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Corporate & Incentive Travel

THE MAGAZINE FOR MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

Terry Epton's 30-Year Journey

The Host of New Orleans

PAGE 16

Terry Epton CITE, DMCP
President, Hosts Global Alliance
New Orleans, LA

Outlook 2013

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Theme Park Meetings

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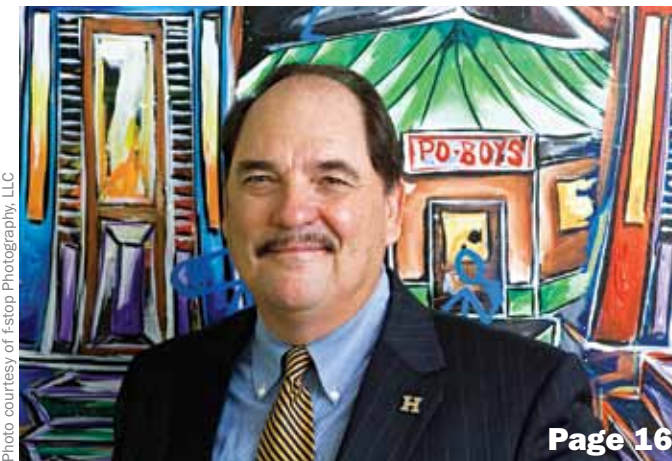
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Photo courtesy of f-stop Photography, LLC



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Terry Epton's 30-Year Journey

The Host of New Orleans
By John Buchanan

Hosts Global Alliance President Terry Epton proudly poses in front of a colorful painting by Reggie Ford depicting stylized turn-of-the century shotgun houses and a local po'boy restaurant in a typical old New Orleans neighborhood.

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Photo courtesy of Walt Disney World Resort



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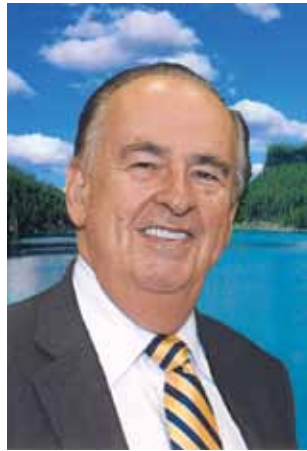
The Grand Plaza, set to open in January at the Anaheim Convention Center, is an outdoor 100,000-sf special event space at the center's front entrance.

Photo courtesy of Anaheim/Orange County VCB

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The Lion Will Roar Again

Terry Epton, who graces our cover this issue, says we are well on our way to a recovery. And Terry should know. He has been a force in our business for more than 30 years and, loyal to one organization, is a rare breed, indeed. Based in New Orleans, Epton, CITE, DMCP, is president of Hosts Global Alliance, a destination management consortium that serves 70 destinations around the world. Beginning on page 16, Terry says he is "thoroughly convinced" the industry will get back to its peak before the 2008 meltdown: "That's because the hospitality industry is very much tied to the general health of the economy. I believe that the U.S. economy is a bit of a sleeping giant right now. ...We just need the right climate to take hold with the economy. Then I think we'll see a tremendous amount of growth in the industry. I think it's inevitable. America has the strongest economy in the world and the strongest work force in the world. So sooner or later, the lion is going to roar again."



As you will see in "Outlook 2013" on page 12, many others agree with Epton. Meetings and incentives and business travel are growing, albeit slowly. For instance, Sherry Romello, senior director,

Hilton meetings and product management, at McLean, VA-based Hilton Hotels says, "I definitely think we will return to pre-recession 2008 levels. It will be a slow, steady return, but I think it will happen."

Then, there is Gia Staley, CMP, manager, meetings and events, at Healthpoint Biotherapeutics, who says, "Our budgets and the number of meetings we hold will be increasing. That's because our business numbers are better than they've ever been. Business is up because we're in a fast-growing healthcare market segment. So our numbers are through the roof."

Julie Martinez, director, events and incentives at Lennox Industries, also sees incredible progress: "Thus far in 2012, we have done more meetings than ever. We booked a record number this year. We surmise the same amount will be booked for 2013."

Even so, the experts who predict little to zero growth in 2013 can still hear the faint sound of the lion's roar as it gets louder and louder.

Harvey Grotsky
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Fun Ship 2.0 Features Added to Carnival Glory

MIAMI, FL — The Carnival Glory returned to service following an extensive, multimillion-dollar renovation that added an array of new dining, bar and entertainment options, which are part of Fun Ship 2.0, a \$500 million product enhancement initiative that is being rolled out across the Carnival fleet. Carnival Glory launched a winter schedule of seven-day Caribbean voyages in late November. In June 2013, the ship will reposition to Boston for a series of four- and five-day Canada voyages before heading to New York for four- to seven-day Canada/New England departures through October. New offerings include Guy's Burger Joint, a complimentary poolside venue offering fresh-made burgers, hand-cut fries and innovative toppings and condiments created by Food Network personality and chef Guy Fieri; Blueguana Cantina, a free-of-charge Mexican cantina with authentic tacos and burritos; Alchemy



The Carnival Glory at Sea.

Bar, a cocktail "pharmacy" where mixologists create custom cocktails; EA SPORTS Bar, an interactive sports bar where patrons can view live action, play popular EA SPORTS video games and

keep up with the latest scores on the 24/7 sports ticker; The Punchliner Comedy Club & Punchliner Comedy Brunch Presented by George Lopez and more. www.carnival.com

Omni Nashville Hotel Tops Out



Omni Nashville Hotel General Manager Dan Piotrowski addresses the crowd at the topping out ceremony.

room space — approximately 60 meeting rooms — and 32 loading docks. The Omni Nashville Hotel was specially created to be an authentic expression of Nashville. Across from the new Music City Center, which will open in April of 2013, the luxury hotel will be connected to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum on three levels. www.omnihotels.com

NASHVILLE, TN — Nashville Mayor Karl Dean, the Nashville Metro Council, leaders from Music City Center, the Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum joined Omni Hotels & Resorts to commemorate the ceremonial topping out of the 21-story, 800-room Omni Nashville Hotel. The 800-person construction crew reached this milestone 17 months to the day after ground was broken on the new convention center hotel, which is scheduled to open in late 2013. The Omni Nashville Hotel will incorporate more than 80,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space, including a 25,000-sf ballroom, a 15,000-sf junior ballroom and more than 49,000 sf of prefunction space. The nearby Music City Center will be 1.2 million sf, featuring a 350,000-sf exhibit hall, a 57,000-sf grand ballroom and an 18,000-sf junior ballroom. It also offers 90,000 sf of meeting

AMEX Forecasts Growth in Asia Pacific to Lead All Regions, North America Expected to Be Relatively Flat

NEW YORK, NY — According to the American Express Meetings & Events 2013 Global Meetings Forecast (the Forecast), Asia Pacific, with its relatively strong economy, is likely to see the strongest growth among regions in both spending and the number of meetings. In North America, economic uncertainty is expected to keep those categories relatively flat, while Europe will likely experience declines as it continues to face a currency crisis, and due to political instability in some markets Central/South America is also expected to see slight declines overall, especially in spend. "Companies consider meetings and events to be a key strategy to driving revenue growth and change management, but acknowledge that they are proceeding with caution in a challenging global economy," said Issa Jouaneh, vice president and general manager, American Express Meetings & Events. "To maximize the return on their investment, companies are highly focused on gaining clarity around

spend, ensuring transparency as to why their organizations are holding meetings and who is attending them, and measuring the degree to which their meetings objectives have been achieved." Jouaneh continued, "While Asia Pacific is likely to experience growth in 2013, as Europe sees declines, meeting professionals in every region point to budget challenges and the need to ascertain their companies' own financial performance before they make investments in meetings as top influencers of their programs. As a result, one of the top emerging trends in the space is the shift to more local meetings. Meetings professionals are also preparing for group hotel and air expenses to rise next year."

Specifically the forecast found:

- Asia is expected to see the strongest growth in both meetings activity and spending.

- North American meetings activity and spending should remain essentially relatively flat.
- Europe will likely experience declines across categories.
- Central/South America will also likely see slight declines — especially in spending — though not as pronounced as Europe.

Group hotel rates are expected to rise:

- 4.7 percent in Central/South America,
- 4.2 percent in North America,
- 4 percent in Asia,
- 0 percent (remaining flat) in Europe.

Top 5 Destinations

1. Orlando
2. Washington, DC
3. Las Vegas
4. Miami
5. Chicago

www.americanexpress.com/businesstravel

Makeover Scheduled for South Point's Spa

LAS VEGAS, NV — The newly renovated Costa Del Sur Spa & Salon at South Point Hotel Casino Spa in Las Vegas opened December 1. The \$500,000 renovation of the 40,000-sf spa includes several new stations, a couples relaxation lounge and sauna steam Jacuzzi. "This project is more than a simple facelift to the exterior," said Ryan Growney, South Point Hotel general manager. Among the new treatments are an orange blossom pedicure, Fiji facial, deep tissue massage and a Surf City Body Treatment. Costa Del Sur will be the only Strip salon to carry the TIGI Hair Reborn line of products. www.southpointcasino.com



1, 2, 3 EIBTM, the Global Meetings & Events Exhibition welcomed more than 15,000 meetings professionals to Barcelona, Spain, for three days of business, education and networking November 27-29. **4** The EIBTM Technology Watch award was presented to BOBtv from bXb Online, a global online event platform. Meetings technology expert Corbin Ball (*far right*) chaired the judging panel. **5** Visit Orlando presented a donation of \$5,000 to National Cares Mentoring Movement and their local Greater Orlando Cares Affiliate during the 42nd Annual Congressional Black Caucus in Washington, DC. (*L to r*) Danielle Courtenay, CMO, Visit Orlando; Nouchlle

Hastings, co-chair, Greater Orlando Cares Affiliate; Geraldine Thompson, Florida State Representative; Susan Taylor, founder & CEO, National Cares Mentoring Movement; Tiffany Moore-Russell, Orange County Commissioner, Orlando; Darrell Butler, chair, Greater Orlando Cares Affiliates; and Oliver Hastings, board member, Greater Orlando Cares Affiliates **6** At the IACC-Europe Annual Conference, Leslie Vanderzwet, general manager, conferences at The Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada, was elected First V.P. of IACC. Sean Anderson, V.P. operations for Sodexo Conferencing was elected Second V.P. **7** The Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau (PHLCVB) announced a new "PHL" initiative aimed at attracting international visitors to Philadelphia. (*L to r*) Jack Ferguson, PHLCVB president and CEO, Ahmeenah Young, Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority president and CEO, and Nick DeBenedictis, PHLCVB board chairman, stand in front of the new "PHL" identifier for Philadelphia at the bureau's Annual Industry Luncheon.

