How Successful Planners Focus on Inclusion, Accessibility and Awareness

THE POWER OF DIVERSITY

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Understanding Diversity and Inclusion

Our cover story this month covers a topic that should be high on the minds of meeting and incentive travel professionals and their employers everywhere. ‘Diversity and inclusion’ is a phrase used loosely today, but to those employees who bring value and new perspectives to their employers, its importance cannot be overstated. Today, diversity and inclusion are considered critical elements for recruitment in the workplace and in retention strategy.

Federal law does not allow discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, political affiliation, sexual orientation, disability, etc. There are more visible and invisible elements that make employees and potential employees diverse from each other than those defined and referred to here. Although often used in tandem with diversity, inclusion is a separate issue.

Inclusion should reflect a business environment in which all employees are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the success of their employer. Inclusion is important for the diversity efforts of employers to succeed. It has been proven that creating a diverse and inclusive culture will generate better employee engagement and productivity.

Aside from being a social, political, ethical and moral responsibility, there are important and meaningful benefits associated with diversity. A study published by the American Sociological Review found that businesses with the highest percentage of racial or gender diversity have higher sales revenue, more customers, and higher-than-average market share and profitability.

These facts alone should be enough to convince any business that fostering a diverse workplace is a top priority. But, when we break down the latest available statistics, it’s clearly evident that we still have a long way to go to achieve the goals of diversity and inclusion.
ATLANTA AIRPORT GOES SMOKE-FREE

ATLANTA, GA — The world’s busiest airport is making a dramatic change sure to affect thousands of customers. Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, which has been the world’s most-trafficked airport in terms of passengers since 2000, went smoke-free in January. The airport said in a statement it will launch a 30-day accommodation package and give out complimentary lozenges to passengers with limited access to the exterior smoking areas. To receive the lozenges, visit concessions locations in Terminals A, B, C, D, E and F. The airport has designated smoking areas outside of the domestic and international terminals, which are located at least 25 feet from the Terminal entrance. Persons under the age of 18 are prohibited from smoking in these designated zones, however. People who violate the ordinance are subject to a civil penalty up to $200 fine.

FOUR CARNIVAL CORPORATION BRANDS WILL LAUNCH NEW CRUISE SHIPS IN 2020

MIAMI, FL — Carnival Corporation recently announced it will launch four new cruise ships in 2020 across four of its global cruise line brands — Iona for P&O Cruises UK; Enchanted Princess for Princess Cruises; Mardi Gras for Carnival Cruise Line and Costa Firenze for Italian brand Costa Cruises. These new ships build on the momentum of Carnival Corporation’s four new vessels launched with rave reviews in 2019 — Carnival Cruise Line’s Carnival Panorama, Costa Cruises’ Costa Smeralda and Costa Venezia, and Sky Princess from Princess Cruises.

NEW AAA DIAMOND PROGRAM REVEALED

ORLANDO, FL — AAA is unveiling a contemporized version of its highly acclaimed AAA Diamond Program. The program will remain backed by professionally trained inspectors using member-driven criteria to recommend only clean, comfortable, hospitable hotels and restaurants. But it is replacing ratings with designations.

LA ST VEGAS HAS RECORD ATTENDANCE IN 2019

LAS VEGAS, NV — Las Vegas continues to prove itself a leading destination for both business and leisure tourism, welcoming a record 42.1 million visitors last year, up from the previous year’s 42.1 million visitors, as the city continues to draw travelers seeking world-class dining, sports and entertainment experiences that can only be found in Las Vegas. With several new venues, attractions and events planned this year, it’s anticipated that Las Vegas will continue to attract strong visitation numbers.

SITE CRYSTAL AWARDS SHOWCASE EXCELLENCE IN INCENTIVE TRAVEL

CHICAGO, IL — The 2019 Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Crystal Awards showcased excellence in incentive travel. The winners are world-class organizations that excel in the design of unique, memorable experiences that deliver measurable results for their clients. Eight companies from all over the world were honored for creativity in program design, marketing, corporate social responsibility and business results, as follows:

• Excellence in Incentive Travel: North America: MFactor Meetings — Rewarding partners with a Crystal Ravel Ship to Vienna and Budapest.  
• Most Impactful Effort Toward Corporate Social Responsibility as Part of an Incentive Program: Streamlinevents, Inc. — Providing more than a million meals through an additional space for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Hawaii.  
• Best Destination-Based Experiential Incentive Travel Program: Spectra in Scotland — A 10-day, VIP, private trip to Scotland including a trip to Edinburgh and a harbor cruise on the Royal Yacht Britannia.  
• Excellence in Incentive Travel: Latin America & Caribbean: TravelerX — Immersive Life trip to Bogota for USD 100 winners.

REGENT SEVEN SEAS CRUISES WELCOMES SEVEN SEAS SPLENDOR

ANCONA, ITALY — Regent Seven Seas Cruises, the world’s leading luxury ocean cruise line, has welcomed to its fleet its newest ship — Seven Seas Splendor. Delivered at Fincantieri’s shipyard in Ancona, Italy, Regent’s fifth ship builds on the cruise line’s rich 28-year heritage offering an Unrivaled Experi- ence with every luxury included. The ship offers 275 beautifully appointed suites, ranging from 307 to 4,440 sq. ft. It also includes four restaurants, three elegant bars and lounges, as well as a $5 million curated art collection, more than 500 crystal chandeliers and more than 1 acre of Italian marble.

HARD ROCK INTERNATIONAL PREMIERS NEW BRAND PROGRAMS

HOLLYWOOD, FL — Hard Rock International has expanded some of its amenities. Meeting planners can choose from special event programs curated by Hard Rock International’s preferred partners. With the help of School of Rock, Jeff Nolan, SongDivision, Scratch DJ Academy, Tangible Formats, Drum Cafe, DJ Drez & Marti and Clean the World, Hard Rock welcomes the opportunity to bring guests meetings experiences that rock. The partners revamped the popular pre-existing brand program, Sound of Your Stay, now includes a new activity-specific spin, especially the Picks, Tracks and Wax and Time of the Essence programs. Attendees cannot only listen to music, but can learn to play instruments and join with others to create a Battle of the Bands or join a drum circle. They can write and create their own songs or learn to be a DJ. The more artistic among them can learn how to make company-branded or inspired vinyl artwork. They can relax inspired vinyl artwork. They can relax participating in a music-infused group yoga experience. Attendees can also tour through the property’s memorabilia, or spend time together helping to give back through creating hygiene kits to be donated to those in need.

SUSSEX, UNITED KINGDOM — The 2020 inspection cycle will be the approved designation while Three-, Two-, and One-Diamond hotels and restaurants will transition to Tem, previously One- and Two-Diamond ratings with designations. Under the new system, previously One- and Two-Diamond hotels and restaurants will transition to Tem, previously One- and Two-Diamond ratings with designations.

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OMNI ORLANDO RESORT AT CHAMPIONSgate ANNOUNCES PROPERTY RENOVATION

ORLANDO, FL — Slated to begin in June and completion in early fall 2020, all guest rooms, suites and villas at Omni Orlando Resort at Championsgate will be updated. Past guests will not even recognize the space as they walk down the brightly lit, beautiful plush carpeted corridors. David’s Club, one of the property’s nine unique on-site restaurants, known for their bourbons, crafts and cuts, was also reimagined in December. The restaurant’s refresh includes new wall coverings, carpet, classic leather seating, gorgeous wood tables, additional flat-screen TVs and refinished wood flooring. For more information, visit www.omnihotels.com/hotels.

CELEBRITY CRUISES READY TO CHRISTEN ONE SHIP WHILE BUILDING ANOTHER

MIAMI, FL — Celebrity Cruises’ much-anticipated Celebrity Apex is set to soon be christened. This is the second ship to be added to the lineage, which began with the 2018 launch of Celebrity Edge. Celebrity Apex employs the very latest in design, spa and wellness trends and progressive entertainment offerings, and will sail the Mediterranean from April to October 2020, and the Caribbean from November 2020 to April 2021. In addition, the company has begun construction on Celebrity Edge in France on its third ship, Celebrity Beyond, which is expected to be completed and delivered by the fall of 2021. For more details, visit www.celebritycruises.com.

NEW RIVER WALK HOTEL UNDER DEVELOPMENT IN SAN ANTONIO

SAN ANTONIO, TX — Dream Hotels has announced the 2023 opening of Dream San Antonio on the city’s River Walk. The property will have 217 guest rooms and suites; a rooftop pool deck, bar, and suites; a rooftop pool deck, bar, and features a two-level expansion that will include a spa and wellness center, and will become the first new build in downtown Las Vegas in 40 years. The ship will have five restaurants and two-level casino. It also will include what the owners claim will be the world’s largest sportsbook in the city, as well as a rooftop pool amphitheater. The Vegas Vickie statue, which was removed in 2017 because of construction after 20 years on Freemont Street, will be a signature feature appearing in the resort’s lobby.

