of the highs,” Steinmetz says. “I think the amount of space in both meeting and convention space, as well as the number of rooms and the quality of those rooms has made it a popular place again.”

You can’t talk Atlantic City without mentioning gaming, and plenty of meeting guests are still attracted to the area because they like to play a slot machine or sit down for a poker game, or now

legally bet some football or place a wager on the ponies. “With sports gambling now legal in New Jersey, there are new sports books in Atlantic City and there’s certainly some growth there,” Steinmetz says. “These are new gambling options and they are definitely catching the eye of some people when they start talking about where to host a meeting.”

A STRONG MEETING SEGMENT

Looking back at last year, Meet AC had another record-breaking year. “We booked 394,029 hotel room nights last year, which will bring over \$400 million back into our local economy,” Harvey says. “This is the fifth year in a row that Meet AC has exceeded its booking room night goals for the year. 2020 will be no exception as we are well positioned to have

another stellar year of definite bookings. We expect to book more than 375,000 room nights in 2020 with a continued stretch goal of 400,000 room nights.”

Meet AC uses an industry tool called the Trends, Analysis & Projection (TAP) Report which provides a yield management forecast for the meeting and convention market in Atlantic City. “Last year, Meet AC exceeded the tentative room nights by over 1 million,” Harvey says. “This report also reveals that Meet AC is currently outpacing its competition with a 38% conversion from tentative to definite for meeting and convention business. Based upon the monthly results of the TAP Report, it shows that Meet AC continues to book meetings and conventions up to eight years into the future.”

The organization’s focus this year will be top-producing vertical markets such as trade shows, education, automotive and social affairs. Meet AC will also strategically go after industry-related events such as American Express INTER[action], PCMA and others for future years.

RUNNING AN EVENT

Joan Wright, president of the Middlesex County Education Association & the New Jersey Retirees’ Education Association (NJREA), has arranged NJREA’s annual convention at Resorts Casino Hotel since 2014, and they are

already booked to return this year. “We keep going back to Resorts because they have been most amiable to our every wish,” she says. “The whole staff is very welcoming and they are spot on. They anticipate any problems that we may have come across. They are only a phone call or text away from answering a question and helping to solve what might have been a problem.”

“Now that there’s enough quality room nights to support that, you can see the trend of Atlantic City’s rebirth.”

Paul Steinmetz
Director
The American Meetings Network



And the staff is quite nimble in an emergency. “Last year, we had a last-minute workshop about health benefits and we didn’t anticipate how many people would show up, but the staff was right there to help and lend a hand with the overflow.” Wright explains that they didn’t even need to wait for more chairs because the Resorts staff anticipated their needs as people were coming in, and no one felt as if they were not welcomed.

Another time, there were more guests at the cocktail party than anticipated, and the food was gone in no-time; but, again, the director had an entire pasta station set up and no one had any

knowledge that there was any problem with having too little food. “In five years there, we have encountered no problems at all with them,” Wright says. “The members never see any problems. When something comes up, they take care of it quickly and quietly,” she says.

With a lot of its members in New Jersey or remaining on the East Coast, it makes sense to hold the annual convention in Atlantic City, but other members come from as far away as California to attend. With 30,000 members in all, the NJREA is an important group.

“We have members all over the United States, and even some foreign countries, and we get attendees coming each year from multiple states, and they all enjoy everything Atlantic City has to offer,” Wright says. “We are an inclusive association. Some people think we’re a teacher’s association, but it’s really everyone who works for the Board of Education — the secretaries, bus drivers and other professionals.”

Susan McGonigle, a 40-year independent planner who handles the annual meeting for Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA), returned to Resorts Casino Hotel this year and notes it was the largest meeting FCA held in the past 15 years. “The staff bent over backward to give us even more than promised, and that’s something that you appreciate being in this business,” McGonigle says. “When you need something done and you don’t have to wait for it, that’s what we look for. It’s a trust factor that makes events run smoother.”

What McGonigle looks for when deciding on where to host a meeting is a venue that’s ready when they’re supposed to be, that someone is there coordinating and the quality of the food is tops. These are all things that she finds in spades at Resorts Casino Hotel.

ATTRACTING GROUPS TO THE AREA

The Atlantic City Sports Commission, which is the liaison between Meet AC and the city’s sports facilities, continues to flourish, and most anticipate exponential growth in the years ahead.