Photo credits: 1-4, EIBTM; 5, Fritz Photographics; 6, IACC; 7, John W. Wlitchek, Jr./i360tours.com

IRF Survey Reveals Motivational Program Trends

ST. LOUIS, MO — Incentive programs are incorporating state-of-the-art tools and techniques such as social media, community service and gaming as a way to attract and maintain interest, according to the Incentive Research Foundation's (IRF) 2012 Fall Pulse Survey of incentive users. The survey reveals that gaming is gaining in popularity over social media and community service strategies. The survey also shows that merchandise, gift card and individual travel programs are benefiting from current economic conditions as companies plan fewer group incentive travel programs. Additionally, North American and Caribbean destinations remain the favored selections as opposed to overseas destinations, and, in terms of favored merchandise, the

study found that electronics, golf items, luggage and housewares remain the most popular rewards. Additional highlights from the survey refer to average incentive programs in the fall of 2012:

- Are less likely to incorporate a social media and/or CSR component (compared to last fall).
- Will have essentially the same budget (48 percent).

- Are more likely to incorporate a gaming component (up 6 percentage points).
- Increasingly involves the company procurement department (38 percent).
- Will include a destination in North America (53 percent) or the Caribbean (46 percent)

www.theirf.org

ESPA's 2013 Annual Conference Set for Orlando

PRINCETON JUNCTION, NJ — The Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA) welcomes event and convention service professionals to its 2013 Annual Conference at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel in Orlando, FL, to be held January 11-13. This year's theme is "Perfecting the Art of Event Service." The agenda is full of engaging and timely industry topics delivered by a host of industry experts and experienced speakers. Keynote speakers Amy Lynch and Kim Lear of BridgeWorks, a company whose focus is researching and resolving intergenerational clashes and encouraging collaboration between generations, kick off the conference. After a day of educational sessions, conference attendees will celebrate at the 25th Anniversary Black and White Beach Ball at the Swan and Dolphin. The "black-tie optional, flip-flop mandatory" event celebrates the past, present and future of the 25-year-old association. For more information, visit www.espaonline.org or contact Elizabeth Roe, membership coordinator, at 609-799-3712.



By Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP

When Meeting Planning Isn't Your Job Title — 10 Tips for Success

Few tasks are as daunting to the marketing V.P., executive assistant or HR director as being assigned responsibility for your corporation's next meeting, no matter how big or small. Unlike many large organizations that employ professional meeting planners, smaller companies often tap their department heads and supporting professionals to produce the next board meeting, annual conference or product launch. For the novice or infrequent meeting planner, the key to a successful meeting lies in first doing your internal homework, then partnering with a CVB destination expert to accomplish your corporation's meeting goals and objectives. Follow these tips to create an applause-worthy event.

1 Find answers to the 5 Ws — why (reason for the meeting), what (type of event), where (venue), when (date), and who (attendees).

Why. Determine the purpose of the meeting: Is the objective to provide member education, promote teambuilding, roll out the next product or initiate strategic planning with minimal distractions?

What. Understand the style of the event: down-to-business with few frills or high-end with planned outside group activities?

Where. Understand what is desired in a venue: Does the board chair have a favorite resort in mind? Do the demographics of the attendees favor a particular city, state or region? If there is not already a specific preferred destination, try to narrow the possibilities down to no more than three locations.

When. Identify the preferred dates: Is there flexibility in order to book the preferred hotel?

Who. There are several here. First, understand who will attend: Will the meeting be

mandatory, or will attendee promotion be required? Next, understand the division of responsibility: Are you expected to engage speakers and provide meeting content or just handle meeting production logistics? Finally, define who is the final decision-maker: you, the CEO, your board of directors? If not you, how much involvement and intermediate information does the decision-maker want, and in what form?

2 Understand your budget parameters. Are you given an amount that you must stay within, or will you create a budget for approval?

3 Be aware of any political sensitivities or red flags. Does your company produce a product that has been the target of bad press in a certain state?

4 Set your timelines. Is your meeting next year or next month? Determine your deadlines for receiving RFP responses, confirming the hotel, inviting attendees and selecting vendors, then create an action calendar to keep you on track.

5 Don't reinvent the wheel. Has this meeting been held before? If so, do you have access to notes, histories, banquet orders, invoices or programs from that event to serve as a reference for the new meeting? If you were not the organizer, can you talk to the prior planner for advice and perspective — what went well and what didn't? What would he or she change this time around? At the very least, speak with a former attendee about their impression of the last meeting.

Numerous hospitality industry organizations have websites with extensive online information about the nuts and bolts of meeting planning, sample templates for various RFPs and contracts, negotiation skills and other best practices tips.

You might want to check these out to broaden your knowledge base:

- Convention Industry Council (CIC)
www.conventionindustry.org
- Meeting Professionals International (MPI)
www.mpiweb.org
- ASAE
www.asaecenter.org
- Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA)
www.pcma.org

6 Contact the destination experts. Although you may not have all the answers, convention and visitors bureau (CVB) sales professionals can help you find them, and their services are free. CVBs are not-for-profit marketing organizations, funded primarily through local taxes, to bring travelers into their destinations. They are the expert resource for information about the area, helping you find the perfect hotel fit, offsite venues, vendors, activities and attractions. The fastest, most efficient way to compare destinations and reach out to your selected CVBs is through www.empowerMINT.com.

7 Create the RFP. Your CVB rep will discuss which hotels provide the best fit — by style, size,

sleeping room rate and amenities — and advise you in creating a request for proposal (RFP) to be sent to the properties you specify. As your representative to the hotels, your CVB partner can field hotels' follow-up questions and collect the proposals to be presented to you as a group.

8 Compare hotel proposals, and discuss them with your CVB rep for additional insights.

9 Before making your final selection, schedule a site visit. The security and knowledge you'll gain by experiencing the venue and property firsthand is invaluable. Leave the site inspection appointment details, suggestions for offsite activities and introductions to key local players to your CVB partner.

10 Use the CVB's post-RFP services to help with attendance promotion, onsite guest information, and as your link to local vendors and media.

By asking the right pre-planning questions, brushing up on your meeting planning skills online and partnering with your CVB early on, you will have the knowledge, confidence, expertise and leverage to produce a successful event. But watch out — you may get the next meeting assigned to you as well!

C&IT

“The key to a successful meeting lies in first doing your **internal homework** then partnering with a CVB.”



Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP,

is the managing director of empowerMINT.com and the Event Impact Calculator for Destination Marketing Association International. She previously served as executive vice president and chief strategy officer for the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau, as well as a distinguished career in sales with Marriott.

OUTLOOK 2013

Looking Up Toward a Better Tomorrow

By John Buchanan

Despite some indicators that suggest a still sluggish market recovering from a deep and abiding recession, the meetings outlook for 2013 is healthy and robust.

“Our budgets and the number of meetings we hold will be increasing,” says Gia Staley, CMP, manager, meetings and events, at Fort Worth, TX-based Healthpoint Biotherapeutics. “That’s because our business numbers are better than they’ve ever been. Business is up because we’re in a fast-growing healthcare market segment. So our numbers are through the roof.”

Budgets for all of her meetings will be up, says Staley, who plans about 50 meetings a year, including an annual sales meeting for 500 attendees and an incentive program for 125 qualifiers.

Healthpoint Biotherapeutics spends about \$2,300 per attendee for their five-day sales meeting. For next year, the budget will be \$2.5 million — up about 60 percent over 2011.

The company spends about \$14,000 per couple on its incentive program, which will take 60 qualifiers and guests to Paris next spring — up from 33 qualifiers in previous years.

In a broader sense, Healthpoint’s meeting activity is growing in general, Staley says, “because we have to go to larger locations than we have in the past because our meetings are larger than they’ve been in the past. And there are also certain particulars that we have to have now, such as good weather, which means we go to particular destinations like Florida, Arizona and California. And those destinations are more expensive at the times we go, such as February and March.”

Julie Martinez, director, events and incentives at Lennox Industries, a Richardson, TX-based global leader in the heating, air conditioning and refrigeration for both commercial and residential markets, has seen her company’s meeting activity explode, too.

“Thus far in 2012, we have done more meetings than ever,” says Martinez. “We booked a record number this year. They consisted of all sizes and are mostly for customers. We surmise the same amount will be booked for 2013. The commercial side of our business is doing well, and now the residential side is picking up, especially now that the housing market seems to be turning little by little. As a planner, I am pleased that Lennox recognizes and supports the value of face-to-face meetings. Most everything we do is customer-related and thus makes it that much more important that we get in front of them as much as possible. Our meetings and incentive trips allow for that.”

However, Martinez is seeing the company’s total expenditures reduced.

“With regards to budgets, our meeting spend is down for 2012, which is ironic since we are booking a record number of meetings and events,” she says. “We are challenged to do the same

quality programs with smaller budgets. Overall, my meeting budget is down approximately 10 percent, and we have been asked to give back another 10 percent on top of that for 2013. That’s tough to do now that the market is bouncing back for our suppliers. Negotiations are becoming a little tougher.”

As a result, the size and scope of Lennox’s meetings for 2013 will remain similar to those of 2012, while incentive travel will increase. “The outlook for incentive travel is looking up for 2013,” Martinez says. “We refrained from doing our main incentive trip in 2012 — a first in my 16 years at the company — due to budget and economical constraints. The HVAC business, especially on the residential side, has suffered in the past few years with sales being down. We felt we could forego the annual incentive trip for 2012, but our customers were quite unhappy about it. Therefore, for 2013 we plan to do an over-the-top incentive to Cape Town, South Africa. We also will offer two trips to Mexico for our premier dealers.”