LAVISH DOWNTOWN LONDON HOTEL OPENS INCLUDING 11 MEETING ROOMS AND A 10,000 SF BALLROOM

CIRCA RESORT & CASINO WILL OPEN IN LAS VEGAS AT THE END OF THE YEAR

LAS VEGAS, NV — Circa Resort & Casino will tower over the Fremont Street Experience in Las Vegas when the 44-story hotel opens at the end of the year. At 125 million sf and 777 rooms, it will stand as the tallest structure north of The Strip and will become the first new build in downtown Las Vegas in 40 years. The Circa will have five restaurants and a two-level casino. It also will include what the owners claim will be the world’s largest sportsbook in the city, as well as a rooftop pool amphitheater. The Vegas Vickie statue, which was removed in 2017 because of construction after 20 years on Freemont Street, will be a signature feature appearing in the resort’s lobby.

WYNN LAS VEGAS UNVEILS NEW MEETING SPACE

LAS VEGAS, NV — The 430,000 sf expansion of Wynn Las Vegas more than doubles the convention and meeting space at the Wynn and Encore on The Strip. The two-level expansion features about 560,000 sf of convention space, including a 20,000 sf outdoor pavilion and four ballrooms. The convention center is powered by their 160-acre solar facility and on-site rooftop solar panels. Attendees at the convention center will also have views of the casino’s iconic 18-hole championship golf course, Wynn Golf Club. Sitting on the site of the former Desert Inn Golf Club, the course hosts several PGA Tour yearly events. The resort already features approximately 192,000 sf of casino space.

MARRIOTT MARQUIS SAN DIEGO MARINA LAUNCHES THEMED OFF-SITE MEETINGS/EVENT PROGRAMMING ABOARD THE ICONIC USS MIDWAY

SAN DIEGO, CA — Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina, the West Coast’s premier meeting destination, announces the release of an exciting new catering initiative for meetings and events. The property invites planners to explore events outside of traditional meeting rooms for unique programming aboard the iconic USS Midway. The property’s themed meeting packages include unique features appearing in the resort’s lobby.

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BCC MEETINGS & EVENTS HAS NAMED BRUCE MORGAN CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

CHICAGO, IL — BCD Meetings & Events (BCD M&E) has named Bruce Morgan Chief Operating Officer as the company continues implement- ing a three-year growth plan. He will have responsibility for managing all leaders from five regions, including APAC, LATAM, NORGAM and the newly-created regions of EMEA and the UK. He brings 25 years of indus- try experience across various functions and global regions and has spent the last 15 years within the com- pany. This latest move is part of the company’s Vision 2021 strategic plan to expand its busi- ness through organic growth and strategic acquisitions in order to diversify its offerings, increase its global scope, and offer new and innovative solutions to its customers with a growing slate of products and services, which are now delivered in more than 50 countries. For more information, visit www.bcdmec.com.

THE RITZ-CARLTON SOUTH BEACH REOPENS AFTER BEING DAMAGED IN HURRICANE IRMA

MIAMI, FL — The renovated South Beach Ritz-Carlton recently reopened after being damaged by Hurricane Irma in 2017. The company invested $30 million to transform the hotel from top to bottom. All 376 guest rooms, ballrooms and meeting spaces, hallways and restaurants have been reimagined. The hotel retains the Art Deco feel while adding new dining options, such as the new Fuego y Mar Latin American restaurant, as well as the Dilido Beach Club and Lapi- dus Bar. The hotel includes 20,000 sf of flexible space, including 11 meeting rooms and a 10,000 sf ballroom. The hotel also now has new window seals and a roof covering.
Creating a Culture of Leadership and Innovation

Want to Be More Successful? Forget Hierarchy and Start Striving to Create Leaders at Every Level

BY SCOTT STEINBERG

L
ike today’s most successful corporate executives are aware, leadership is less about exercising individual talent these days and more about one’s ability to steer a workforce’s collective capabilities and expertise toward achieving a common goal. Noting this, it’s vital to make leadership a concept that scales. But to achieve this objective, you’ve also got to empower colleagues to have the courage to make hard choices and routinely deploy smarter ideas, no matter what challenges they may be facing. Luckily, a few simple strategies can help you get your workforce in the right mindset to take the reins here.

GET IDEAS FLOWING

For starters, you’ve got to put programs and platforms in place that allow great ideas to bubble from the bottom up, not just flow from the top down. As studies repeatedly show, end-users for our services and solutions — everyday customers — are often the most informed parties. These audiences, are often the most informed parties.

GET RAPID FEEDBACK

If it helps to comprehend the value of making this shift in operating strategy, consider the more feedback from any given operating landscape that you can get, and the faster you can get it, the more rapidly you can use this information to improve your business plans and programs. As a result, the better your organization will be. Likewise, it pays to remember that flexibility and agility are, at heart, the very essence of future-proofing. Put simply, the more opportunities you give yourself to pivot, and more sources of insight and resources you can draw upon when deciding which direction to go, the more resilient you’ll become.

But to achieve these goals, it’s just as important to recall that it pays to teach workers that the concept that a new strategy or solution has to be ‘perfect’ before you give it a try is self-defeating. In fact, waiting until a plan is flawless before you roll it out — because it stops us from moving forward — is an inherently flawed approach.

Rather, a better approach to driving positive change and innovation is to embrace the concept of a ‘minimum viable product’ model, and the idea that something just has to be ‘good enough’ before you deploy it. Because getting a solution to ‘good enough’ forces us to hone our time and efforts, and allows us to quickly gain real-world feedback faster than that can help shape ideas for the better. It’s often a springboard to something great.

Meaning that the more you can ingrain these principles across your organization at meetings and special events, and the more that you encourage smart, cost-effective risk taking, the more successful you’ll be. Likewise, the more an experienced team leader that you’re willing to step back and let your people take the lead, the likelier the odds are that you’ll have no trouble adapting to changing times and trends by adapting yourselves in turn.

LET YOUR WORKERS SHINE

In effect, the more readily you, as a leader, work to give your people more chances to surface, share, and develop new strategies and solutions based on the insights these audiences are sending the more readily you’ll put yourself in a position to succeed going forward. Keeping this in mind, executive leaders in every space would also do well to note that — while things are going well and you can most afford to take chances — now would be the best time to start making a host of smart investments in initiatives that drive constant learning and growth for their organization. And, for that matter, it’s also the best time to encourage colleagues to get behind the idea of making more insight-driven decisions and educating themselves through a running process of trial and error that involves constantly playing around with new strategies and solutions. That’s because, as we were surprised to find while researching recent best-seller “Make Change Work for You,” in uncertain times, the irony is that you’ve got to take more risks, not fewer, if you want to get ahead in any space. However, while “risks is the new safe,” so to speak, these risks have to come in the form of small, smart, cost-effective bets designed as ongoing learning experiments designed to help you quickly gain deeper insights into the shape of changing operating landscapes and make better and more informed choices as you get smarter. In addition, as above, to stay relevant, organizational leaders also need to start being more deliberative about putting systems and programs in place that can help frontline workers assume more of an ownership role in making key decisions.

THINK FAST

Keep in mind that these moves fast in today’s working world. Most organizations can now go from conceptualizing new services, solutions or programs to rolling them out in less than 90 days. Less than 30 days is more common than not. In fact, some institutions for are launching new solutions every 6 weeks all year round, just for the learning experiences that these efforts provide. Likewise, as organizational leaders, we all now live in an always-on, connected age where the various audiences you serve are also giving us feedback and telling us how their needs are changing with every interaction.

The real question you should be asking yourself is if you want your organization to remain competitive — do you have what it takes to compete? It’s, “What role can you play in facilitating change management?”

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5 Ways to Develop a Budget-Friendly Incentive Travel Program

BY SARAH HILL

Incentive travel offers a range of benefits for companies of all sizes, so it’s no surprise that companies worldwide are implementing programs every year.

With the help of incentive programs, companies can encourage healthy competition in the workplace, provide extra motivation for achieving challenging goals and increase dedication and loyalty in the workplace.

But while there’s no doubt that incentive travel programs offer a lot of value to businesses of all sizes, implementing a successful program can sometimes be a challenge, especially without prior experience.

So, we’ll explore some of the most important aspects you should consider when organizing a budget-friendly and immersive experience that your employees won’t forget for a long time.

START PLANNING EARLY
If you want to have any chance of planning a budget-friendly journey for the staff, you need to start preparations as early as possible, since that will allow you to carefully weigh your options and look for the most cost-effective destinations.

Usually, a good rule of thumb is to start planning the journey at least six months in advance, although even a year before the trip isn’t too extreme, as that would allow you to get the most out of your budget.

What’s more, when you set goals well in advance, you are also giving your team time to accomplish them, and can thus set more ambitious goals that would be hard to reach if the deadline were shorter.

Just as the best venue-finding services start looking for the best sites early, so should you identify potential opportunities. Look for special group packages and consider what types of trips could work within your budget while also providing an unforgettable experience for your team.

One thing to consider is the season during which your trip will take place. Sometimes, you may find that going to a particular destination during the off-season might allow you to get much more bang for your buck without hurting the quality of your trip.

GENERATE EXCITEMENT
An incentive travel program won’t be very useful if it doesn’t excite your team, as they won’t be motivated to work any harder if the reward isn’t something they truly want.

So, you should be open to talking with your team members about their preferences and figure out which destinations sound the most appealing, and you could even consult venue-finding services about the options that might work best.