“Currently, we are pacing to hit

over 100,000 room nights with sports groups,” Harvey says. “The Rock ‘n’ Roll Marathon Series and Pickle Ball are just a few of the new groups that will take place this year. The sport courts continue to be a game changer for these types of events and have certainly shown a return on investment.”

Due to the governor’s expansion of the film tax credit program, The Atlantic City Film Commission has received several major production inquiries. Meet AC anticipates that these opportunities will result in additional room nights and economic impact for Atlantic City, and provide incremental exposure to the destination in the coming year.

Plus, there are endless activities and experiences for attendees once the meetings end. Being on the Boardwalk is popular with meeting guests, Steinmetz says, because it has access to the beach, offers dining and retail opportunities, an aquarium and the Steel Pier amusement area.

“They can visit the Orange Loop; take in a show at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City; ride The Wheel at Steel Pier, the third-tallest wheel in the U.S; climb the 228 steps at the Absecon Lighthouse; or watch with the locals at famous eateries with unique dining experiences,” he says.

Wright says people enjoy getting away, and the ambiance by the water makes Atlantic City such a great destination.

“It always evokes memories from when many of us were growing up, and it’s like going back home,” she says. “There are a lot of great shows, plenty of nice shops, and the casinos are actually a low priority for many of us. People like to go to unwind in a pleasant atmosphere.”

Steinmetz sees the opportunity for other businesses to come to the area and expects high-end dining and entertainment options to be a part of the Atlantic City landscape in the years to come. The latter is already starting to come through as the city is becoming more of an East Coast Las Vegas. “If you’re a gambler and want to play poker, where 10 years ago you had to go to Atlantic City, now you probably have something local or at least close to you, so they needed to bring in more things to attract people.” Steinmetz says. “From an entertainment and dining standpoint, it’s upped its game.”



That, he says, is among the reasons why people want to go there now.

The one negative he hears about Atlantic City concerns getting there, because, although Atlantic City International Airport is about 9 miles from downtown, it’s an hour’s drive if someone is flying into Philadelphia and a couple of hours to drive from New York City. But, while airlift can be a challenge, Steinmetz thinks that the reality of going almost anywhere else will still have similar time problems, and it’s worth the ride to experience so much.

VENUES APLENTY

Located within a few hours’ drive of nearly 33% of the nation’s population and 20% of the country’s business addresses, the Atlantic City Convention Center (ACCC) is easily accessible for conventions, trade shows and meeting attendees. The ACCC boasts 486,600 sf of meeting space, five spacious exhibit halls, 45 meeting rooms, 29 covered loading docks and plenty of CVB support. Over the last year, TD Bank held its annual Merchant Service Sales Conference there and numerous association meetings are scheduled in the ACCC this year.

Steinmetz notes that the opening of the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City, the Ocean Casino Resort and the renovation of Harrah’s Resort Atlantic City has brought all three resorts to the top of the desired list among associations and companies holding meetings in the area, as everyone likes to go to the new and shiny hot spots.

“They all have some fabulous meeting spaces and we’ve been able to put some meetings at each in the past year,” he says. “It’s not just about the gam-

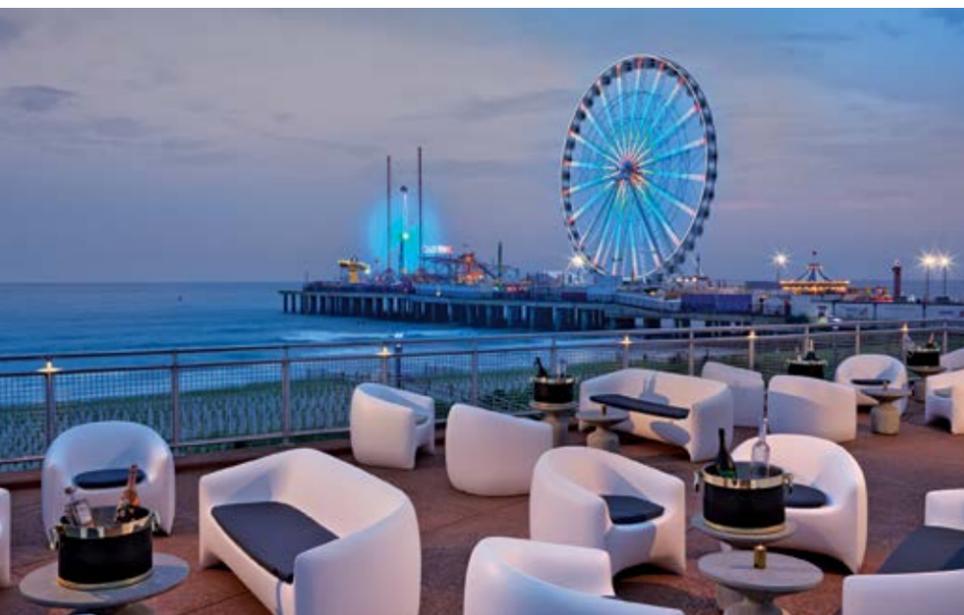
Members of the New Jersey Retirees’ Education Association say they have chosen Resorts Casino Hotel since 2014 because the professional staff can handle any issue.