Overall, as a planner, Martinez says her challenge is the same as those of many of her peers — to do more with less. “The workload has increased, and yet staffing levels are down,” she says. “My staff has been downsized three times over the past few years. My worry is that quality will suffer with the number of programs we are turning. Attention to detail could be compromised as we work to produce each event or meeting.”

David Rich, senior vice president, strategy and planning/worldwide, at independent event marketing agency and meeting planning consultant George P. Johnson Experience Marketing in Boston, also sees a largely healthy market.

“We’ve seen a steady incremental increase in our clients’ budgets for the last 12 months,” he says. “And one of the things we’re seeing that is related to that is an increasing understanding of the value of people getting together face-to-face.”

Lingering Concerns

Despite such optimism among indi-

vidual planners after the unprecedented meeting industry meltdown of 2008-09, however, the hard statistics tell a slightly different story.

On an industry-wide scale, business travel — including meetings — is growing, but progress is slow, says Joseph Bates, vice president of research at the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) in Alexandria, VA.



Gia Staley, CMP, Manager, Meetings and Events
Healthpoint Biotherapeutics, Fort Worth, TX

For 2012, according to GBTA data, transient business travel will increase 2.9 percent, while group spending will rise just 2.3 percent.

“That is a reversal from the last several years,” Bates says. “And the reason we’re seeing it is that companies are being much more cautious in terms of their (meeting) spend. And that happens when corporations become concerned or apprehensive about their spending if there is a lot of uncertainty about what might happen in the future. And in that kind of climate, the easiest place and first place to cut back on travel is on the meetings side.”

Further complicating a full recovery of the meetings industry is the economic crisis in Europe, Bates explains. “That also has resulted in a slowdown in the U.S. business travel market,” he says, “not just domestically, but also international outbound.”

The silver lining to that particular cloud, he notes, is economics, not any larger perspective on a changing meeting industry or the long-term of role of meetings in business. “It’s just all about macro-economics,” Bates says, adding that an important underlying issue is a quest for value. He predicts that dynam-

ic will continue to have a lasting impact on the industry.

“We’ve been seeing that ever since we started to emerge from the recession,” he says. “Companies today are looking to maximize the value they get from every dollar they spend. So those expenditures are now being scrutinized at every level.”

At the same time, however, says Cindy D’Aoust, chief operating officer and in-

“Our budgets and the number of meetings we hold will be increasing. That’s because our business numbers are better than they’ve ever been. Business is up because we’re in a fast-growing healthcare market segment. So our numbers are through the roof.”

terim CEO at Meeting Professionals International (MPI) in Dallas, top executives at U.S. companies understand that face-to-face meetings are the most successful drivers of growth.

“There are meetings that can be conducted either virtually or in some other kind of different format — that’s really nothing new,” D’Aoust says. “But when you’re talking about really driving growth or customer and employee loyalty, most people can clearly understand the impor-



“As a planner, I am pleased that Lennox recognizes and supports the value of face-to-face meetings.”

Julie Martinez
Director, Events and Incentives
Lennox Industries
Richardson, TX

tance of face-to-face events. Humans are social beings — we thrive on contact with other humans.

Nevertheless, D’Aoust acknowledges that in recent years the meeting industry



Yuri Arcurs/www.Shutterstock.com

has not done a particularly good job of reinforcing its value to organizations. “As an industry, I think we’ve been our own worst enemy over the years in that we have not done a very good job of demonstrating the real value of meetings when

lenges we all face today,” D’Aoust says. “It’s so easy for people to go online and access information now. So the real challenge today is how to deliver meaningful content to your particular audience in a way that will truly engage them and

wise media and public perception of expensive trips doled out at shareholder expense — continue to be a legitimate and enduring concern, Summers says. “I’m not convinced concern over optics will ever go away at this point.”

“So the real challenge today is how to deliver meaningful content to your particular audience in a way that will truly engage them and maintain their interest. And part of that is giving it to them in the way they want it.”

Cindy D’Aoust, COO and Interim CEO
Meeting Professionals International, Dallas, TX



it comes to driving the growth and health of companies,” she says. “Even though we’ve done a good job on studies about the overall economic impact the meeting industry has on communities, we haven’t done a very good job of demonstrating the positive impact that meetings have on individual organizations. Business leaders who use meetings for the right reasons, such as an annual sales meeting or a product launch or the training of people or creating customer loyalty or top performance by salespeople, continue to see greater growth than those who choose to cut such meetings out of their budgets.”

maintain their interest. And part of that is giving it to them in the way they want it. Moreover, meeting professionals must address the education, networking and business needs of an industry that now comprises four generations,” D’Aoust says.

Meeting professionals also face the unique challenge of defining that success and creating clear metrics that measure it. “I do believe those meetings that truly deliver value to the organization will continue to have the largest budgets and in some cases, I think we’ll see companies spending more money on those particular meetings because they are aware of the great return they will see with a well-planned and well-executed meeting,” D’Aoust says

“Many companies will still try to engage their people with extraordinary experiences that ‘surprise and delight.’”



Allison Summers
Managing Director
Site
Chicago, IL

This is just one of the many challenges facing the meeting and event industry, however. Once the meeting has begun, meeting professionals have a growing challenge of keeping participants engaged in a technology-driven era of rapid and relentless innovation, D’Aoust says. “Engagement is one of the major chal-

says Allison Summers, managing director of Chicago-based Site.

Despite a recession-driven downturn in activity over the last several years, traditional users of incentive travel such as automotive and financial services companies remain strongly committed to it as a key business tool, while relative newcomers such as technology and telecommunication companies are now enthusiastically embracing it.

At the same time, however, the nega-

In turn, that reality has had a discernible impact on destination and hotel selection. “Wise but distinctive properties are in,” Summer says. “Extravagant properties are out. Some groups will still go to a five-star hotel. But even they have to make sure those choices can be backed up with the fact there was

wisdom in the selection, that it wasn’t just an act of extravagance.”

But, she says, companies that truly understand the unique value of effective incentive programs will strive to “up their game” when it comes to satisfying the expectations of qualifiers and delivering more “experiential” travel.

And that, she says, goes to the very rationale for why incentive programs work and are a good investment.

“Many companies will still try to engage their people with extraordinary experiences that ‘surprise and delight,’” she says. “And some will put even more focus on doing that. They’ll just put more careful consideration into how they do that.”

The Hotel Perspective

Yet another encouraging trend in the industry is the steady and dynamic growth of small meetings, says Sherry Romello, senior director, Hilton meetings and product management, at McLean, VA-based Hilton Hotels.

“We also continue to see shorter lead times in planning a lot of meetings,” she says. “And we also see more frequent regional meetings.”

As a competitive strategy since the recession, hoteliers have been working to leverage brand loyalty with more and more meeting-related amenities popular with planners and attendees.

“I think pretty much all hotel brands have adopted that kind of strategy if meeting business is important to them,” Romello says. “And Hilton certainly rec-

ognizes the importance of meeting business. So we know that there are ways we can leverage our relationships to better understand what planners need and what we can bring to those relationships.”

Another emerging trend — and something that benefits both planners and hotel operators — is a growing focus on multi-year, multi-meeting agreements, as opposed to one-off events, Romello says.

However, at the same time, the inevitable pendulum is swinging back toward a seller’s market. “But is it fully back to a seller’s market yet?” she says. “I don’t know that anyone can say that. And it also varies by market. There are some that are incredibly strong, but there are others where hotels are still willing to work with you.”

And most important, Romello says that she is confident meeting demand will return to all-time-high pre-recession levels. “I definitely think we will return to pre-recession 2008 levels,” she says. “It will be a slow, steady return, but I think it will happen.”

Starwood Hotels & Resorts also expects a healthy 2013. “Our corporate customers tell us that their appetite for travel is still quite robust and there aren’t any indications that they are pulling back on travel,” says Betty Wilson, the company’s vice president, North America divisional sales. “We expect tight booking windows and smaller meetings trends to continue into 2013. We are encouraging our customers who have locked in dates to plan and book further out.”

Meanwhile, facing a tight booking window, an increase in the number of meetings planned and being sourced, and a continuing focus on “doing more with less,” Wilson says, planners are more reliant than ever on hotel sales reps, in effect, being their business consultant.

Given that reality, Wilson says, Starwood is leveraging that opportunity to extend the value of its brand. “Our focus is on being the easiest company to do business with,” she says.

That, in turn, will translate to more business as the pendulum swings back

to a seller’s market. “Supply growth in North America, especially among full-service hotels, will continue to be limited into 2013,” says Wilson, noting that Starwood offers nine individual brands within an 1,100-property portfolio that spans nearly 100 countries. “This, in combination with the continued cycle of recovery and strong demand, puts pressure on rates to rise. Availability is also becoming more limited, so planners with limited date flexibility are encouraged to plan ahead and lock in their dates further out to get the best pricing.”

However, Wilson says, she also sees post-recession destination selection across a broader spectrum. “Though corporate meetings tend to be shorter term and smaller, planners are still looking at major metro areas but also looking for airport and suburban destinations, as many corporations have ‘regionalized’ their meetings,” she says. “We offer multiple alternatives across different brands in all the major city centers and airport areas, plus fantastic secondary market locations like suburban New York, Boston and Dallas.”

More exotic domestic and international destinations remain hot as incen-



Corbin Ball, CSP, CMP, Consultant, Corbin Ball Associates, Bellingham, WA

tive programs regain their pre-recession popularity. We’ve seen an even stronger focus on creating ‘once in a lifetime’ experiences in unique destinations,” Wilson says.

Technology Drives the Future

Moreso than ever before, new and innovative meeting technologies will drive the future of the industry, says Bellingham, WA-based tech guru Corbin Ball, CSP, CMP, of Corbin Ball Associates. “These are tremendously exciting

times,” he says. “In the 30 years I’ve been watching meetings technology evolve, there has never been a more rapidly changing time than there is right now. And the change is happening faster than ever before. I think meetings will change more in the next five years because of technology than they have in the past 20.”

The No. 1 driver of that change will be the relentless progress of mobile technologies that transform every aspect of the meeting-planning process, Ball says.