You could organize a company-wide survey, asking your employees what they like and then looking for the most common answers to develop a profile of what the group preferences are before making any decisions.

Whichever type of journey you end up choosing, you should try to plan a memorable trip that everyone will want to talk about well after it is over, as that will not only help boost morale, but will also serve as extra motivation the next time you want to organize a similar incentive journey.

Figure out your budget
As any experienced agency will tell you, incentive travel planning starts with figuring out the budget you can allocate to the trip. The easiest way to do this is by calculating how much ROI the goal you’re trying to achieve will bring, which you can then use as a benchmark when deciding what percentage of that sum you can spend on the journey.

In many cases, incentive trips will have clauses of specific sales numbers or other accomplishments by the staff, so you should figure out how you can measure the progress of those goals and then determine what amount would be adequate to spend on the trip if the goals are met.

This way, you won’t have to look at the cost as an expense, but can instead view it as an investment that will boost employee productivity and help your company achieve numbers that wouldn’t be possible otherwise.

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Even if your incentive journey is just a weekend getaway to another city, that can be a fun experience if you take the time to plan it out.

Some groups of people might get excited about a relaxed trip to a warm beach destination, while others could be much more responsive to an action-packed sightseeing tour of exotic or exciting places. So, you need to evaluate what the group preferences are before making any decisions.

Whichever type of journey you end up choosing, you should try to plan a memorable trip that everyone will want to talk about well after it is over, as that will not only help boost morale, but will also serve as extra motivation the next time you want to organize a similar incentive journey.

Collect feedback after the trip
Finally, if you want to develop an effective and budget-friendly incentive travel program, you need to be able to steadily improve on your planning process and maximize every penny in the budget.

To do that, you need to conduct surveys and talk to your employees, asking them about what they liked and didn’t like about the trip.

Remember, these are individuals with their own interests and preferences, and since the incentive trip is a reward, you should treat it as such and make sure that the majority of people enjoy it.

Over time, you should be able to refine your trips and customize them to make each the best journey possible for everyone involved, which will help you get the most out of the wide range of benefits that incentive travel can offer.

Sarah Hill is a content writer at Seven Events Ltd, a leading event company that specializes in providing event management services, venue finding and conference organizing. She started her career in the events industry nearly a decade ago. As time progressed, she became an avid event blogger, sharing her insight on corporate event planning. Visit sevenevents.co.uk
What does it take to create an exceptional conference or meeting event? One way is by giving attendees golf and spa downtime where they can disconnect from daily workplace demands. Here, the goal is simply to relax, refresh and rejuvenate in a beautiful location, resulting in enhanced performance, productivity, creativity, health and overall morale, both for individuals and teams.

Jack Henry & Associates Inc. is a major player in providing technology and processing capability to banks and other financial institutions. Recently lauded in the Wall Street Journal for earning “the highest return of any stock in the Wilshire 5000 index over the past 30 years,” the company hosts an annual Golden Circle Recognition event for their top-performing sales people who are key contributors to this success. And, when they do, Steve Tomson, vice president of Sales & Marketing, explains: “We want these to be adventures for our top performers and a guest of their choosing. It has to be a 5-star recognition event that we want people to salivate over. This is really driven as a sales recognition event highly designed for relaxation and decompression.”

Aura of Tranquility

Last year, the company selected Ojai Valley Inn to host 325 people for their special event. Not only did the property provide what Tomson and Donna Brinson, meetings coordinator, had envisioned; the property’s golf and spa facilities also added a level of unexpected tranquility. In fact, “I wondered if it was a little too laid back,” Tomson said. “But people said, ‘No, this is what we needed, a level of peacefulness.’ Everybody seemed at peace.”

Ojai Valley Inn is conveniently located between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara. And while traffic from LAX is a fact of life, Ojai more than compensates by allowing guests to take advantage of a broad range of activities onsite and offsite. In the case of Jack Henry &
The Farmhouse at Ojai Valley Inn is a 30,000-sf culinary and event center offering everything from dining halls to classroom space. It hosts cooking classes, wine-tasting events, demonstrations and themed dinners.

Entertainment at Jack Henry & Associates’ event at Ojai Valley Inn included paper-marbling classes, trolley wine tours, jeep rides, a caterman experience and more.

Timeless Elegance

For Jeanné O’Brien, senior vice president of Global Marketing and Communications for Insurance Auto Auctions, Inc. (IAAI), and a key decision-maker in signing off on the company’s annual conference site, Sea Island shines in a class all its own. For an idea of just how much IAAI values its relationship with Sea Island, the company will host its fifth annual senior-level client event for between 180 to 200 people on site early this year.

Recent property enhancements at Sea Island’s golf and spa resort include seven new cottages at The Lodge; the new Mizner Ballroom I and II, precluding a combined room capacity of 500 in 5,073 sf; and a 17,000-sf Golf Performance Center that offers a comprehensive approach to golf from customized instruction with world-class pros, club fittings, golf fitness and View Your Swing Technology. O’Brien also mentions a new pedestrian alley at the Cloister Beach Club, which previously housed a movie theater, as indicative of Sea Island’s thoughtful approach to design. “It’s so well-appointed, it looks like it’s always been there.”

Aside from the site’s stellar location and climate, and a stay at Sea Island “feels like I’m home and very welcomed,” says Val Altovska, IAAI’s director of Corporate Marketing & Events. O’Brien concurs, citing the destination’s extraordinary foundation of service as a main factor in their decision to return year after year. “That’s really what’s so incredibly different about Sea Island: the level of service is so ingrained, it creates a really cohesive and integrated experience that’s almost invisible. From the moment you walk into the lobby, you know you’re in an elevated, harmonious experience. Their level of service shows in everything, in every element, every thought.” From remembering guests’ names six months later to providing supreme flexibility in food and beverage options, and transforming meeting spaces on extremely short notice, the property excels.

Where Sea Island’s exceptional service transcends the ordinary to extraordinary lies in the staff’s ability not only to anticipate IAAI’s meeting needs but, even more, to becoming a partner in the company’s conference success.

Alitovska adds, “Over the years, the conference team has taken the time to learn who we are and our clients, and make sure that they’re a reflection of our brand.” It’s that distinctiveness that also resonates with O’Brien. “For a property to be able to support and elevate your brand, it really supports us from a business perspective,” she says. “The feedback we get from our conferences is always incredibly high, usually 4.7 across the board; but, at Sea Island, it’s 4.9, which speaks well to their brand alignment.”

As Sea Island’s activities, the destination offers a plethora of familiar and unique guest experiences. Fitness enthusiasts can choose from among three golf courses, horseback riding, a shooting school, kayaking, paddleboarding, beach-bike riding and bird watching. IAAI guests especially enjoy Sea Island’s signature ‘Cass & Blast’ event, a combined shooting and fishing adventure. “It’s such a unique experience — a level of an experience,” O’Brien says. “One of our clients said, ‘I’ve never experienced that before. It was so much fun!’ Whether enjoying wine activities where the staff share insights and hands-on experiences for guests, shopping excursions, yoga or day excursions, clients and guests have no shortage of activities from which to choose. “The property is so beautiful and relaxing,” Altovska says, “that people will also simply hang out by the pool.”

When it comes to more rest and relaxation, Altovska says, “I love The Spa at Sea Island.” The Forbes Five-Star, 65,000-sf spa and fitness space features a beautiful courtyard, plenty of treatment rooms, wet and dry saunas, and a variety of spa services, including treatments from massage and body to skin care, a full-service salon, and The Spaichte and Beauteque, a shop offering spa gifts, exercise wear and

Donna Brinson
Meetings Coordinator
Jack Henry & Associates Inc.

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skin- and body-care products. Despite its size, O’Brien finds that the same level of exceptional service and feeling of comfort experienced elsewhere on the property extends all the way through here. “I love their pedicures and their signature facial and Hydra-Facial MD. Despite the size of the spa, the space doesn’t feel clinical at all.”

Plus, Alitovska appreciates that over the years, “I’ve had the same masseuse, and it’s wonderful to see a familiar face when I return.”

Alitovska sums up her experience at Sea Island, saying, “Coming here’s a different world. You really feel a different energy, just a sense of comfort and timeless elegance. Don’t consider hosting your event at Sea Island; just do it. They dig in with us to give us best solutions for our conference needs. They’re there to be a partner with you.”

For Sheri Trotter, senior vice president of Programs & Special Events at Williamsburg, Virginia-based Snow Companies, Kingsmill Resort, in Williamsburg, offered her 300 attendees what they wanted in a resort for the company’s annual Employee Appreciation Party. “Kingsmill is a location where your group will get the business done and will be able to relax as well,” Trotter says. “The amenities offered, the environmental beauty and the attention to detail from all aspects makes a well-rounded meeting/event.”

Kingsmill has two 18-hole golf courses — The River Course and The Plantation Course — and offers the Golf Channel Academy. The Spa at Kingsmill offers facials, massages, body wraps, and salon and beauty treatments, as well as wellness and body treatments. “We are a local company and we needed an exceptional venue for such a special event to honor our employees for a job well done,” she says. “The water view is magical. It provides a certain level of peace when on breaks or when having a meal and, after hours of meetings, that is a great respite. And it automatically comes with every package.”