bling anymore. While table games and slot machines are certainly a part of the attraction, the other offerings that these resorts offer — the shows, restaurants and spas — are really what make people want to come in to these great places.”

The Mid-Atlantic Society of Association Executives’ annual meeting was held recently at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City, with a theme of “Reaching the Peak of Association Leadership.” Others with meetings this year at the resort, taking advantage of its 2,000 rooms and more than 150,000 sf of meeting and event space, include the New Jersey Association for Floodplain Management and the Delaware Valley and New Jersey Chapters of HIMSS.

This past year, Ocean Casino Resort welcomed the New Jersey Education Association convention, the largest annual gathering of educators around the world. Ocean Casino Resort offers 160,000 sf of private, flexible meeting space complete with a fully equipped business center and an onsite technical support team. There is an Event Center that encompasses 70,000 sf and, if you’re looking for expansive views of the Atlantic Ocean, the resort also offers 90,000 sf of outdoor spaces. Activities include the largest Topgolf Swing Suite in the country, concerts or comedy shows at Ovation Hall, HQ2 beach club and nightclub, and slots, blackjack and other gaming at the casino.

Sargent says each venue has its own theology, and her clients can pick a place that fits their needs and demo-



Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City offers a view of The Wheel at Steel Pier.



Harrah's Resort Atlantic City features a concert venue, top, and has recently upgraded its rooms and its Waterfront Conference Center, middle. Bottom, Tropicana Atlantic City features more than 122,000 sf of meeting space.

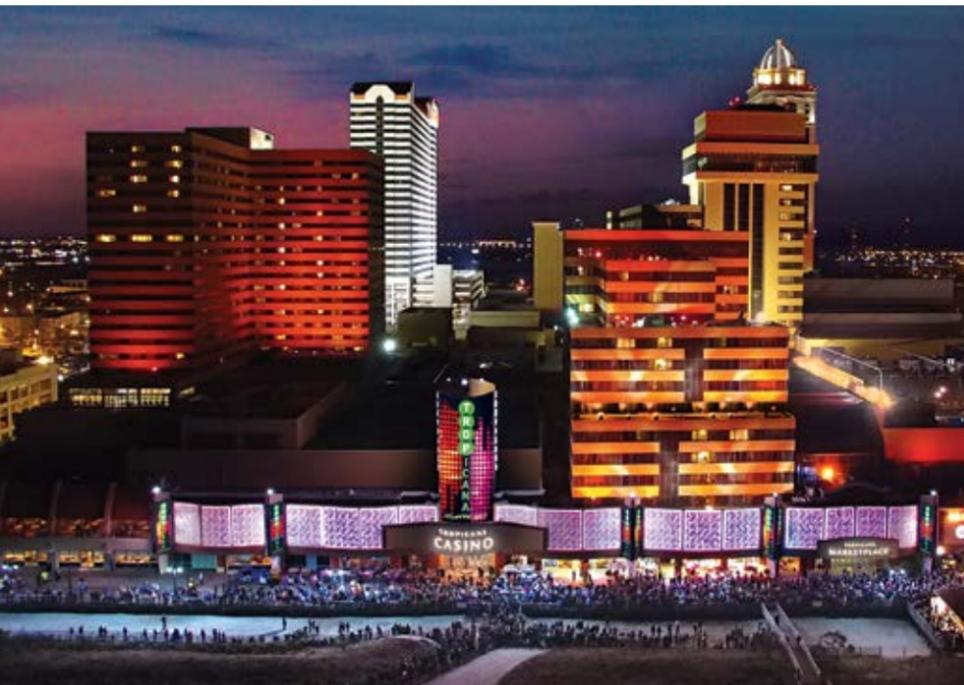
graphics best, citing the vista of the beachfront at the property or the cachet of the boats on the water at the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa.