“And that includes everything from interactive programs to lead exchange to audience engagement tools to attendee surveys to social media,” he says.

The major catalysts of a more tech-driven industry are iPhones and iPads, Ball says, noting that the majority of activity on Facebook and Twitter is now being driven by mobile devices.

“And all of that means meeting planners have a great opportunity now to eliminate paper, whether that is their ‘bible’ or a binder for exhibitors or attendees,” he says. “And attendees can now very easily access agenda or course notes or make notes along the way before or during the meeting.”

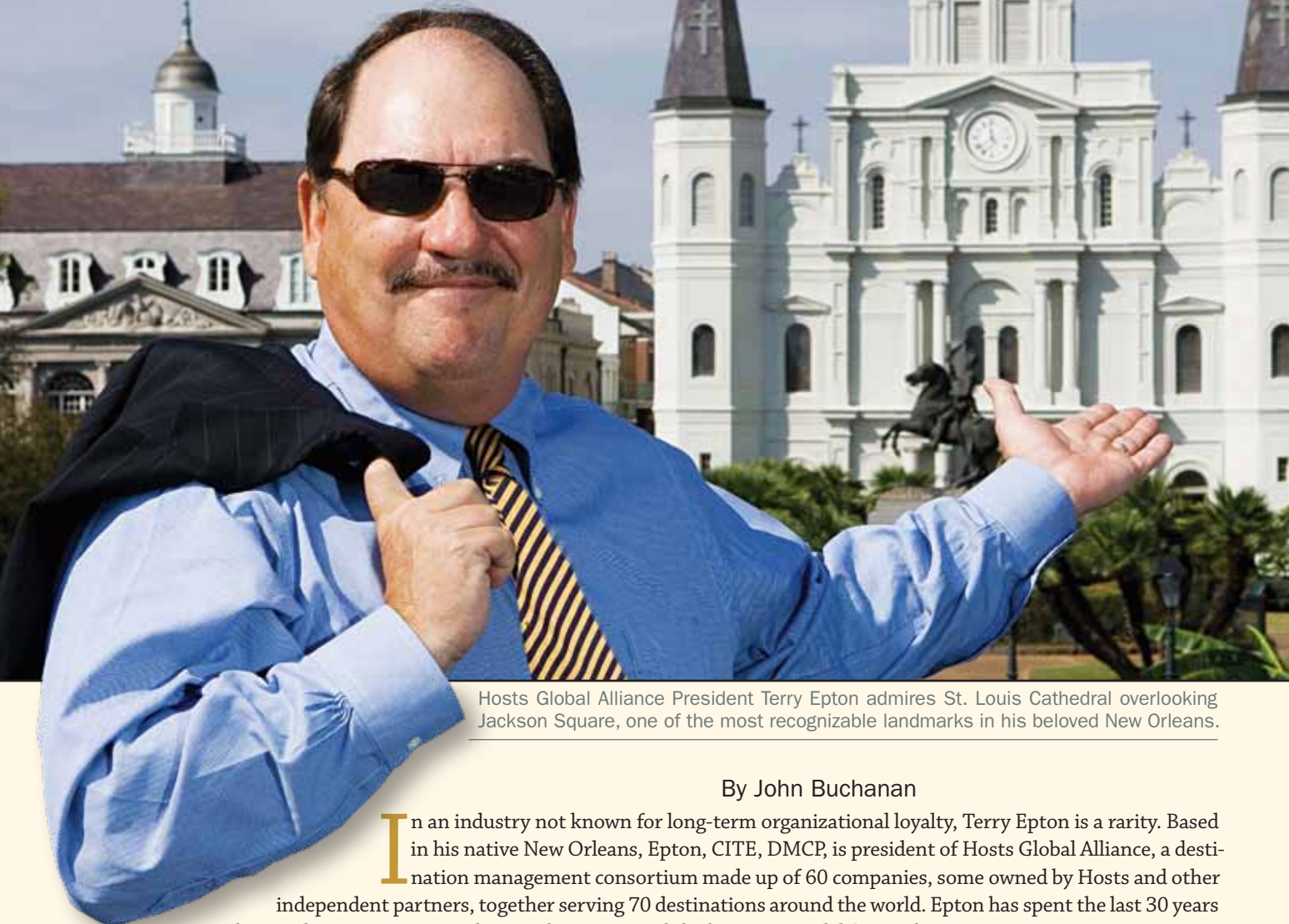
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ees are reaching unprecedented levels. “That’s why we’re seeing social media tools linked more and more to meetings now, so people really can get engaged before the meeting and make suggestions about how to make the event better from their point of view,” Ball says. “And as a result of that, more and more events will actually be organized by attendees, based on what their specific desires are. And that kind of engagement is just going to become more and more important because social media tools allow it now.” **C&IT**

Terry Epton's 30-Year Journey

The Host of New Orleans



Hosts Global Alliance President Terry Epton admires St. Louis Cathedral overlooking Jackson Square, one of the most recognizable landmarks in his beloved New Orleans.

By John Buchanan

In an industry not known for long-term organizational loyalty, Terry Epton is a rarity. Based in his native New Orleans, Epton, CITE, DMCP, is president of Hosts Global Alliance, a destination management consortium made up of 60 companies, some owned by Hosts and other independent partners, together serving 70 destinations around the world. Epton has spent the last 30 years with a single organization — the one that pioneered the business model for modern DMC groups.

Photo courtesy of f-stop Photography, LLC

Born in New Orleans, Epton earned a degree in hotel and hospitality management from the University of New Orleans. He started his career as a room clerk at a local hotel, and four years later, he joined USA Hosts and rose to become its president and CEO in early 2006 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

During that fateful year, he also served as the chairman of the board for the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau. He is currently a trustee and director of the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) and heads its Annual Incentive Invitational Committee, the primary fundraiser for IRF's research efforts.

When USA Hosts was acquired in late 2010 by Frank Andrews, owner of August Jackson, a communications design company, Epton became president of the newly formed Host Destination Services LLC, which does business as Hosts Global Alliance.

Epton recently spoke with *Corporate & Incentive Travel* about his legendary career and the lessons he has learned along the way.

C&IT How did you first become involved in the meeting industry?

Epton My intention was to work for USA Hosts for six months and use the opportunity as a place to find my next hotel job. I had previously worked my way up to director of sales at a hotel, but it wasn't the quality hotel where I wanted to be working. I wanted to be at a major downtown hotel. But then I was recruited by USA Hosts to come onboard as a salesperson. They explained to me that I'd be selling to the same kind of clients that I was already selling to, and that it would be my job to get to know all the key hotel sales and marketing directors around New Orleans. So that seemed like the perfect place for me to go, so that when I found out that a good hotel job was available, I'd be able to present myself for the position. That was 30 years ago.

C&IT What was it during those early years that made you like the meeting industry so much that you'd end up staying in it for 30 years?

Epton What was most interesting to me was the difference between working for a DMC and at a hotel. At a hotel, you're op-

erating in kind of a silo. You can work in a major hotel across the street from another major hotel and literally not know what's going on across the street from you. What I found out by working for USA Hosts was that I had an opportunity to be involved in the industry on a much wider and broader basis. I got to know the people at the CVB and the convention center and all of the major hotels in town, plus all of the major vendors and suppliers and attractions. So I was a fish in a much bigger pond.

C&IT So you saw the business advantages in functioning that way?

Epton Yes. For example, I was just at the IMEX show in Las Vegas, where sellers engage major buyers in our industry. And on a local basis, we're the biggest buyers in New Orleans. And you don't have that kind of (clout) in a hotel sales capacity. The other thing, to me, was that in a hotel sales environment, you have a very, very structured market. You handle corporate business in the Northeast region, or you handle insurance but not pharmaceutical business. Your boundaries are very tight. And in the DMC business, it's a matter of taking the path of least resistance to generate the most revenue. That is a big, big difference in terms of how you do business. It means you can go out and be creative and establish relationships across any market boundaries. And that appealed very much to me from the beginning.

C&IT As your career evolved, what were the most important business lessons you learned about the key factors that make a DMC successful in a particular market?

Epton The most important lesson I learned was that you have to be very, very good at what you're doing. You have to make promises, based on the things that people tell you they want, and you have to keep those promises. And you have to have people around you that also keep those promises. That's because a customer doesn't need a DMC to get a mediocre program. They need a DMC to get a great program. And I learned that very early on.

C&IT How does that, in turn, impact the way you do business?

Epton The important lesson there is that it's not about being cheap. It's about

being a great value. And that's a lesson that has served me very well along the way in a very tough industry.

C&IT What about the lesson when it comes to relationships with customers?

Epton The thing you learn there is that your customers trust you with their job. They literally put their job in your hands. Within a hotel, they have their convention services manager, who is their liaison with the front desk and security, and the catering department and all the different service areas within a hotel. Outside of the hotel, the DMC is sort of the convention services manager for everything they'll be doing in the rest of the city, whether that's at the airport and with transportation or with décor or entertainment, or restaurants and offsite event venues. The point is that a good DMC has to be a customer's conduit to all of those elements. And they depend on us to be experts, suggesting what's right and getting things done for them within all of those various categories within the destination.

C&IT When you finally became CEO of USA Hosts, how did you continue to base a vision for the brand on the lessons you had learned?

Epton The Hosts brand had actually originated with the first DMC in the U.S., which had been in San Francisco — San Francisco Hosts. Our previous owner purchased it and had also bought a company called Holiday Tours that became USA Holidays. But it was a leisure travel company. So with San Francisco Hosts, his vision was to change the rest of the company into a national chain of DMCs that concentrated on corporate and association meeting business.

C&IT How did you rise through the organization?

Epton I was a regional director of sales, then the vice president of sales for several years. And we expanded the company quite a bit during those years. Then we had our first hiccup, which was 9/11. And I wouldn't call it a hiccup. I would call it a major obstacle to the future of the business, because looking back, we reacted slower than the rest of the industry in terms of contracting the size of our operations and downsizing. The reason for that



(Clockwise from top) Epton and staff at an early '90s Hosts New Orleans lunch at the famous Pat O'Brien's; at a trade show around 1986; Hosts Sales Director Epton, Director of Operations Liz Scoggin (Dodson) and Hosts President Woody Hensley, in 1985.