She adds, “We used a considerable amount of the event space at Kingsmill.

Kingsmill Resort, top and middle, provided just what the attendees at a Snow Companies event needed to relax. Bottom, Sea Island’s 17,000 sf Golf Performance Center offers a comprehensive approach to golf.

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**TIER ONE**

Complimentary one (1) hour welcome reception with beer, wine and chef’s assortment of hors d’oeuvres

5% credit to the master account

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Free breakfast buffet in Elements 1010

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The flow is exceptional, ambience is lovely and the service is always spot on. Now, let me tell you about the food. It isn’t your typical conference facility food, it is so much more. It is fresh, creative, plentiful and always good, really good. The culinary crew is very good at what they do.”

**AUTHENTIC WESTERN ADVENTURES**

Set in a serene location in Colorado Springs, complete with scenic mountain views, The Broadmoor is a favorite group destination for Bethany Jones, a meeting planning consultant for NASBP. “We’ve always had a really great relationship with The Broadmoor, a Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five-Diamond property. Just the service is like nowhere else. The staff always asks if they can do anything for you. Every single guest is valued and remembered. Our only challenge at The Broadmoor is that the room blocks sell out quickly,” she says. “And while getting to Colorado Springs usually means having to make connecting flights, no one complains about it.”

Accommodations at The Broadmoor offer plenty of options, from rooms to suites and cottages. “I also appreciate having tiered rates for different room types to meet different budgets,” Jones says. Converted from what was once a private home, The Estate House, a 12,000-sf sanctuary, is located across from the cottages and offers more of a C-suite experience for smaller meetings. It also includes a chef’s kitchen for culinary events. For special group gatherings, Jones likes to book The Broadmoor’s 6,300-sf Cheyenne Lodge, a separate meeting and banquet space up the hill from the hotel, with shuttle service provided.

Jones finds The Broadmoor a good venue for a self-contained event as it boasts several restaurants and bars, including fine dining at the Penrose Room, Italian food fare at Ristorante del Lago, regional American cuisine at Summit, plus prime steaks, prime rib and seafood at La Taverne. Guests can also explore dining options at The Broadmoor’s signature cafes and lounges, such as Bar del Lago, Café Julie’s and the Penrose Lounge. An impressive team of culinary chefs leads The Broadmoor’s varied dining experiences, from upscale to more modest venues. Drawing inspiration both from their global travels and the local surroundings, the culinary team creates unique dining experiences ranging from contemporary European cuisine to casual burger and pizza fare.

Beyond dining, the property also features a new, high-end bowling alley. And no one has to leave the property to enjoy shopping excursions and a variety of other amenities. For example, with 43,000 sf available, The Spa at The Broadmoor offers 40 spa treatment rooms, a full-service salon and a state-of-the-art fitness center. Two award-winning golf courses, The Broadmoor’s East and West courses, play host to national tournaments such as the 2018 and 2025 Senior Open, and offer unique ventures such as golfing with a legend in the sport, professional golfer Hale Irwin.

In addition to the property’s golf and spa amenities, for truly authentic Western experiences, it’s hard to top The Broadmoor’s wilderness excursions and experiential adventures. Guests can also hike the trails, go zip lining, sign up for fly-fishing camp with a private guide, or learn about the sport of falconry at the beginner or intermediate level with The Broadmoor Outfitters. Rather read and relax in front of a fireplace? The Broadmoor has you covered there, too.

“We often go back to The Broadmoor for a reason, they’re top-notch. The property is continually expanding. I really compliment them for not resting on their laurels. Everything is beautiful,” Jones says. Beyond the recent conversion of The Estate House, The Broadmoor is excited about opening a new, more than 110,000-sf Exhibition Hall, including 32 breakout rooms, in the spring this year. The Exhibition Hall offers an appealing addition, especially for clients seeking space for large-scale trade shows other than convention centers. Boulders Resort & Spa Scottsdale, Curio Collection by Hilton also offers top-notch golf and spa amenities. Its two courses — the 6,811-yard North Course and the South Course, at 6,726 yards — feature boulder formations and other Sonoran Desert terrain that offers challenging play for golfers. In addition, players can get a lesson from expert PGA- and LPGA-certified instructors. Attendees looking to relax via a shamanic tipi, meditation labyrinth, organic garden and or reflect pond should visit the 33,000-sf spa, which offers 24 treatment rooms, a spa café and learning center.

“We’ve always had a really great relationship with The Broadmoor. Every single guest is valued.”

**BETHANY JONES**

Meeting Planning Consultant

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Diversity and inclusion are big buzzwords in the insurance and financial sectors right now. But it’s not always easy to go from talking about these ideals to incorporating them into everyday functions in the company—including meetings, leadership training and other corporate events.

For businesses that are truly committed to recruiting and retaining employees with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, making events both diverse and inclusive is more important than one might think. The hard truth is that people of a different race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, religion or age often aren’t being given the same access to opportunities as people in the majority.

“...a lot of companies that are trying to do good what they’ve done is they’ve recruited people who are different, but they don’t necessarily nurture, mentor or highlight the potential in the different folks to climb the ladder,” says Jessica Pettitt, CSP, owner of Good Enough Now, who is a speaker, author and educator who has been doing diversity and inclusion work for nearly 20 years. “If people are not being nurtured in the organization, that organization should at least outsource it to a conference or other event.”

Amy C. Waninger, CPCU, author of the book “Network Beyond Bias” and founder and CEO of Lead At Any Level, agrees with Pettitt. “When you have high-potential employees who are different, but they don’t necessarily nurture, mentor or highlight the potential in the different folks to climb the ladder,” says Jessica Pettitt, CSP, owner of Good Enough Now, who is a speaker, author and educator who has been doing diversity and inclusion work for nearly 20 years. “If people are not being nurtured in the organization, that organization should at least outsource it to a conference or other event.”

Amy C. Waninger, CPCU, author of the book “Network Beyond Bias” and founder and CEO of Lead At Any Level, agrees with Pettitt. “When you have high-potential employees and, in particular, when you have high-potential employees who don’t look like everyone in your C-suite, those are people you should send to conferences,”

How Successful Planners Focus on

Inclusion, Accessibility and Awareness

BY SOPHIA BENNETT

DIVERSITY

POWER
OF

PHOTO BY BRYAN WALKER TING

Participants in an Aspen Policy Tech Hub event. L-R: Ryan Olson, Anil Dewan, Ginny Fahs, Steve Weis, Nicole Young, Terah Lyons, Brindile Nommick, Allison Day, Karina McKelvey, Ora Tonic, Betty Cooper and David Albin Hidalgo.

PHOTO BY BRYAN WALKER TING
One of the earliest decisions a planner must make is where to host their event. Before picking a destination or venue, it’s important to investigate local laws and attitudes that might affect participants, Pettitt says. Some states ban the use of gender-neutral pronouns or gender-neutral bathrooms in public facilities. The laws around medical cannabis also may be different, which can cause problems for participants with disabilities who use medical cannabis. “There’s actually a bigger liability than doing anything in the first place. Because you asked but you’re choosing to ignore the information you got.”

To help young people or people with lower incomes, consider offering registration fees on a sliding scale, providing scholarships and helping people find housing partners that offer a little extra. Other venue considerations include ensuring the facility is accessible for people with disabilities. That means “the entire venue, not just the area around the main stage,” Waninger says. “That includes finding a hotel that will welcome everyone. It’s increasingly possible to find secure accommodation partners that offer a little extra in that regard.”

Says Pettitt, “Some hotels are starting to put rugs in the closets for yoga, stretching or for prayer rugs. They’re also putting an arrow in people’s rooms pointing toward Mecca.” These small stickers are unobtrusive for people who don’t need the information, but some properties have also taken the arrow as an opportunity to educate people, putting a small card on the table explaining why the sticker is there.

These small messages of education and acceptance give businesses an opportunity to increase diversity awareness among employees and customers, she says. “If all of the panelists are CEOs who are 65-year-old men, that doesn’t invite a lot of people to feel welcome.”

“One of the biggest mistakes people make when they’re trying to get a diverse group is they end up trying to do it within their network.”

For businesses committed to recruiting and retaining workers with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, making events diverse and inclusive is important.

nothing wrong with looking to other industries for best practices and case studies on how to broaden the pool of participants. The Aspen Tech Policy Hub, a policy incubator run by The Aspen Institute, hosts an intensive fellowship program every year. The program places a high priority on recruiting diverse candidates and has done a good job of meeting its goals. Dr. Betsy Cooper, founding director, shared some of their secrets to success.

“One of the biggest mistakes people make when they’re trying to get a diverse group is they end up trying to do it within their network,” she says. “If you’re just sitting around thinking about people you know, the group may not be as diverse. One of the most important things you can do is make it public that you’re searching for these options and allow diverse voices to speak up.”

She adds, “On top of that, it’s really important to reach communities outside the ones you normally speak to and make sure they’re aware of that opportunity. If those communities aren’t visiting your website or following you on Twitter, they won’t see it.” Cooper recommends looking for people who have written articles or blog posts in the field on which you’re focusing and contacting them. Another idea is to contact professional organizations.