Tropicana Atlantic City features more than 122,000 sf of meeting space and 2,400 rooms, making it one of New Jersey's largest hotels. Its meeting and event space includes 5,600 sf of total meeting space at the Chelsea Tower; the Tropicana Showroom, a Broadway-style theater that seats 2,000; the Havana Tower, with more than 37,000 sf of meeting space; the nearly 20,000-sf Grand Exhibition Center multipurpose room; and The Ballroom, which offers 18,000 sf that can be divided into four individual meeting rooms.

The Quarter at Tropicana, which features an Old Havana theme, features 200,000 sf of retail, dining, entertainment and spa experiences, including an IMAX Theatre. This past year, PriorityOne Group sponsored the New Jersey Medical Group Management Association's Practice Management Conference at the Tropicana. The New Jersey Society of Health-System Pharmacists also held their annual association meeting at the resort last year.

Steinmetz recently planned a meeting at Harrah's, which debuted a more than \$80 million renovation to upgrade to its rooms and suites. It's part of a \$300 million investment Caesars Entertainment has made into its three Atlantic City properties over the last four years, which includes the Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center (WCC).

The WCC, the largest hotel conference center from Baltimore to Boston, offers unbeatable ocean views. The 100,000-sf center has two 50,000-sf ballrooms and allows events to take place in one location. "New Jersey has some very bold, ambitious goals for the number of visitors they want to come in, and I think they are making moves to achieve those goals, bringing in a lot of meeting planners and making a strong push from a marketing and advertising standpoint," Steinmetz says. "Now that there's enough quality room nights to support that, you can see the trend of Atlantic City's rebirth." | AC&F |



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LAS VEGAS



Nevada Hot Spots Continue to Entice Planners and Attendees

By Christine Loomis

Two things come up consistently when planners discuss Las Vegas as a meeting destination. First, the city has such extensive airlift it's a great place to meet regardless of where in the country or the world attendees are located. Second, the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCVA) is one of the top CVBs in the business.

But Las Vegas isn't Nevada's only excellent meeting destination. The Reno-Tahoe area offers an entirely different vibe that meets the needs of many groups.

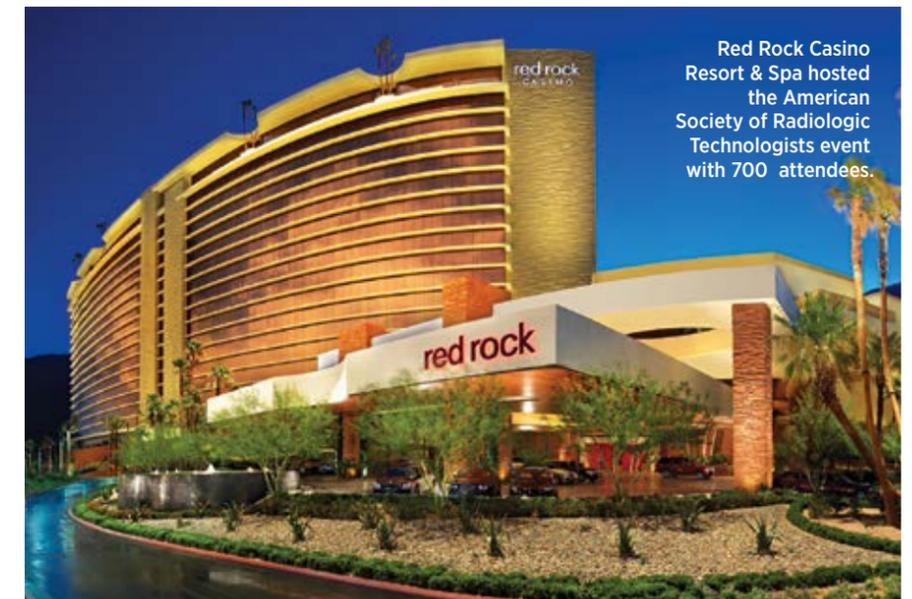
ASSETS APLENTY

Christine Pauley, CAE, CMP, CEM, director of Meetings & Conferences at the American Society of Radiologic Technologists (ASRT), is clear on the assets of Las Vegas. Her organization's

Educational Symposium & Annual Governance & House of Delegates Meeting, with 700 in attendance, met at Red Rock Casino Resort & Spa for many reasons. "Obviously, Las Vegas has one of the best lifts in the country. It's easy-in, easy-out from almost anywhere. And, of course, it has that special cachet; it immediately evokes thoughts of fun, entertainment, fine dining and just general excitement. Las Vegas gives the feel of vacation along with business — it's one of those destinations that a person wants to go to, even though it's for work," she says.