Vegas. We went from an office that was doing upwards of \$10 million a year in business to one around \$4 million almost overnight. And at that point, there was no question that we had to make the kind of changes we had been reluctant to make before. But as things turned out, Las Vegas was down, but not out. As a result, I'm very glad to be able to say that our Las Vegas business is about 90 percent of the way back to where it was, in terms of revenue, and growing steadily. Our Las Vegas operation is humming now.

was because we had become like a big family that had been working together for a long time. As a result, we were very reluctant to lay people off. But that ended up hurting us in the long run, because by the time we saw what had actually happened to the industry as a result of 9/11 and the aftermath, we had put ourselves in a big hole financially. And it took us a long time to work our way out of that. Then we went through Hurricane Katrina. I was chairman of the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau during that year when we saw the city's brand all but destroyed by the storm. And that was the year during which I learned more about what it takes to be successful in this industry than in any other year.

C&IT Then came the global economic crisis and meeting industry crisis of 2008 and 2009.

Epton That affected our operations in Las Vegas dramatically, because the commentary out there was that it was not prudent for corporate clients to be taking meetings and incentives to places like Las

Vegas. We went from an office that was doing upwards of \$10 million a year in business to one around \$4 million almost overnight. And at that point, there was no question that we had to make the kind of changes we had been reluctant to make before. But as things turned out, Las Vegas was down, but not out. As a result, I'm very glad to be able to say that our Las Vegas business is about 90 percent of the way back to where it was, in terms of revenue, and growing steadily. Our Las Vegas operation is humming now.

C&IT Having been in the business as long as you had by then, would you ever have imagined the kind of crisis the industry faced in 2008 and 2009?

Epton No. I was caught completely flat-footed, with my mouth hanging open, because I always saw the business that we were in as a driver of the economy, as a big creator of jobs for people that might not have college degrees. I always saw our industry as an integral part of the economy. So to see something like that happen, I realized it was more about optics or perception than it was about reality. And thank God, we have recovered from it, gotten healthy again and are actually stronger.

C&IT Do you think the industry will ever get back to its peak before the start of the 2008 meltdown?

Epton Yes. I am thoroughly convinced that will be the case. That's because the hospitality industry is very much tied to the general health of the economy. I believe that the U.S. economy is a bit of a sleeping giant right now. People have a lot of money on the sidelines, and they're still a little afraid to peek around the corner and see what's coming down the road. So they're still being conservative and protecting their reserves. They're not being as bold as they normally would, because they're still apprehensive in light of all that's happened in the last few years. But in my opinion, we just need the right climate to take hold with the economy. Then I think we'll see a tremendous amount of growth in the industry. I think it's inevitable. America has the strongest economy in the world and the strongest work force in the world. So sooner or later, the lion is going to roar again.

C&IT Looking back to before the recession, what do you think were the most important ways the industry had changed and evolved over the course of your career?

Epton When I got into the business, we didn't have fax machines, cellphones, FedEx or desktop computers. Everything was done on telephones and legal pads. So the change in the business has been profound. But as a business, the meeting industry also grew and matured at a rate that was just dumbfounding. For example, the proliferation of convention centers and what they can do for a city's economy is really something that is very striking. And that expansion of convention center capacity in places like New Orleans meant that we started to see the massive kinds of citywide conventions that we've seen evolve over the years. But that has also meant that with all the new convention centers, the industry has become more competitive. So today, it's become harder to get those major conventions to your destination.

C&IT What will be the biggest issues

Terry's Top 10 Lessons Plus One More About Fun

- 1. Experience doesn't mean anything until you have some.** I try to first listen, then empathize and finally seek to coach our younger employees. I have a lot more experience, but seeing business through their eyes is priceless.
- 2. While technology and business practices are constantly changing, doing the business we do is still about trusting people and earning people's trust.** When I came to Hosts in 1982 I quickly realized that my customers were putting their jobs in my hands and that it was all about earning their trust. It is the same today.
- 3. Your reputation is shaped by your worst days, not your best... always take the high road.** Shortcuts are often risky, and your success is based on your body of work. Avoid the temptation to say whatever it takes to get the business and just give people the straight facts. You may lose a battle, but it's about winning the war.
- 4. Don't get hung up on being right.** There are a lot of right ways to do things. Just because it isn't your right way doesn't mean it's wrong. Most arguments take place because both people are right. When you agree to do it their way, they take ownership and good outcomes are guaranteed.
- 5. That's why we call it work.** The reason we are a valuable and vital part of successful programs and events is because we work hard and we do our homework. When employees over the years have commented about how hard it is to get it all right, I say, "That's why we call it work."
- 6. Pay it forward, do whatever it takes.** Once the contract is signed and the program is in motion, don't be a scorekeeper. Pitch in and do whatever it takes to help your customer's programs be successful. Sometimes that means troubleshooting and helping fix something you technically aren't responsible for. There is plenty of time to look back and see how a program or an event had a successful outcome. Never look back at a letdown and say, "I saw that coming."

- 7. You get back as much as you put in.** Some people step up, and some people watch. I've found that being a mentor, volunteering for industry associations and local industry groups is critical to your personal and professional development. One day you will find yourself in a position of leadership, and the watchers will all say how lucky you were to get there.
- 8. You never learn anything with your mouth open.** That's what my mother told me when I was in grammar school, and it has been true throughout my entire life. Ask intelligent questions and learn. If you close your mouth and listen, your customers will tell you exactly what they want you to sell them.
- 9. Everything that I know how to do right, I've done wrong at least once.** Life is about learning, and learning from one's mistakes is how you become wise and experienced. Whenever we hire someone I tell them it is okay to make mistakes...as long as you don't make the same mistake twice. Then I watch them very closely.
- 10. It's about the people...it's about teamwork...hire great people who are smarter than you.** The only way to move up is to have smart, reliable people who you can trust with delegated authority. The smart ones will make you sing. The others will have you explaining.

Have fun and never take yourself too seriously. There is a reason why we are drawn to an industry that has its foundations in delivering "fun." It has been our philosophy that you cannot successfully sell fun if you don't know how to have it...and if you aren't having fun, this stuff is just too hard. There's a reason why most of my notes were on cocktail napkins back when I was a full-time salesperson!



Epton practicing what he preaches — having a little fun in celebration of his 30 years.

or challenges in the industry over the next few years?

Epton I think one is continuing globalization and at the same time, the economic concerns over places like Spain, Greece or Italy. When companies are risking large amounts of money to build new hotels, the last thing they want is the kind of volatility that can turn your business upside down overnight. But the flip side of that is that people around the world are much more global now and the emerging markets like China and Brazil are going to be sending more and more people to the U.S. Right now, there are still some barriers to that. But I see the U.S. Travel

Association working to ease the process of getting visas to come here. And that is a very good thing for our industry, particularly when it comes to things like Pan-European incentive programs.

C&IT As the industry continues to recover and grow, why do you think New Orleans remains such a popular meeting and convention destination?

Epton If I had to use one word that sets us apart, it's that we're authentic. New Orleans is a truly authentic destination that's unlike any other place in the U.S. We were a European city for 100 years before we became an American city. So we have a different outlook on life here.

People who were born here, like me, tend to stay here. And people who come here tend to end up staying here. And that's why I moved our corporate headquarters here when I became CEO of USA Hosts after Hurricane Katrina. I had been asked by our then owner, on a number of occasions, to move to Nevada or the West Coast, and I declined to do that because New Orleans has a lifestyle and a way of existence that is contagious. Once you've experienced it, you just don't want to be anywhere else. And over the years, that has also come to be true in the hearts and minds of an awful lot of meeting planners and attendees.

C&IT

The Great Meeting Space Makeover

How Hotels Are Adapting to the New Ways Attendees Connect and Collaborate

By Harvey Chipkin

If we can't evolve the way we do meetings, meetings in hotels could become obsolete." That is the word from Peggy Fang Roe, vice president, strategy, global operations services for Marriott International, which has sought to be a leader in rethinking the way people conduct and participate in meetings.



ROE

As Roe indicates, the future of meetings is here now. The long-held idea of a meeting as an event where a group of people sit face forward in a room and listen to somebody is ending — if not over. As a result, meeting venues are rushing to deal with changes even as planners struggle to keep up themselves. The changes are well-known and include:

- The increasing reliance on mobile devices to communicate;
- The rapidly evolving communication patterns of those who grew up tethered to technology;
- Change in the very purpose of meeting at a time when getting information is easy, and connecting with other people has become more challenging.

The Future of Meetings

As a result of all this, suppliers are working hard to preempt the future of meetings. Earlier this year, Marriott unveiled a "Future of Meetings and Work" program at its Global General Manager's Conference. GMs saw demonstrations of a number of meetings innovations, including mobile apps and redesigned spaces. Marriott is already testing and

implementing some of these innovations because, as Roe says, "Sitting in a conference room theater-style, watching a PowerPoint presentation, is not the way people operate anymore. The real work is done outside of that — the collaboration and connections that happen in breakout spaces and informal meetings. People are taking in information in different ways."



Photo courtesy of Marriott International

Marriott's "Future of Meetings and Work" project includes the Workspring initiative in partnership with Steelcase, which is reinventing small-meeting workspace designs in hotels (above) to encourage collaboration.

The most popular app in the early testing, says Roe, was Redcoat Direct, a mobile app that allows Marriott's traditional redcoat service person to communicate with the planner who is in the meeting room. If the planner punches into the app that they need more coffee, the redcoat will know where they are and can punch back that the coffee is on its way.

Another Marriott initiative is called Workspring, a partnership with Steelcase, the office equipment company, that provides a new kind of meeting space "designed for the way people operate now." It takes underutilized spaces and employs furnishings, lighting and technology to make them more useful. "One of the big insights of our research concerned the importance of ROI," says Roe, "which we think is complementary to how work is changing. Even in a meeting of 1,000 people, the real productivity happens in the ancillary areas of informal meetings, and we will be doing a better job of facilitating that. The mobile factor will really change how meetings are executed to make them both more local and more global," says Roe, "as well as more social and more collaborative. You could even be in the meeting room

watching the speaker on your iPad because it makes it easier."