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zations that work with people from differing backgrounds and ask them to pass RFPs, meeting invitations or other materials along to their mem-
bers. This is a great recommendation for events looking to recruit speakers as well as participants.

If the event will select a pool of participants rather than taking registrations from anyone interested in attending, Cooper emphasizes that it’s important to have a transparent and fair selection process. “You risk going back to your own biases if you don’t take the opportunity to select in a methodi-
cal way. For our pro-
gram, we select people first based on their written materials, then through interviews. We score each piece of individual and finding a way to make sure they’re cared for,” Brighton says. “Find alternatives so people are not excluded from the conversation.”

INCLUSION AT EVENTS

To ensure everyone feels comfort-
able at the event, Waninger recom-

dends having a code of conduct in the program or posted in the event that says something like the following: “Harassment in any form will not be tolerated. People who make unrepres-
ented participants feel unwelcome will be removed.” Pettitt recommends providing a cell phone or pager num-
ber in the event brochure people can call if they experience harassment. That way, the company can work to resolve the problem immediately.

“If someone feels threatened or unsafe, do you have a plan to protect them — and potentially to upset someone who is accused of behaving badly?”

AMY C. WANINGER, CPCU
Founder and CEO
Lead At Any Level

“I’ve heard stories about women being followed into their room, or women presenters who were harassed or made to feel very uncomfortable by questioners in the audience,” Wan-
inger says. “It’s important for meeting planners to have a strategy in place in advance for how they’ll deal with those situations. If someone feels threatened or unsafe, do you have a plan to pro-
tect them — and potentially to upset someone who is accused of behaving badly? It’s so much more comfortable to think about those things and have a plan and follow that plan, as opposed to

thinking about it in the moment when people are upset.”

Brightton recommends having gathering-
er at the event where attendees can connect both with other attendees who are different from them and who are like them. “Events can have silos, and it can be challenging to be a new person in that environment and feel comfortable participating,” she says.

“Partner new people with someone who’s been an attendee for a long time to make introductions and bring them from being an outsider to an insider.”

However, many folks may also feel more comfortable when they connect with others with whom they have more in common, which Brighton found when she worked for an association that had a large contingent of people from other countries. “I always thought it was incredibly important to — rather than just hoping they ran into each other — bring the international partici-
pants together so they could meet and interact with each other,” she says.

The old way of thinking about racial diversity was to insist on being colorblind and treating everyone the same instead of acknowledging the differences that made them interesting and full of mean-
ingful contributions. Just as that outdated model of thinking is now gone, the idea of designing a ‘one-size-fits-all’ event may not always work.

Her Leadership Uncorked events use wine as an analogy for corporate leadership. But at one of her trainings, she had a person who didn’t drink alcohol. She found a way to draw the same parallels using tea so that attendee could have a simi-
lar but unique sensory experience to everyone else. “Instead of saying, ‘I’m going to design something that’s gen-
der neutral and friendly to everyone,’ it’s about looking at each unique indi-
vidual and finding a way to make sure they’re cared for,’” Brighton says. “Find alternatives so people are not excluded from the conversation.”

The Aspen Tech Policy Hub, a policy incubator run by The Aspen Institute, runs an intensive fellowship program every year. The program places a high priority on recruiting diverse candidates and has done a good job of meeting its goals.
Healthy” is today’s across-the-board buzzword, even in the culinary world’s meetings scene. From planners to chefs, eating clean and organic are in the forefront of decision makers’ minds when planning a get-together to reward and motivate attendees. Here’s the inside scoop, though certainly not of the ice cream sort, on foods that are good for the body, eaten for energy and that nurture the mind.

INSPIRATION AND INNOVATION

In alignment with the food-health-meetings link is Alexander deHilster, creative design manager for Meetings & Incentives Worldwide Inc. (M&IW), a global event management company that specializes in meetings, incentives and conferences. Having taken groups to the InterContinental San Diego, he’s worked in partnership with a nationally recognized health insurance plan provider.

The M&IW specialist describes a culinary reception at InterContinental San Diego, which was inspired and created by the city’s Little Italy Farmers Market. Each vendor/chef-attended station served its own menu selections under an individual logoed tent — complete with a list of all ingredients and food allergens. Decorated with white picket fencing, greenery and communal picnic tables, and featuring an acoustic duo for entertainment, it was overwhelmingly a welcoming and inventive success.

By Cynthia Dial
“We now see a larger impact of guests with health restrictions or allergies coming into the Lobby Bar & Grill during conferences.”

CHEF JOSE MENDOZA
Pechanga Resort Casino

With meetings no longer seen as opportunities to overindulge, regardless of consequence, today’s planners operate by different rules. “I do my best to always provide three to four different types of main courses, two to three different types of salads, three to four different side dishes and a variety of desserts to satisfy various dietary needs,” deHilster says. “In general, I also offer mostly vegetarian/vegan hors d’oeuvres so everyone can enjoy them. Even meat eaters don’t miss that we’re not serving beef sliders, lamb chops or chicken skewers. And I always tell chefs: ‘I don’t want to see another portobello mushroom option,’ which is no problem these days as chefs are very creative.”

Mentioning that paleo, keto and Whole30 diets are sometimes requested, he explains that he works closely with chefs to come up with a varied menu that can accommodate almost all special meal requests, as well as providing items that appeal to those with no restrictions. One alternative is to serve deconstructed options so everyone can add whatever ingredients they prefer to the dish. When needed, he sometimes provides two different options of the same dish, i.e. angel hair pasta and spaghetti squash.

“My first conversation with the chef is: ‘Are you flexible with the menu?’ I like to pick and choose, mix and match and collaborate with the chef,” deHilster says. “Most times my menus end up being very different from the hotel’s banquet menus.”

CULINARY AND CUISINE

“Southern California’s culture and cuisine have always leaned toward healthier options,” says Amy DiBlase, executive chef at InterContinental San Diego. “However, the expansion of this mindset across the country has taken it beyond the status of a trend to an expectation.” She deems ‘elevated vegan’ a must and expounds that it should be imaginative — enticing vegans and non-vegans alike.

In the attempt to best showcase a destination, DiBlase thinks local sourcing is the first and most critical step in creating a dining experience distinctive to the locale.

“This needs to happen across the entire spectrum of ingredients — not just produce, poultry and seafood from farms, but also favorite neighborhood vendors, local coffee roasters, gelato makers or a hard kombucha brewer.” Foods, such as walnuts, quinoa, blueberries, acai berries, kale, termed brain foods, have been linked to good health because of their antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties. “The trend has also led his team to come up with more composed vegetarian and vegan options, as well as lighter fare offerings from their regular menu and banquet menus.”

“People feel better when they eat real, fresh food — period.”

FOODS CAN BE SELECTIVE AND SAVVY

“The world is becoming more food savvy, and meeting attendees are interested in every element of the culinary experience,” says Joanie Phillips, CTP, director, purchasing and design at Onsite, a Minneapolis-based company experienced in travel and events, incentives and recognition and marketing services.

So, in addition to health concerns, elements of the culinary scene are expansive. To handle the attention to calories, gluten, meatless and more, Phillips’ awareness of food choices covers all the bases. Bullet points of interest for this event specialist creative and savory small portions; tasty, plant-based alternatives; milk alternatives, including milk alternatives, including soymilk, almond milk, coconut milk; new trends of low-sodium, low-sugar, low-fat foods; lactose-free, nut-free, vegetarian and vegan accommodation, as well as adherence to kosher and halal food preparation. “To address the popular grab-and-go concept, healthy options exist in pre-built salads in a cup, power bowls and bento boxes.”

A RESORT & CASINO’S CULINARY LEADERS

Situated in Temecula in the heart of California’s wine country is the 1,090-room, five-diamond award-winning Pechanga Resort Casino. It is known throughout the region for the property’s wide variety of eateries, including the Great Oak Steakhouse — winner of the Wine Spectator Award of Excellence; chef Hunter Gonzalez, catering and banquet leaders, and Chef Jose Mendoza, Lobby Bar & Grill, which is part of the $800-million resort expansion, have a dual commitment. Gonzalez says that while their quest is to bring the wine country and coastal feel to the property, the healthy food trend has also led her team to come up with more composed vegetarian and vegan options, as well as lighter fare offerings from their regular menu options, even down to the breaks. “We have incorporated a lot of house-made items such as granolas, pickled vegetables and even coconut water.” The chef has also introduced more superfood selections, including nuts, berries, yogurts, kale, lentils, chia seeds, different juicing possibilities and more.

“We now see a larger impact of attendees with health restrictions or allergies coming into the Lobby Bar & Grill during conferences,” Mendoza says. The end game for this chef’s crew has been to adjust menus so that their most popular dishes can usually be modified to each attendee’s liking.

From planners to chefs, eating clean and organic are in the forefront of decision makers’ minds when planning a convention or event to reward and motivate attendees.
With a focus on house-made items for the Lobby Bar & Grill, Mendoza ensures that he and his culinary team know exactly what goes into their final dishes. “We have also started a small in-house pickling program where we pickle seasonal fruits and vegetables for use when not in season.” He continues that one of the biggest additions to Pechanga’s healthy-dining scene is its wellness menu, where gluten-free, vegetarian and vegan options reign, and gives a shout-out to its most popular dishes — Vegan Mushroom Wellington for dinner. “We have also started a small room Chorizo served at breakfast and its most popular dishes – Vegan Mushroom Wellington, a layer that dissolves to expose something underneath.”