Pauley also points to the LVCVA, saying, "In my opinion, Las Vegas has one of the best CVBs in the country. They're always available and willing to help, no matter the size of the program."

Naturally, not every group chooses to be on The Strip. Fortunately, Las Vegas provides excellent options for those who want access to The Strip,



Red Rock Casino Resort & Spa hosted the American Society of Radiologic Technologists event with 700 attendees.

as well as a little distance from it. Red Rock is one of those options.

“The main reason we chose the Red Rock Resort was because of its quality,” Pauley says. “Sleeping rooms are spacious and beautiful, and the meeting space is up-to-date, flexible and lovely. We were able to house all of our attendees at the resort, which is important to us. We liked the fact that the resort itself is off The Strip, but that The Strip is easily accessible for those who wish to go. We felt that Red Rock Resort gave our attendees an upscale experience that they truly enjoyed.”

From staff to F&B, Pauley says the resort delivers. “The staff is amazing. They’re completely customer-service focused. And the food is outstanding; many of our attendees commented on it.”

In terms of advice to those considering Las Vegas, Pauley says it’s all about communication. “Talk to the CVB. The staff is helpful, available and can provide a lot of resources and ideas. And if you’re going to plan a meeting at a venue off the Strip, such as Red Rock, be sure to be open and communicative with your attendees. We emphasized that it was the best of both worlds — a beautiful resort with hiking trails, jeep tours, horseback riding and beautiful scenery, not to mention great shopping and dining in downtown Summerlin, but also with easy access to The Strip when they wanted that experience.”

REPEAT CUSTOMERS

Ken Shilson, president and founder of the National Association of Buy Here Pay Here Dealers (NABD), says his alliance has met in Las Vegas for more than 20 consecutive years. Now that NABD has merged with the National Independent Auto Dealers Association, that combined group is still meeting in Las Vegas. One reason it works so well for them, Shilson says, is also the airlift.

“No one knows more about events in Las Vegas than people living there, and that makes the LVCVA the experts in the area.”

Ken Shilson
President and Founder
NABD



“It’s a destination with so many direct flight connections. We have members all over the United States and some international locations, and virtually all those destinations offer direct flights to and from Las Vegas,” he says.

He also agrees that the LVCVA is a critical partner. “We utilize their staff and ask them for printing materials. They help us send out RFPs, they connect us to the right people at the hotels and they help us find the right space.”

Because the group is mandated to move hotels every four years, they’ve been based in many Las Vegas properties, including Wynn Las Vegas, Caesars Palace and, later this year, MGM Grand

Hotel & Casino. Shilson has the highest praise for Wynn, where the group has stayed multiple times and, in fact, is currently negotiating to stay there multiple years in the future.

“Wynn is a tremendous facility,” he says. “The people in sales and the convention support services are absolutely outstanding. I think they’re the best in Las Vegas. In particular, we truly value the national sales manager at LVCVA, who has coordinated the relationship between NABD and LVCVA for 10 years or more. He gets us in touch with whomever and whatever we need at LVCVA.”

Wynn’s convention space is another plus for Shilson, who says, “The space is ideal for us because our exhibit hall and education sessions can be right next to each other. We’ve found that when the two are separated, attendees can get lost or distracted.”

With a group of approximately 2,500 attendees, Shilson says the Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC), while excellent, is just too big for them. That’s why they like convention space at the hotels. Shilson encourages anyone planning a meeting in Las Vegas to contact the LVCVA. “For one thing, the LVCVA works with some of the best meeting planners in the world, bringing them out there to get to know the city and network with other planners, so top planners know Las Vegas.”

Moreover, he says, “No one knows more about events in Las Vegas than people living there, and that makes the LVCVA the experts in the area. We absolutely would not have been as successful without their assistance.”