On-Demand Society

"We live in an on-demand society," says Michael Dominguez, senior vice president of sales for MGM Resorts International,



DOMINGUEZ

and all these changes will come because the audience is demanding it. "At this point," says Dominguez, "everything has to be customized, and we are all about having to create solutions. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all solution. The planner today is being charged with content curation, and we as hoteliers have to be their partners in making their content live and breathe — whether it's through technology or the room itself or the way that the meeting is structured."

But Dominguez cautions, "Planners should not be pressured into doing what they don't need to do. Planners think they need an app for every meeting, and maybe they don't. It's our job to help them decide questions like that so they get the most possible value out of their events. At the end of the day, the meet-

ing is driven by your customers, who are your attendees. Planners need to ask a lot of questions. Sometimes we're nervous about looking silly, but you have to be confident in asking questions.

"That's why," says Dominguez, "we try to have our staff be as educated as possible — so they can help planners make the right decisions about all these changes. Planners will have to change but they don't have to change everything today — and they don't even have to change immediately."

Connectivity Concerns

At Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, according to Marc Cassier, Fairmont's executive director, conference services and catering, "Connectivity is a key



CASSIER

concern for modern events, so we're doing everything from adding a high-tech media lounge called Intersect at The Fairmont San Francisco — where groups can mingle and hold intimate, technology-driven events — to strategically placing Internet docking and charging stations, wireless touch panels and more in renovated function spaces at properties like Fairmont Washington, DC."

When it comes to technology, of course, connectivity is No. 1. "Imagine," says Kristin Kurie, president of The Wilderman Group, which operates a number of conference centers, "we are going to have 900 attendees in a general session and everyone is using a smartphone and a tablet — that's what we're going to need to accommodate. We're going to need a bigger boat. And people want connectivity the minute they walk into the building. They don't want an onerous log-in process."

Things change so fast that the company's facility in Richmond Hill, which opened just three years ago, is already revisiting its technology needs.

Tony Yousfi, director of sales for Aria Resort & Casino in Las Vegas, which invested heavily in its technology before opening three years ago, agreed that



Photo courtesy of Marriott International

A Marriott "Future of Meetings and Work" work-lab, which is testing newly imagined hotel conference spaces with updated technology, furniture configurations, lighting and more.

Planners: Dealing With the Real World

While major hotel brands may be at the top of the curve in adapting to changes in how meetings are conducted, meeting planners have to work in the real world of clients and companies who may be resistant to change. And they have to deal with the reality of current circumstances — rather than futuristic pie in the sky. Kyle Hillman, CMP, conference planner for the National Association of Social Workers, says he recently had a Twitter exchange with one hotel that was touting free Wi-Fi in meeting rooms. “I asked them about the guest rooms and access was not free there. What does that do for me? Do they charge for air conditioning?”

And Hillman has not yet seen much evidence of the new look to meeting spaces although he is intrigued. “The concept is very attractive to me. From a cost standpoint, I love the idea that the hotels might make the technology and furnishings cheaper for me. It can be a deciding point for me because I can spend my pool of money on something else. If I’m comparing spaces to spaces, I look for the one with more character, which will enable me to spend less time creating the experience I’m looking for.”

Judy Johnson, president and CEO of Rx Worldwide Meetings Inc. in Plano, TX, that handles pharmaceutical meetings, says that her clients are frequently resistant to change. “I’m really big on Audio Response Systems and would love to see more of that in meetings where audience members are frequently reticent to ask questions.”

However, says Johnson, “for many of our clients, the formula remains the same. The speaker gets up and does an introduction and the protocol of what a drug is about. Then somebody else talks about reporting. There is little deviation.” However, technology has invaded even those meetings, says Johnson, because “they often have a hybrid element with speakers addressing attendees from a remote location.”

Things might change at some point, says Johnson

because “attendees are getting younger. They have smartphones and they’re emailing and texting during the meeting. If we had ARS we could capture a lot of that energy.”

Mandy Archer, director of meetings for Rx Worldwide Meetings, agrees that “Technology enables us to create an interactive environment so people are not afraid to express their opinions.”

The big picture, says Archer, is that “these changes are happening slowly, and hotels are integrating the changes slowly. We are very happy when a hotel has a studio from which we can do a live webcast, and we utilize services like that where we can.”

Nancy Kwon, director of executive relations with iRise, a high-tech company based in El Segundo, CA, sees venue choice as critical because her meetings depend on voluntary attendance by existing and potential clients. “We had our annual conference in the Aria (Resort & Casino) in Las Vegas last year,” she says. “We looked at five or six properties in Las Vegas and went with the best package. Also, we thought the Aria would be attractive because it was the newest property in town and was bright and airy so attendees wouldn’t feel cooped up.”

The annual iRise conference, says Kwon, is heavily educational: “We show them our product road map and features coming down the pipeline and case studies. We also have some existing customers showing how they solved problems using our software. And finally we bring in partners who use our software and might have their own offerings for clients.”

While the conference is not broadcast outside the venue, says Kwon, social media is coming into play. “We had a Twitter contest,” she says, “for most Tweets, most creative Tweet and some others.”

While attendees are not surveyed for age,” says Kwon, “they seem to be in their late 20s to late 30s and because of the natures of their jobs in middle management.”

For the future, Kwon is open to different cities but will tend to look at new hotels where “the layout is more up to date.”

— HC

connectivity is fundamental, noting, “Most attendees are now carrying three devices: a phone, a tablet and a laptop. Multiply those three times 2,000 people and you can see the kind of bandwidth that you need.”

“Every technology need is built into the space, and that means a lot of cost savings. Instead of a blind bid for AV, the planner will find that we’ve built everything into the meeting package,” Yousfi explains.

And it’s not just big convention venues like the Las Vegas hotels that are seeing all these changes. At Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, geared to the top tier of C-level meetings, change is rapid as well. “These leaders,” says Tom Ernsting, director of group market sales, “are challenged to transform their organizations to be cutting-edge. Our differentiator as a brand is contemporary luxury, and we aim to have a more modern take on the meetings industry.”

Technology, asserted Ernsting, starts well before an event and lasts well after. He explains, “The whole sales process is different. Instead of handouts, gifts and doughnuts, now it’s working with planners who might be home-officing or job-sharing. We need to do



ERNSTING

webcasts for that and state-of-the-art technology for our presentations.”

Playing Catchup

And even hotels that were created in another era of meetings are reacting to all the changes. The 45-year-old Hyatt Regency Atlanta, which just spent \$65 million on redoing its meeting spaces and other services has a special room for planners called the Chicago Meeting Planner Room, complete with full-sized refrigerator, microwave, printer and executive chairs. Its serves as the heart of the conference. The flat-screen television in that room serves as a screen to monitor events going on throughout the meeting space from the hotel’s security cameras. The planner can watch breakout rooms, registration lines and large ballroom events all at once without leaving their desks. “That room has been a home run,” says Casper van Eldik Thieme, director of sales and marketing. “Planners can look at the screens and see if a meeting has broken early and act accordingly.”

Blending Social Space With Meeting Space

While technology is critical to the new meetings, everything from comfortable couches to art on the walls is also being thrown into the mix of how people connect today.

“The way people work has changed dramatically,” says Roe, “and the nature of work is driving all the things we’re doing, especially for the next generation of meeting attendees. People need to meet face-to-face, but that’s not enough. The place in which they meet needs to be inspiring. You have to evaluate these spaces.

“It’s not just that the room is different or outdated,” says Roe, “It the idea of social space blended with meeting space. It allows people to have meetings, breakouts, then a meal without stopping their conversation.”

Recently, says Cassier, “We’ve been coordinating less formal setups that feature a distinct residential feel. Comfortable and stylish seating arrangements that encourage discussion



Aria Resort & Casino’s technologically sophisticated meeting spaces offer built-in videoconferencing, plasma TVs, HD projection screens, advanced wiring and more.

and collaboration really bring attendees out of their shells. Incorporating natural light into meeting spaces is another important trend that we’re seeing everywhere from the new hutong (Chinese street) inspired meeting rooms at Fairmont Beijing to the brand new \$20 million Palomino Conference Center at Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, which features “nano” walls that open up to the outdoors for a refreshing open-air meeting or evening banquet. Natural light has been shown to increase productivity as well as make people feel more energetic, making it a priority for meeting planners.

Kurie says that the space often drives the meeting itself. In the new LeGrand Conference Center in Shelby, NC, she says, “this is a LEED Silver building, and the sustainability is informing the way space is used. There is so much daylight everywhere, even in the ballroom, that it causes planners to rethink their events. Think about your own personal lives where we have a great-room effect. Everyone hangs out in the kitchen, and that’s what you’re seeing with meeting space. There is a need for formal spaces but also for fluid spaces.

“To some degree,” says Kurie, “you see groups making it up as they go along. We had one medical group that has always done their training in a certain way. When they come to LeGrand, they use the building to their advantage.”

And even in Las Vegas, with its huge ballrooms and space, says Yousfi, changes are coming into room environ-

ments. “We do have rooms with sofas and tables and chairs that lay back — and pods of furniture, because when it comes to meetings, networking is key.”

And in a luxury setting, says Ernsting, “the flow, content and feel of the meeting call for non-traditional spaces. In Las Vegas we converted a former art gallery into an informal space for breakouts and other sessions. With all the spectacular elements of that hotel, this really hits a nerve with planners.

No space goes undiscovered anymore says Ernsting: “Even a bar might be used for a meeting because it’s been shown that different environments create more energy.” A couple of hotels even have beach-style cabanas, where small groups can retreat after a session for an informal session.

Ideally, all this investment in technology and new environments will be rewarding for the hotels and for planners. “Whenever you improve efficiencies,” says Cassier, “you’re going to have a bigger bang for your buck. And when you give younger attendees the connectivity and high-tech presentations they crave, you’re going to encourage attendance among a demographic that expects to always be plugged in.”

Looking ahead, Dominguez sees a future that might verge on sci-fi. “I look at facial recognition technology and how you might not have a device but might be connecting through every surface you touch. How does that change the dynamic of a meeting?”