“We certainly see a big wave of people moving toward a plant-based diet and ditching meat altogether.”

**LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION**

“Because of our location, we have the pleasure of a lot of health-conscious members attending our events,” says Aron Harrington, associate administrator, Southern California Credit Union Alliance (SCCUA), in Long Beach, California. The group has conducted meetings at Pechanga Resort Casino each June for the last few years, returning again this year. “With that said, we certainly see a big wave of people moving toward a plant-based diet and ditching meat altogether. You do see the big guys out there, like Burger King, adapting to this food trend.”

While the meeting planner doesn’t claim his organization to be the best at incorporating healthy choices into his events, he ensures that there is always a vegan and or vegetarian option when available and SCCUA has changed its snack offerings from typical sweet treats to more health conscious and mind-power items. With foods new to the scene — such as the West African flavors of moringa, tamarind and cereal grains, insects, seaweed, tamarind, fonio, teff and millet; spreads beyond peanut, cashew and almond to include watermelon seed and pumpkin butter, as well as soy alternatives like mung bean pringles or golden chlorella, a type of algae — where do planners like Harrington go to stay ahead of the food curve? “Google is our best friend for everything, including healthy food trends,” he says.

Gonzales adds: “Our chefs, myself included, are always looking to tweak our menus throughout the year to make sure we’re offering the best and freshest ingredients we can while trying to stay ahead of the curve on food trends.”

**EVERY HEART BeAT IS HEALTHY**

With more than 300 dining options within walking distance of its convention center and meeting hotels, and nearly three-quarters of those eateries independently owned and with chef-driven concepts, it’s little surprise that Indianapals is considered one of the nation’s hottest culinary cities. Upping the ante is the locale’s proximity to rich agriculture, affording the city’s chefs and caterers the opportunity to collaborate with farmers, and infuse local produce and protein into their menus.

“When you think of Indiana, you typically think of corn cobs and pork tenderloins,” says Rachel Solano, banquet executive chef at JW Marriott Indianapolis. Although the hotel offers those items on some of their menus, these days there is much more. “We source local products as often as possible. This is really where our ‘roots’ are most reflected in our menus,” Solano says. The chef adds that the hotel’s menus have significantly evolved over the years to be more inclusive for all allergies and even diets. “Keto and Whole30 have significantly evolved over the years to be more inclusive for all allergies and even diets.”

“Expect to see more dishes that are interactive or al fresco. Sit-down dinners are a rarity. It’s all about the venue and the food,” Bell says. He continues that the hotel’s menus have significantly evolved over the years to be more inclusive for all allergies and even diets. “Keto and Whole30 have significantly evolved over the years to be more inclusive for all allergies and even diets.”

“The planet too...”

With the shift toward more reception-style events composed of food stations paired hand in hand with those working to be at their physical best. The following are some easy, yet effective, ways to make a difference. In the interest of addressing the globe’s overindulgence, InterContinental San Diego’s Chef Amy Dibiase follows these guidelines: “We try to reduce waste on the front end through sustainable sourcing, cross utilization of ingredients amongst multiple dishes and smaller portion sizes. Unfortunately, the shift toward more reception-style events is not helping, so we also have to maximize composting and food donation opportunities on the back end,” she says.

Joanie Phillips, of One10, also practices a multi-pronged approach. “We promote eco-friendly serving ware such as bamboo, have water stations versus bottled water, offer canned beverages instead of plastic cups and utilize more bulk than individually packaged items, i.e. build your own trail mix instead of granola bars,” she says. Another idea is a logoed registration desk giveaway — a S’well water bottle, known as the container which keeps water, offer canned beverages instead of plastic cups and utilize more bulk than individually packaged items, i.e. build your own trail mix instead of granola bars,” she says. Another idea is a logoed registration desk giveaway — a S’well water bottle, known as the container which keeps water, offers a comfortable container for guests to bring their own water. And at the end of the meeting, the hotel also gives away a logoed water bottle to each attendee.

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**SHOW ME THE MONEY!**

**ALEXANDER DEHLISLTER, MEETINGS & INCENTIVES WORLDWIDE**

“Budget is forever a challenge, but 1 always make it work.” His tip is to order a certain quantity of food to make the budget stretch further. Not every guest eats every food item, so he doesn’t order individual portions of everything for everyone. He also tries to add food items that are not only health-conscious, but also make the experience more appealing. “I try to match foods with the décor or the theme. Once, I did a seated French-themed event with a seven-course meal. The look of the room changed with each course and the food represented a culinary journey from the north to the south of France.”

**CHEF AMY DIBIASE, INTERCONTINENTAL SAN DIEGO**

“Sit-down dinners are a rarity. It’s all about themed receptions composed of food stations paired with craft beverages and local craft beers. This could be a simple table-side dessert preparation or a Champagne-pouring aerialist. People want to be wowed or, better yet, have a video that will wow their Instagram followers.”

**JOANIE PHILLIPS, ONE10**

“Expect to see more dishes that are interactive or alter are in front of the guest, such as a plate ganache that forms when a soup is added or a dessert that when mashed reveals a melted chocolate sauce, or a layer that dissolves to expose something underneath.” Again, think Instagram.
Just as the meeting and events industry has evolved over the last several decades, so has the working environments in which meeting attendees, as well as planners themselves, work. This change in the working environments within the financial and insurance sectors, as well as other industries, has resulted in a need for innovative ways to make meetings a success in this ever-evolving work environment.

Today’s flexible working environment is not at all reminiscent of your grandfather’s working experience. In the ‘60s, work was primarily done by people working together in the same office. There were computers, but they tended to fill entire rooms and were expensive enough that most small businesses couldn’t afford them. “Work had to be done in an office. We shouldn’t forget, either, that at this point in history in the U.S., women could still be fired from a job once they became pregnant,” says Teresa Douglas, co-author of “Working Remotely: Secrets to Success for Employees on Distributed Teams.” “Corporate America assumed that someone stayed at home to care for personal tasks and raise the children. Work wasn’t flexible.”

As Douglas explains, a mix of technological and cultural changes began to shift us out of this way of working. The 1980s brought computers that could fit on a desk, and laptops that weighed 25 to 55 pounds. It wasn’t until the early 2000s, when technological advances that brought us ubiquitous Wi-Fi and lightweight computing devices, as well as smartphones, that work could become mobile.
According to Global Workplace Analytics, the number of people working remotely has grown more than 159% since 2005. Increased globalism is place Analytics, the number of people working remotely has increased, increasing numbers of baby boomers and Gen Xers were hitting their mid-career stride and joining the sandwich generation,” Douglas says. “There’s nothing like trying to care for your parents and your children while holding down a job to make a person question why we need to go to an office if all of our work lives on our computers.”

That brings us to today, when you can start a business, hire people who live around the world and sell a product or service without leaving your home. “According to Global Workplace Analytics, the number of people working remotely has grown more than 159% since 2005. Increased globalism is probably a large part of why work is more flexible now. It doesn’t make sense to maintain to 9 to 5 schedule when you work in wildly different time zones,” Douglas says.

Drew Scott, senior vice president of Scott Insurance, says that, as technology has evolved across the decades, the ease of working remotely has increased. However, sometimes the technology at home takes a while to catch up to the industry standard.

“We offered our first work from home opportunity to staff in the late 90s. However, when we became fully paperless, it became difficult.”

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In these instances, scheduling can be challenging,” Lages says. The good news is that you can solve 90% of these issues with patience and planning. And, if there’s one thing event planners do well, it’s planning. Douglas suggests getting into a video room and playing with the buttons to see what makes the most sense for the meeting’s size and style.

** KEY STRATEGIES **

So how can meeting planners adapt their processes to accommodate today’s flexible working environment? The key to successfully implementing meeting strategies among people who work within a flexible work environment is to clearly communicate the importance of organization, scheduling and being aware of other’s time constraints or conflicts. And it’s important to remember that some people are simply not cut out for the rigors of setting and managing one’s own schedule in an untraditional setting — which can impact the ability to seamlessly orchestrate meetings of all types.

That’s why it’s so imperative for the employer to communicate expectations in advance — from turnaround time with project work to the expected attendance at off-site meetings and events. Also, employees making this change should have a space in their home that is strictly dedicated to work, and must acknowledge and find solutions for all distractions.

Lages advises meeting planners to be aware of the best platforms and technology offerings to communicate effectively. You can have a real-time video with a seamless ability to share presentations and content. “Ensure when booking on-site locations that, if you have remote participants, the connectivity is sound and the equipment will accommodate all parties whether on video screens or compatible phones,” Lages says.

**THE FUTURE OF THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT**

As the world becomes more global, the way meeting planners and attendees work will become both less location dependent but more location significant. Lacey Clark, principal of NW Recruiting Partners, an affiliation of Sanford Rose Associates, says it won’t be long before we’ll be interacting with coworkers in an office environment from the comfort of our home office while wearing virtual reality headgear. “Companies are choosing to give flexible work schedules for many reasons. Commute times are too long, it’s less expensive for the company to have ‘hoteling stations’ rather than a desk for every person, many employees are more effective when working from home without the distractions, and employees are demanding more flexibility for family and personal matters,” Clark says. “Our culture is evolving to value our time away from work as much as we value the money and security a job provides.”