One challenge for groups less familiar with the city is that there are so many options in terms of hotels and other venues. “Reach out to the LVCVA first and they’ll help you get to the right place and meet the right people for your group,” Shilson advises. “For us, for example, there are only four or so properties that are really right. The LVCVA, along with GES, our exhibit

Ken Shilson, president and founder of the NABD, says Wynn Las Vegas is a “tremendous facility.”

The Anti-Defamation League held its annual Imagine a World Without Hate Gala for more than 500 at Paris Las Vegas Hotel & Casino. They chose Paris because Caesars Entertainment is a “dedicated partner.”

services company, really helped us identify them by doing a comprehensive assessment first.”

Wynn, which already impresses, will do so even more with its two-level expansion of its meeting and convention space. It recently added 300,000 sf, bringing its total to 560,000 sf, including 57 flexible meeting rooms, an outdoor pavilion with adjacent lawn and four pillar-less ballrooms. Just like the existing space, the new space is powered by 100% renewable energy. Wynn also introduced a new Zero Carbon, Zero Waste event service, a newly conceived spa, and the resort’s Tom Fazio golf course reopened last fall after an extensive redesign.

IDEAL VENUES

Courtney Kravitz, associate director of development with the Anti-Defamation League, held its annual Imagine a World Without Hate Gala for more than 500 at Paris Las Vegas Hotel & Casino last November. This event is always held in Las Vegas, where the organization’s office is based. However, being local doesn’t necessarily guarantee finding exactly the right fit for an event. In this case, it’s no problem.

Paris Las Vegas is part of the Caesars Entertainment portfolio, and Kravitz calls Caesars a “dedicated partner” with which to work. “The Anti-Defamation League is very honored to have developed a relationship with Caesars Entertainment. Caesars’ commitment to diversity and inclusion match ADL’s values and strengthen the partnership. ADL is appreciative of the supportive role they play for nonprofits throughout the state of Nevada,” says Kravitz. “From an event planning perspective, I’ve found them to be extremely responsive, accommodating to our needs and truly go above and beyond what is asked. Their entire staff take ownership and pride in the events they host and it shows.”

Another nice thing about working with Caesars, she says, is “the connections they have with outside vendors from décor to A/V make it easier to coordinate and make the ‘day of’ go smoothly.”



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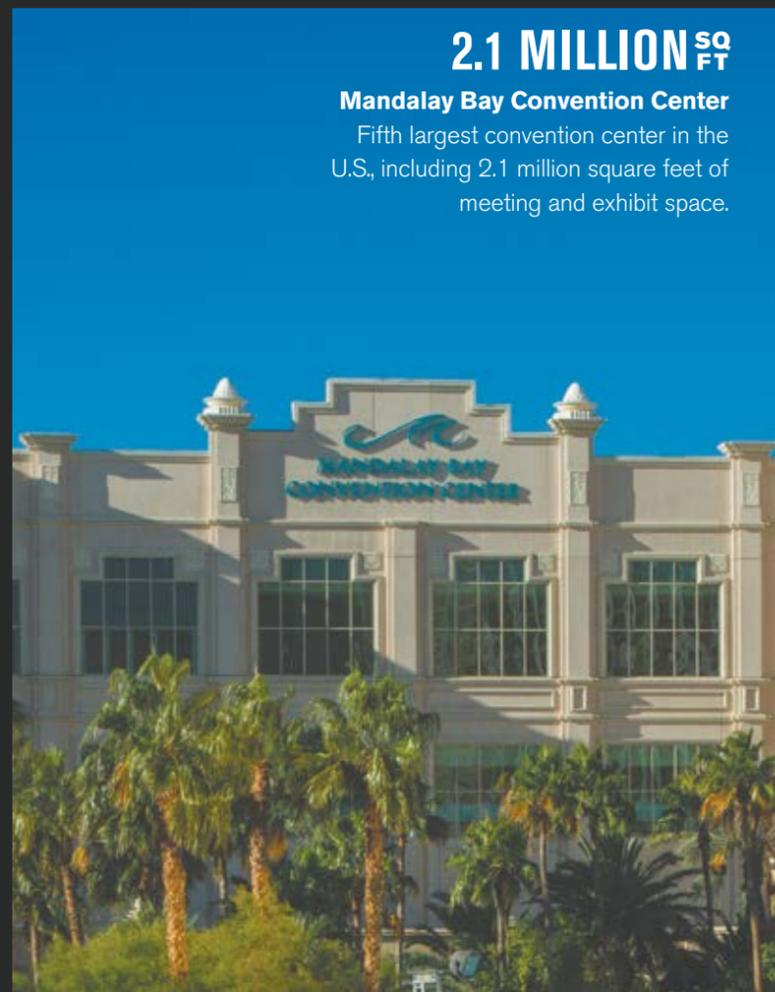
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Las Vegas