C&IT

Theme Park Meetings

By Stella Johnson

Greenough Communications attendees are fully engaged on a thrill ride at historic Canobie Lake Park in Salem, NH.

The Fun Factor Relaxes, Energizes and Delights

With the roller coaster economy back on the upswing, business is looking pretty good for theme parks. The Themed Entertainment Association's 2011 annual global theme park attendance report noted that the industry grew 4.8 percent in 2011 over 2010. The rise in attendance and spending on thrills and spills is due not only to rising consumer confidence and pent-up demand, but to successful efforts by the industry to reinvent and upgrade its offerings: According to Global Industry Analysts, theme parks are bullish on expansion plans that include more hotel rooms, secondary attractions, state-of-the-art rides, and wireless and interactive technology services such as RFID badges, Wii, kiosks, etc.

The importance of the fun factor can never be overstated for the overworked.

Theme park meetings allow attendees to really get away from it all and interact with coworkers and executives on a truly level "playing" field. For planners, theme parks are a natural choice, offering unmatched value, and built-in special event venues and entertainment guaranteed to boost group morale and enthusiasm.

Orlando's Magic

Probably no place brings out the inner child more than Disney theme parks, and Leigh Bentley has seen the effect firsthand: "During my tenure as the meeting manager for a restaurant organization, we hosted our annual convention at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel, centrally located at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, FL. During that event, we incorporated theme park characters into our opening

general session and provided meet-and-greet opportunities with them during breaks. The event was an 'adults only' one, so we were really surprised to see so many people lining up to have their pictures taken with the Disney characters."

Now, as meeting services division manager of a major franchise organization, Bentley says that Disney is still part of the picture. For the franchise's June 2012 annual national convention, there were more than 2,200 franchise attendees and family members in attendance, representing all age groups.

"We have been apprehensive about holding an event at a theme park for many years as we were concerned about how the destination would impact attendance at our required events. After much discussion with the city, the parks, the resort and other meeting planners, we

decided to return to Orlando after a 25-year hiatus," states Bentley.

"What we do is to each year ask our attendees for suggestions as to where they would like to have a future event. For several years now, they have been requesting a return to Orlando. Normally, we keep the location of future conventions a secret and then, at our annual meeting, we reveal the next year's destination during our final awards event. We even play it up and tease the group a little about where we are going — show them destinations with a 'not yet' or 'nope' graphic over it. Last time, when we finally announced that we were going to Orlando, well, the room just went wild."

One of the reasons for going with the Disney choice was the proximity of the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel to the Walt Disney World Resort theme parks, which include the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Hollywood Studios and Animal Kingdom. Attendees could access the various parks on foot or by boat or bus.

"We made it so that the attendees would be able to work around our event agenda: attending our required events in the morning, and visiting the parks in the afternoon and evening. If we had selected a property farther from the theme parks, or without access to them, we might have seen a decline in attendee participation in our sessions since they would have had to spend more time determining how to transfer to the parks."

This strategy paid off in a big way for the franchise group as the nationwide organization reports that by carefully planning its business agenda so that it provided free time for the attendees in the afternoon and evening, it had the highest overall attendance in its entire history, with owner attendance increasing by as much as 13 percent and guest attendance increasing by 18 percent over the previous year.

The hotel hosted the general sessions, trade show, breakout meetings and awards sessions, with the majority of the sleeping rooms housed at the Dolphin. "We had considered hosting our opening-night reception in one of the theme parks," Bentley relates. "But, based on our arrival schedules and the way we permit

Ed Coletti
Executive V.P.
Greenough
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Boston, MA



"We all have such great memories of going to amusement parks as kids, we thought it would be fun to revisit those memories and create some new ones."

additional guests to attend our reception without paying to attend, we were unable to coordinate the financial logistics to make an 'in-park' event work for us. So, we hosted our reception on the beach of the Dolphin hotel. This made for a great evening for our attendees. Not only was the weather beautiful, but attendees could walk to the Boardwalk or Epcot after our event to watch the fireworks." Disney's Boardwalk is a popular dining, entertainment and shopping district.

Since families are such a big part of the franchise's annual meeting, the company always strives to schedule appropriate activities and entertainment for the children, allowing parents the opportunity to visit the many vendor booths.

"We placed theme park characters outside our trade show to keep the younger crowd — and many of the older crowd — engaged in being in the trade-show space. We also had characters attend our opening night reception on the beach. The photo opportunities were wonderful and kept the interest of our guests throughout the evening," Bentley notes. "But, due to the theme park character regulations, we had to modify some placement of characters around our trade show and create places for the meet and greet. Some of the rules were a little extreme, but we were able to make them work for our group."

While Bentley admits that a theme park destination may not be the best selection for every group or for every year, she says that every three to four years,

providing such a change can boost attendance.

"Holding a convention at a theme park destination enables attendees to bring their families for extended vacations. So, allow ample activities for attendees and guests, and incorporate a variety of inter-

ests and entertainment into the event sessions," Bentley advises. "Of course, the added value is that increased attendance at a meeting or convention permits the group to communicate the message directly to the larger audience, making a stronger impact on future results by reaching more of the people who can implement the needed actions and changes to attain projected growth."

Orlando's other major player is Universal Orlando Resort, which boasts the wildly popular Wizarding World of Harry Potter in the Islands of Adventure park. The Themed Entertainment Association reports that Islands of Adventure posted a 29 percent increase in attendance in 2011 over 2010, in large part due to the Harry Potter effect.

Groups that stay in any of Universal's AAA Four Diamond onsite hotels enjoy early access to Islands of Adventure or Universal Studios one hour before they open; and can skip the regular lines during normal park hours. The three onsite hotels are Loews Portofino Bay Hotel with 750 guest rooms and 42,000 sf of meeting space; Loews Royal Pacific with 1,000 guest rooms and 85,000 sf of meeting space; and Hard Rock Hotel with 650 guest rooms and 6,000 sf of meeting space.

Updates to the meeting space and ballrooms at Loews Royal Pacific and Hard Rock were completed in September; and guest room renovations at Loews Royal Pacific will be completed in stages, with the first half scheduled for a 2014 completion and the rest in 2015. Hard Rock also will update its guest rooms at some future date. Loews Portofino Bay was scheduled to finish renovations to all guest rooms in December 2012. Construction of the new, more moderately priced 1,800-room Cabana Bay Beach Resort will be completed in 2014.

Planners can arrange for special events to be held inside the theme parks or at a restaurant or club at Universal's CityWalk, a dining, entertainment and shopping district. Groups also can book the entire CityWalk complex for a massive block party.

Staying Close to Home

Booking a popular theme park doesn't always mean heading for Orlando.

Sometimes a planner has to work within the confines of budget and convenience, as was the case recently with Ed Coletti, executive vice president of Greenough Communications, located in Boston, MA.

"We all have such great memories of going to amusement parks as kids, we thought it would be fun to revisit those memories and create some new ones too," says Coletti. "We saw it as a chance to build on the camaraderie that we're

lucky to have here at Greenough. This was the first year (July 2012) we decided on a theme park, too. We wanted to create an event that would allow all of us on the team to get outside, dress casually and have some fun on a beautiful summer day. We viewed it as a great way to offer a small thank you to the group for all of their hard work."

The Greenough group selected the historic Canobie Lake Park, which has

opened every summer since 1902 with rides, games, live entertainment, shops and other attractions. The park is in Salem, NH, 40 miles north of Boston.

Coletti says the Canobie Lake staff was extremely helpful with all the details of the one-day corporate outing. Not only were there enough hardcore rides to satisfy the thrill seekers but plenty of other things to do to keep everyone happy.

"All in all, we found it to be a great way for us to bring the team together offsite in a safe, convenient environment," Coletti adds. "Since the venue is located a little over an hour north of Boston, we rented two large passenger vans and broke the group into two teams. We're a very competitive group, and we wanted to ensure that we had a friendly rivalry going on between the two teams.

"We set up an onsite scavenger hunt, gave everyone maps of the park, provided tee shirts (different colors per team) and gave each team a camera in order to record their exploits," he notes. "With bragging rights at stake, each team set off on their own searching for the various items or landmarks on the list with a pre-arranged time for everyone to meet at lunch to review their results. Once we finished lunch, we continued to explore the park, but this time, we did it as one group, which created even more laughs and photo opportunities for us. For us, this event was all about having fun and getting the group out of the corporate environment," Coletti says. "We don't get many chances to do things as a group outdoors, so this was a really great way for us to accomplish that."

Another group that booked a "local" park was Empire Beauty Schools (EBS), a 75-year-old company with 110 teaching schools located in 22 states and headquartered in Pottsville, PA. John Dalton, vice president of communications at EBS, says their nearby theme park of choice is Hersheypark. The group holds a company-wide competition and trade show at Hershey every year.

EBS has been so successful holding events at Hersheypark that it has even outgrown it. "But they love our group and work with us to accommodate all of our needs as much as possible. It's fun and exciting, especially with our annual student

competition, and our 125-exhibitor trade-show floor. Everyone looks forward to it," says Dalton.

"For the student competition, they have to first qualify at their local Empire school so that only the best of the best are competing against each other. Other people who attend include educators and family members, for emotional support," states Coletti. "Also, there's our trade-show floor, which normally contains 125 exhibitors of the professional hair care industry, and our network café where hair salon companies can interview our students on the spot."

Dalton says that all of this goes on in the Hershey Lodge during the day. During the evening hours, attendees are free to explore the park with the general populace from 7 to 10 p.m. But, between 10 p.m. and midnight, Empire buys out the park for its sole use. "So all the attendees can enjoy the park two ways, as part of the general public and as part of group," adds Dalton. "We have hosted events like this in New York City, Baltimore, Philadelphia and other places, but there are two reasons why we go back to the Hersheypark: customer service, which has always been outstanding, and its Disney quality of cleanliness. Even our students claim it is a five-star facility. It's not too hard to talk about something you're pleased about, and that's a tribute to Hershey."

History Lessons

Colonial Williamsburg, "the world's largest living history museum," held a special charm for Archstone, an apartment operation company headquartered in Alexandria, VA, and Old Dominion Electric Cooperative (ODEC), an electric generation and transmission group headquartered in Glen Allen, VA.