Morgenstern thinks the open work plans and co-working spaces will continue to evolve and gain popularity — with people gravitating toward being around other people more, not less. But they will need to learn how to apply work processes and organization within the flexibility because we are all motivated by the same goals,” Morgenstern says. “We strive to make our unique contributions, accomplish great work, and be connected to others while having a healthy work-life balance.”

Scott adds that history shows us that flexible working environments will only continue to increase. “The workforce continues to be more sensitive to the cost of living, the commuting experience, and the overall standard of living,” Scott says. “Certain lifestyles require that people work remotely. Employers cannot afford to limit their workforce by strict geographical restrictions.”

**WHERE FLEXIBLE WORKING ENVIRONMENTS AND MEETINGS CONNECT**

Employers should take the following steps to enhance the remote working experience as it relates to ensuring streamlined meetings:

- Establish clear expectations and guidelines about meeting availability. Use collaborative software and online platforms to help staff stay in touch.
- Schedule regular calls and in-person meetings.
- Keep a schedule of workers’ on-site availability and where and how they can be reached when off-site to keep scheduled meetings flowing smoothly.
- Ensure employees have the resources they need, like a laptop, cell phone and the ability to connect to secure corporate networks.
- Ensure your client silent because she has nothing to say or because her internet is slow and she has a lag. **TERESA DOUGLAS**

Co-Author

“Working Remotely: Secrets to Success for Employees on Distributed Teams”

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Best Practices for Making the Disabled Feel Welcome at Any Event

BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed and signed into law by President George H.W. Bush on July 26, 1990. You might think that, as a result, all public facilities, including hotels, convention centers, arenas and other venues typically used for meetings and other events easily accommodate physically challenged people today so planners don’t have to think much about it. Unfortunately, that’s not always the case.

THINK ABOUT INCLUSION

With the topic of inclusion very much in the forefront of meetings-related discussions, planners actually have a lot to think about to ensure that their meetings are not just welcoming but also safe for attendees with disabilities. Accessibility in all its variations is a highly complex issue, and planners have a multitude of considerations in order to meet all needs at every meeting, regardless of where it is taking place.

So what do planners have to consider? “Ease of use, inclusion and respect,” says Holly Valenti, general manager at Hols New Orleans. She also notes that, “It’s a lot easier now than it was even just five years ago. Convention facilities, transportation companies, venues and even human resources are getting more and more familiar with the requirements.”

That’s true in the United States but, as our experts point out, that may or may not be true in international destinations. But there’s also the importance of understanding what attendees may or may not need, and having a dialogue with them about that rather than making assumptions.

“Planners should not assume that a person with a disability needs assistance,” says Valenti, and that’s where respect comes in.

“A sign of respect is to ask attendees if they need assistance before acting,” she cautions. “And, if you do offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted, then wait for or ask for instructions; respect the person’s right to indicate the kind of help that’s needed.”

Transportation is one key area where accommodating disabilities may come into play. “Typically, booking vans or buses with wheelchair lifts, for example, is not a hard task and they should be the same price as vehicles without a wheelchair lift,” Valenti says.

But a planner’s job doesn’t end with simply finding and booking the vehicles. “One of the most challenging parts of this type of transportation,” Valenti notes, “is ensuring that the driver is trained on how to use the equipment, as well as educated on how to respectfully interact with each attendee.”

Sight and hearing impairment are among the typical challenges that planners have to think about.

“Just recently, we incorporated a closed-captioning system as well as a sign language interpreter during a general session for 2,700 administrative professionals,” Valenti says. “Both services were projected onto the main screen above the stage during the keynote presentation so that all attendees were always able to see both services.”

She notes that many large conferences typically have their own customized conference apps, which can be very helpful to attendees with disabilities. “These include schedules, conference info and transportation information,” she says. “Typically, information for disabled attendees is included in this app, for example, special phone numbers to call for an ADA shuttle.”

ASK QUESTIONS

Asking and answering questions, regardless of the specific circumstances, is important. “Always ask questions about how you can best accommodate meeting attendees, and also respond appropriately to what attendees ask you or tell you. Understanding disability access needs and responding accurately, quickly and respectfully to requests for information, directions or assistance conveys genuine welcome,” Valenti says.

Tabina Endean, CMP, CED, DES, head of events for SITE Global, says, “Steps taken and action required depends in part on where you are and how compliant the destination and venue are. A historical venue or city may have pavement or floor surfaces, and narrow doorways, that aren’t required to be compliant because they’re historical. Some locations may require considerable planning while newer venues may be fully compliant with access to ramps, elevators, visual cues for hearing impairments and audio cues for visual impairments. This is something to consider at the RFP and, if you’re still determining the site, at the site inspection stage.”

In some cases, depending on the location, planners may even have to consider moving an event to a newer or more fully compliant venue.

Like others, Endean points out that asking questions is key. “Things to consider range from ramps and elevators to accessible restrooms, including non-binary needs. It’s also important to ensure that you’re not creating obstacles with displays or loose cords, that you have power available to charge scooters and devices that enhance accessibility, and to think about how you are training your team to work with attendees with special needs.”

Not all disabilities are visible, she
notes. “Many are not, such as low vision or hearing loss, and chronic medical conditions that limit mobility, strength or interaction.”

Moreover, each disability is different. “Mobility, vision, hearing — everyone has a different need. Additionally, you might have attendees who have scent sensitivities and you may need to create a scent-free meeting, or there may be serious dietary challenges. Ask,” she says, “Don’t make assumptions.”

DON’T FORGET PRESENTERS

Speakers and presenters must be considered, too. “Do you have presenters with physical challenges who must be on a stage? How will they get there? And what about presentations? Will attendees with different abilities be able to learn from and interact with presentations as expected?”

Endean has firsthand experience. “From no elevators to non-functioning elevators requiring us to take people through service entries, to awkward moments when we have a back row available for wheelchairs and scooters and a participant who wants a front-row seat, to unbudgeted needs for ASL translation or, if required for a speaker to come too late to secure translation, the lessons have been learned the hard way.”

Her favorite best example was years ago when a colleague was planning for a 2,000-person dinner with people coming off a cruise ship to a nearby venue for a dinner and dance event. “The dance floor was unnaturally large at nearly 1/3 of the room, which made sense when the orchestra began to play and in the floor filled up with dancers in wheelchairs — and million-dollar smiles all around. More recently, I was on an event where one participant had limited mobility and many people turned attempts assisting her, from wheeling her around, to supporting her on cobblestone or gravel walks, to assisting with luggage and getting drinks. It was all appreciated and she not only had a seamless experience, but also made new friends.”

Bottom line, Endean says, “Disabled attendees want what we all want: A comfortable experience navigating an unfamiliar environment.”

The process has to start with registration. “If you ask attendees about limitations at registration, you have a good start on what’s needed,” Endean says. “Then over-communicate what they can expect from beginning to end. And, again, don’t make assumptions. Don’t assume, for example, that someone in a wheelchair wants to sit at the back of the room, maybe they prefer the end of an aisle at a midpoint or near the front. Ask.”

Then, there are service animals. Is the venue welcoming to them and their basic needs, including water, food and relief facilities? When and how should communication to attendees and to event staff members fit into the overall planning? “It’s also important to know that service animals are not just for the blind; they’re used for all needs as well,” Endean says.

The fact is that there’s not a one-size-fits-all solution with being a person with a long standing experience optimum for attendees with disabilities. “What is really worth knowing is that planning takes time and asking questions is paramount. For example, if deaf attendees require ASL/translation, these individuals typically have to be booked well in advance, and there’s more than one sign language, just as there are many spoken languages,” she points out.

Endean also notes that there are attendees who speak a language that isn’t the primary language of the event. “Having subtitled image magnification can offer a solution and several services do this in real-time,” she says. “Microsoft, for example, has been using Skype’s ability to do this in its own meetings for a long time.”

Technology is often the answer. “Many people are now technologically savvy, including tablets and phones, to aid their navigation through the world. And devices such as LipSync allow even those in ‘sip and puff’ chairs to use devices for multiple functions. Word-to-text translation, such as with Accessible Doc, or personal-device access, can also support hearing-impaired participants.”

Endean also advises that planners need to consider accommodations for disabled attendees. Planners need to provide visual interpretation if a speaker’s presentation is reliant on visual aids. “It’s much like watching a TV show with the ‘describe video’ turned on,” Endean says. “You also can’t rely on visual signage to give cues on where to go, so having a human guide or audible cues, like when you have Google maps turned on, helps sight-impaired attendees navigate the conference.”

Endean thinks more about an attendee’s experience and to what extent the attendees will come. Meanwhile, she suggests that planners ask their mobile-app providers what they offer. “You may find they already have solutions for you. And groups such as Mobility Mojo are great non-technical resources for accessible travel, which, of course, is required for attendance at most conferences. Check them out.”