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Kravitz says the layout of Paris Las Vegas is ideal for the group's event. "We specifically like the Paris Hotel for our gala due to its location once you get into the hotel. The accessibility for our guests truly makes all the difference. All they need to do is come down the escalators, make a left and the room is right there. That's just not the case with most hotels."

Association management companies may have multiple clients for which a city might work as a convention destination, and that's the case with Kellen, which has brought multiple associations to Las Vegas. Phelps Hope, CMP, senior vice president, Meetings & Expositions with Kellen, calls Las Vegas, "as unique a destination as can be found in the USA." Yet, it's not for everyone.

"We find that either groups are open to meeting there, very keen to meet there or absolutely will not consider Las Vegas for their conference," Hope says. "For those groups that will consider Las Vegas, it is a fabulous destination because of the variety of entertainment, restaurants and attractions, people-watching and because of its uniqueness. The city also offers a wide range of group housing, from very affordable to extreme luxury. If the group is somewhat flexible with their desired conference dates, we typically can find a property that fits their budget."

In addition to utilizing what the hotels and resorts offer, Kellen groups have also held offsite events at Las Vegas restaurants. "We recently held a small group function at Hell's Kitchen, the restaurant by Gordon Ramsay," Hope says. "We chose this restaurant not just on the reputation of the food and service, which is exceptional, but because of the added entertainment value the restaurant provides due to the competitive theme of the red team versus blue team with the kitchen staff and service personnel, which provided another benefit of entertainment for our group."

Like others who meet in Las Vegas, Hope says Kellen meeting organizers always start the meeting process with the LVCVA. "They are the ones that help guide us to the new venues and

attractions and help us avoid bookings that perhaps are not actually suitable for our specific group. They're also very helpful in promoting our meeting if we need additional support, and the LVCVA helps to lend a voice to our overall booking potential, which helps us with negotiations."

He says groups that met in Las Vegas ranged in size from 150 to 1,200 attendees, and the hotels Kellen-managed associations have used include Bally's Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, Paris Las Vegas, Caesars Palace, The Mirage Hotel & Casino, The Venetian Las Vegas, Bellagio Resort & Casino, Wynn/Encore Las Vegas and MGM Grand. "We have a checklist we build for each specific group with their priorities listed in order so we can best select the hotel or venue that suits their specific needs. Priorities might include proximity to The Strip or definitely away from The Strip," Hope says. "Perhaps the variety of restaurants within the hotel or venue is a priority for a group, or the entertainment available in-house matters. Whatever it may be, once we're clear on that specific group's priorities, we can then enlist the LVCVA to help guide us to the best-suited properties."

While it's true that some organizations consider the distractions of Las Vegas a non-issue, others need to work around them. "The greatest challenge Las Vegas holds for any of our groups is the massive amount of distractions," Hope notes, "such as late-night entertainment, nightclubs, attractions and so on. This puts more pressure on us as the organizers to clearly highlight the value proposition and messaging of the meeting content, the benefits of attending all the sessions and events of the conference, and guiding the attendees rather than having them venture out on their own during the hours of the conference."

That leads Hope to his best advice for meeting planners and groups working on a conference in Las Vegas. "Be aware that your overall attendance numbers, registration and room block will be higher than in most other destinations; however, you will likely see a drop off in the sessions due to the variety of competing distractions offered in the city. This simply means you have to work harder in your conference design



Gary Shapiro, president and CEO of the Consumer Technology Association, and Ivanka Trump in The Venetian Las Vegas' Venetian Ballroom at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) 2020. CES is an annual trade show organized by the Consumer Technology Association.

and messaging to make your conference more important than those distractions."

Over at Tropicana Las Vegas — a DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel, a new upscale lounge will be of interest to some groups. The Trago Lounge opened last year with a contemporary, elegant vibe. It offers an extensive selection of fine spirits, as well as talented mixologists who can create inventive cocktails for any palate, pre-dinner or after all the conference events wrap up, and it's available for buyouts.

ARIA Resort & Casino offers a variety of deluxe guest rooms and

RENO-TAHOE

Reno is aptly nicknamed The Biggest Little City in the World. It offers the ease, convenience and friendliness of a small city but many of the amenities of a much larger urban area. In fact, it offers easy access to one of the country's most spectacular lakes and mountains to play on, a choice of ski areas and gaming.

There are more than 16,000 hotel rooms, and it goes without saying that the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority is an excellent resource for planners. In fact, the Authority owns four of the area's top meeting venues — the Reno-Sparks Convention Center, the Reno Events Center, the National Bowling Stadium and the Reno-Sparks Live-stock Events Center.

Reno has two projects on tap that will likely be of interest to groups. One is the revitalization of the old CitiCenter station and surrounding area, including upgrading the Reno Event Center and National Bowling Stadium, and adding a non-gaming hotel and multiuse spaces. City approval is pending. The other project is the revitalization of Reno's Industrial Center.

Whether your association is looking for a Las Vegas experience or a meeting in Reno close to the natural attractions of Lake Tahoe and the Sierra Nevada, the state of Nevada has you covered.

"For those groups that will consider Las Vegas, it is a fabulous destination."

Phelps Hope, CMP
Senior Vice President
Meetings & Expositions, Kellen



suites that provide a choice of mountain views or views of The Strip. For meetings and conventions, there are more than 500,000 sf of versatile event spaces, which includes seven ballrooms ranging from 17,500 to 51,000 sf. Five of the ballrooms have fully functioning theatrical stages. For foodies, ARIA's culinary offerings include award-winning restaurants CATCH, Carbone, Jean Georges Steakhouse, Bardot Brasserie and Sage.

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MOREHEAD

Kari Morehead has been named special events & partnerships coordinator for the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. Morehead brings more than 15 years of experience in event planning and coordination to her new role.

Visit Anaheim announces the promotions of three senior executives. **Charles Harris** was promoted to chief marketing officer & executive vice president of public affairs. He also serves as Visit California's vice chair for the Brand & Content Committee, is an Anaheim Transportation Network board member and is Orange County Visitors Association's co-chair for the Marketing Committee. **Junior Tauvaa** has been promoted to chief sales officer. He recently spearheaded the recent launch of the Orange County Sports Commission. **Mariles Krok** has been promoted to vice president of meeting & partnership sales. Krok is now responsible for management of the Partnership Sales Team, who will connect partners with Visit Anaheim initiatives, activities and events.



TAUVAA

The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau (GMCVB) recently named **Sonia Fong** as vice president of convention sales. She has secured many high-profile clients in her 20 years with the organization. Currently overseeing the GMCVB's Washington, D.C. Regional Office, Fong is also chair of the Miami Beach Hotels Task Force and is the GMCVB Medical Tourism liaison. Her main focus will continue to be selling the Miami Beach Convention Center (MBCC) for citywide bookings.



FONG

Team San Jose recently welcomed **Charles Baran** as director of event operations. Baran joins the organization with 15 years of hospitality and marketing experience. He was most recently the director of sales & marketing for Hotel Sorrento in Seattle, but he has worked with other brands as well.



CURTIS

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort recently announced **Jim Curtis** as director of sales & marketing for the entire complex. Curtis has more than 30 years of sales experience in the hospitality industry. Most recently, he was area director of sales for Omni Hotels & Resorts.



ANNICCHIARICO

CSI DMC recently promoted **AJ Bownas** of Arlington, Virginia to vice president of event management. He has worked with the company as a senior event manager and general manager before moving up to his newest role.

BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, has appointed **John Annicchiarico** as vice president of sales operations. Although he most recently was vice president of sales for Salamander Hotels & Resorts, immediately prior, he served as Benchmark's director of sales & marketing at Villas of Grand Cypress. He also served as director of marketing for Loews Coronado Bay Resort in San Diego, California, among other positions.

Maple Ridge Events announced **Tom Tillman** as its new director of sales. Over the past three decades, Tillman was the associate director of sales at the Hilton Nashville Downtown, senior sales manager at the Sheraton Music City Hotel, and has held multiple director of sales and marketing positions. For the past two years, he was the director of national accounts at the Nashville Convention and Visitors Corporation.

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