Talking to cagey attendees who want a front-row seat, to non-functioning elevators requiring us to take people through service entries, to awkward moments when we have a back row available for wheelchairs and scooters and a participant who wants a front-row seat, to unbudgeted needs for ASL translation or, if required for a speaker to come too late to secure translation, the lessons have been learned the hard way. “Don’t make assumptions,” she says, “Don’t make assumptions.”

Endean agrees that a planner’s course of action transcends the attendee experience. “If deaf attendees require ASL/translation, these individuals typically have to be booked well in advance, and there are many spoken languages,” she points out.

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As the director of Vibe, an event design and destination management company in Miami, Florida, Valérie Bihet has a keen understanding of the importance of face-to-face meetings within the events industry.

With more than 20 years of meetings and events experience, Bihet has worked intimately with the management, design and production of special events. Her event experience spans high-profile social occasions, nonprofit fundraisers, corporate meetings, conferences, product launches and incentive trips. As such, Bihet has seen the way technology has impacted traditional face-to-face meetings.

“Technology has changed meetings in a couple of ways. First, there is much more interaction between presenter and audience,” Bihet says. “New software allows you to ask a question during a presentation and the audience can answer in real time.”

Nick Morgan, author of “Can You Hear Me? How to Connect with People in a Virtual World,” says he’s seeing three main changes affecting the face-to-face aspect of today’s meetings.

First, meetings have become tech-savvy in varying degrees, with polling software, apps and holograms leading the list of technical innovations.

“That’s probably the easiest and least meaningful kind of change — it’s really just a reflection of the surrounding society,” Morgan says. Also, meetings have adopted a streaming element and often allow people to participate remotely via their computers.

“This is a real change that meetings have embraced without really thinking through how that should change what’s presented and how it’s presented,” Morgan says. “As a result, those watching remotely are most often an add-on rather than an actual new dimension of the meeting and little is done to make the remote viewer experience a satisfying one.”
Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Bihet says the increased use of technology and virtual experiences in our work and personal lives has created a deep need for face-to-face experiences, which meetings can provide, “but not if they try to become virtual,” Morgan says.

So, with the advancements in technology and virtual meeting options, is Bihet seeing corporations and others leaning toward embracing technology and lessening the amount of face-to-face meetings?

Not quite yet. “With all of my clients, even virtual, I’m seeing a face-to-face meetings a year with all of the top management,” Bihet says. “After that, if you have quarterly meetings, those can maybe be done digitally with conferencing, I really think that at least one to two per year, depending on budget, have to be face to face. It’s more powerful when people know each other in person. You have a better connection and it makes people want to step up in a company need to know each other.”

As Bihet explains, people cannot only be behind a screen to offer an experience. You need to be connected outside of the ‘reunion’ model. When virtual, you have to be face to face. It’s more powerful when people know each other in person. You have a better connection and it makes people want to step up in a company need to know each other.

According to Melanie A. Katzman, PhD, author of “Connect First: 52 Simple Ways to Ignite Success, Meaning, and Joy at Work,” people are naturally wired to connect with each other. But in today’s work environment we’re often more focused on interacting with screens than with those around us. We’ve forgotten how, when and why to connect with people.

“You cannot keep a person away from their new surroundings. In a sense, virtual brings the annual conference or other event work and/or convention business, as Stecker sees in the days of the digital audience or online presence. But that doesn’t require travel or long hours away from doing actual work. Local chapters of professional associations, in-person meetings trump remote ones. Consider this: a meeting planner sets a very high bar when she orchestrates an out-of-town meeting for a group. A packet awaits each attendee when they arrive. This includes a personalized welcome note, often on a local postcard, annotated one-page maps, suggested places to visit before the event officially kicks off and a small envelope with local currency so the attendee can get a cup of tea and a sense of their new surroundings. In advance, the meeting planner provides links to the photos, contact information and bios of the whole group. Afterward, she sends the seating charts so attendees can follow up with “that fascinating conversationalist to my left.” The event team is prepped beforehand as to “who might want to meet whom,” and they proactively find attendees and make them as engaging as possible. The meeting planner also provides links to the photos, contact information and bios of the whole group. Afterward, she sends the seating charts so attendees can follow up with “that fascinating conversationalist to my left.” The event team is prepped beforehand as to “who might want to meet whom,” and they proactively find attendees and make them as engaging as possible. The meeting planner continues to scan the room for the person who was ‘feigning’ disinterest by playing on their phone, and offers to personally escort them to a guest who might share a common interest.

“By modeling such attentive behavior and creating the conditions for maximum interaction, the meeting planner infuses energy and happiness into what could otherwise be dull, obligatory corporate events,” Katzman says.

So what is the business approach when event planners go to the effort described above? For Morgan, it’s quite simple:
Face-to-face meetings provide a type of human communication that virtual meetings do not.

“We exchange more information via body language — building trust, creating connections and making strong commitments — than we possibly can virtually,” Morgan says. “All virtual relationships tend to degrade over time, so there’s a deeper kind of efficiency — the efficiency of profound human connection — that happens much more effectively in person. Meeting planners should make the in-person richness of human connection clear because it simply cannot be done virtually,” Bihet says.

“You need to shake the mind up to keep attendees energized,” Bihet says. “Do more workshops where people are really learning about the company in a more hands-on way. Use those apps to engage them in the presentation and include entertainment.”

Morgan says the single-most important thing for meeting and event planners to do to make face-to-face meetings most effective is to allow for structured networking. According to Morgan, meeting planners tend to overload meetings with speakers in order to demonstrate a packed meeting, but it's usually overkill.

“The second-most important thing is to allow the participants to have structured ways to interact with the speakers and panels, so that there is a merging between audience and speakers,” Morgan says. “This is rarely done but is astonishingly powerful for the audience when it is done well.

What’s more, meeting planners who want to enhance face-to-face meetings should focus on who is in the room. Make quick verbal introductions. Is it a big group? Ask a few questions that, with a show of hands, allows people to have a sense of their fellow attendees. If possible, place name cards in front of guests so they can be addressed personally and to help participants put names to faces.

“Assign seats to relieve social pressure; add an element of surprise and ensure exposure for people who might not otherwise meet,” Katzman says. “Company meetings of even six people are enhanced by shaking up who sits with whom.”

“There will be ways for us as planners to continue to use technology to reinforce the power of face-to-face meetings,” Bihet says. Experts agree that the real future of face-to-face meetings is to provide the vitality of human connection that is missing from the virtual world. So meetings that succeed will double down on the face-to-face aspects of the meeting rather than the virtual. And they will have to figure out how to make the best possible use of the audience’s time, since that is increasingly scarce.

“At the end of the day, despite all the technology we've come to rely on, the future of work demands a professional, practical way of establishing quality relationships by connecting with each other first as fellow humans, and then as coworkers and collaborators,” Katzman says. “This makes face-to-face meetings more critical than ever.”
Gateway Canyons Resort & Spa, in Gateway, Colorado, has appointed Tim Mattos as its new director of sales and marketing. Mattos brings more than two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, including various leadership positions. He will oversee all marketing campaigns and revenue strategies for the property in his new role.

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate has announced it has two new senior sales managers – Randi Ferlito and Daniela Price. Ferlito and Price will maintain relationships with key accounts and generate new group business for the hotel near Orlando, Florida. Both have had experience working with Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort prior to their new positions.

BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, has appointed Estelle Mapp as its new director of sales and marketing for Costa d’Este Beach Resort & Spa, a Gemstone Collection property in Vero Beach, Florida. Mapp brings nearly 16 years of professional hotel sales experience to her new role.

The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay is pleased to welcome Clodagh Larkin as the California oceanfront resort’s new director of meeting and events. Joining the resort from The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba, Larkin brings dynamic international experience within The Ritz-Carlton portfolio.

JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort & Spa, in Orlando, Florida, appointed Tami Corday as its new director of sales and marketing. Corday has a background in the hospitality industry and has worked in food & beverage, catering, event planning, hospitality management and customer service.

JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort & Spa in Orlando, Florida has named Jamie Jordan as its new director of sales and marketing. Jordan brings more than 26 years of hospitality leadership experience with Marriott International. Jordan will be creating and executing a marketing plan to lay a foundation for the hotel’s success.

The Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta All Inclusive & Spa in Mexico has named Maria Laura Venegas as its new director of sales. With more than 20 years of hospitality experience, Venegas has expertise managing segments such as tour operators, leisure groups, MICE and ecommerce. An expert in Mexico’s hospitality industry after leading impactful marketing and sales initiatives for national brands such as Camino Real, Brisas and Park Royal, she will be responsible for working closely with all aspects of the hotel and ultimately generating sales and leads.

The Live Aqua Beach Resort Punta Cana, in the Dominican Republic, which is slated to open this spring, has appointed Marc Andre as its new director of sales and marketing. Aside from managing all aspects of the hotel’s grand opening, Andre will oversee and manage sales staff and reservations to maximize revenue and ensure the achievement of marketing goals. He has been in the hotel sector for more than 30 years, working for leading hotel chains such as Grupo Presidente InterContinental, AMResorts and Grupo Playa.

Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort & Spa announced Cory Baum as its new director of sales and marketing. Baum joins the property from Hyatt Regency Jacksonville in Florida. Baum has previously worked at other Hyatt properties and has received numerous awards and recognitions.
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