Nadine Francis, vice president of training at Archstone, says she coordinated a meeting at the early American-themed park in Williamsburg, VA, last April, a decision that afforded the group an interesting change of pace. It was a first-time visit for the group of 110 attendees, which included trainers, HR, marketing and operations representatives, and all levels of management.

"We selected the Williamsburg Lodge at

Colonial Williamsburg," says Francis. "It is a quaint setting — elegant yet offering a casual hotel environment. The convenient location and the professionalism of the staff were amazing."

Archstone's three-day conference involved business meetings, an annual awards dinner in the lodge, game night at the hotel and tours of Colonial Williamsburg including orientation walks, tours of the city or art museums, carriage rides and more. "I would have to say the history part was usually missing from our past choices," says Francis. "Each year we try to do something different, which can include downtown locations or resorts up the East Coast. But this year, Colonial Williamsburg proved to be extra special for us."

Meeting at Colonial Williamsburg was not a first-time event for Erin Puryear, manager, member services and energy innovation planning at Old Dominion Electric Cooperative. She stresses that the historic site is more like a permanent fixture for her company.

"We schedule a conference every year for our electric cooperatives," Puryear states. "With help from a planning committee and coworkers, we determine the timing, location, menu, speakers-presenters, and extra-curricular activities, including receptions and our annual golf outing. We have held this meeting every year at Williamsburg since 2003 with the last four years at Williamsburg Lodge."

ODEC's meeting is an industry-related informational conference that typically has 70-110 attendees, including cooperative staff and vendor sponsors. Puryear states that the cooperative picked the Williamsburg Lodge because it was a central location for its attendees with three airports relatively close by; and the group enjoys the many attractions at Colonial Williamsburg including a variety of tours like a "Ghost Walk" in the evenings.

As for group feedback: "Year after year, it's always positive. That's why we've been holding this conference at Colonial Williamsburg for nearly 10 years now. It is our belief that it is more relaxing and provides for a more upbeat experience at the conference than other possible choices," she concludes.

C&IT

Sports Parks

While not a theme park in the traditional sense, Chelsea Piers is a 30-acre sports and entertainment urban complex located along the Hudson River in lower Manhattan. The complex includes a multi-tiered outdoor driving range, health club, sky rink, field house, two event centers (The Lighthouse and Maritime Center) and Silver Screen Studios, among other offerings and programs designed for families and corporate groups.

Conversation LLC, a New York City-based full-service marketing agency with a roster of high-profile clients such as Nordstrom, E*Trade and L'Oreal, took time out for some teambuilding with 30 participants at Chelsea Piers. Mimi Lin is the company's managing director, responsible for overseeing a number of the company's special activities and events. She shares her group's experience at Chelsea Piers.

C&IT Why Chelsea Piers?

Lin Chelsea Piers provided a unique experience...that could not have been accomplished at a hotel or resort, which would have felt more like a business setting. Plus, being dressed in athletic attire and participating in physical activity gave us a chance to feel relaxed, yet energized at the same time.

C&IT Did you consider other theme parks?

Lin While we considered destinations that were more amusement park-oriented, including Six Flags, the company ultimately wanted to spend a day that encouraged teambuilding, group collaboration and healthy competition in a sports-oriented complex like the Piers.

C&IT What was the mission?

Lin The mission was to celebrate Conversation's fourth anniversary, and the goal was for the team to interact with each other as individuals in a setting outside of the office. They spend so much of their day together collaborating on projects, we believe it is important to facilitate positive relationships throughout the agency. Sometimes, simply changing the environment or location from the office setting can help to spark a different way of approaching work deliverables, and by default, strengthen the bond among colleagues.

C&IT Was this the group's first time at Chelsea Piers?

Lin Yes, this was our first time at the Piers, although group outings are a frequent treat at our company. We take annual trips to Wine U Design, a wine-making establishment in Long Island,



Marketing agency Conversation sponsored a day of competition and camaraderie for 30 participants at Chelsea Piers sports complex.

hold sporadic summer barbecues on our office roof deck, and partake in karaoke nights and boat cruises around New York City. As an office that works hard day in and day out with one another, we enjoy taking the team members out of the office several times during the year to extend the camaraderie.

C&IT What types of activities were selected?

Lin We carefully selected activities that were hands-on and engaging, stimulated teamwork and most importantly posed as a challenge, both individually and team-wise. From obstacle courses to volleyball, rock climbing to tug-of-war, we were impressed with the encouragement that everyone showed each other.

C&IT What were the highlights?

Lin The entire day was filled with highlights of personal and team triumphs. One standout activity would have to be the rock-climbing relay race. Many members of the staff had never rock climbed before, and rather than allowing the wall to be a force of intimidation, everyone, without a second thought, tackled the wall like climbing experts. The wide smiles, roaring applause and high fives all instilled personal confidence and further spread team trust.

C&IT What was the feedback?

Lin My inbox was flooded with heartfelt thank-you notes the following morning. It was a topic of conversation that was heard buzzing around the office for days, even weeks after the event. We were overjoyed with the success of the day and look forward to planning more unique outings for future milestones. — SJ



California

Photo courtesy of San Francisco Travel

A Treasure Trove of Destination Jewels

By Derek Reveron

California — the Golden State — is a meeting planner's treasure chest loaded with a variety of destination jewels that shine brighter as they continue to expand, renovate and update.

No wonder groups return again and again to California destinations, including the ever-popular San Francisco. The city attracts repeat business from groups, and many attendees stay on after meetings to enjoy the Bay Area. As a result, San Francisco's meetings business is strong, says John Reyes, executive vice president of sales and service and chief customer officer for San Francisco Travel, the city's convention and visitors bureau. "We are told by planners of citywides as well as smaller groups that attendance is up when they meet here. Many corporate and association groups with citywides continue to have record-breaking attendance, and the biggest growth is in groups from overseas market," says Reyes.

San Francisco's popularity stems partially from its overall value compared to other top destinations. Reyes says, "Look at the natural tourist attractions, restaurants, lifestyle and famous wine counties. When you put all that together and put it in a value proposition, we are able to identify customers that look at the expense, but are willing to commit meetings and conventions based on a total picture in terms of what they get from San Francisco."

Expansion of Moscone Center, San Francisco's convention center, is adding even more value. The Moscone Center, which includes Moscone North, South and West, recently completed a two-year, \$56 million renovation involving the North and South buildings.

Other additions include a \$4.5 million wireless system, which can provide high-speed Internet service for up to 60,000 laptops, smartphones, tablets and other devices simultane-

ously. In addition, Moscone Center recently received LEED Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. The Moscone Center offers more than 700,000 sf of exhibit space and 106 meeting rooms with more than 256,000 sf of space.

San Francisco upgraded Moscone Center with input from an advisory council consisting of planners of citywide meetings from across the nation. "They toured Moscone and told us they wanted to see investment in the structure and planning for technology needs of the future. The improvements retain our current customers and allow us to bring in new ones that may not know Moscone. Competition is getting fierce, and we have to keep up with our competitors," says Reyes.

More than 30,000 hotel rooms are available within a short distance of Moscone Center. Some hotels are undergoing improvements. The Mandarin Oriental, San Francisco has refurbished its 158 guest rooms and suites and more than 5,000 sf of function rooms, a new Italian travertine marble lobby and a restaurant. The Fairmont San Francisco plans a \$20 million renovation of the property's 591 rooms over the next two years, according to news reports. The Hilton San Francisco Union Square has completed a \$53 million redesign that included the property's 550 guest rooms and function space.

There is more to the San Francisco area than the city itself. That's one reason why a large pharmaceutical company held a five-day meeting for 50 sales executives in the Bay Area earlier this year. The group stayed at the historic Carvallo Point Hotel, which is located just outside of San Francisco in Sausalito near the end of the Golden Gate Bridge.

The group enjoyed activities in and outside of San Francisco. Part of the experience was the scenic ride back and forth across the Golden Gate Bridge, says Gordon Thompson, CMP, DMCP, and president and CEO of Cappa & Graham Inc., a San

Francisco DMC. "We had a reception at the hotel and enjoyed the beautiful view of the bridge and bay. In San Francisco, we had a dinner at the top of the Transamerica Building. On another night we had a choice of five or six restaurants for dinner. We went to wine country in Napa Valley for a day and had a tour, tasting and presentation. We had lunch at the winery, and they had a choice of playing croquet or nine holes of golf at the Meadowood Resort. We had dinner in a winery," says Thompson.

He notes that the Bay Area's variety is truly unique. "We have a perfect blend of natural beauty and man-made beauty, symbolized by the Bay Area and the bridge. San Francisco has a surprise behind every corner. It has an allure and mystery. I have never had a group say they wouldn't come back to San Francisco. The biggest thrill to me is when they leave, they say I wish I lived here," says Thompson.

Los Angeles

Los Angeles serves up everything planners and attendees could want West Coast style. The city offers entertainment, cultural attractions, a pulsing nightlife, lively neighborhoods, fine dining, 75 miles of coastline and more. There is also a plentiful supply of world-class hotels and meeting space. The Los Angeles Convention Center (LACC) is among the largest convention facilities in the United States with more than 147,000 sf of meeting space, 720,000 sf of exhibition space and a 299-seat theater. The LACC holds LEED Gold certification and offers state-of-the-art technology.

Several hotels have undergone recent renovations, expansions and updates. In downtown, the 434-room DoubleTree by Hilton Los Angeles Downtown, formerly the Kyoto Grand Hotel and Gardens, opened in July with 15,000 sf of conference space. The L.A. Hotel Downtown, formerly the Marriott Los Angeles, is undergoing a \$20 million renovation scheduled for completion in spring 2013. Renovations include design and service upgrades to the hotel's 400 guest rooms, meeting rooms, restaurants, grand lobby, and business and fitness centers. The hotel offers 25,000 sf of meeting space. Also downtown, the Wilshire Hotel will make way for a new 70-story office and retail tower, and the new 900-room Wilshire Grand Hotel. The hotel is scheduled for completion in 2017.

In Hollywood, Loews Hotels & Resorts purchased the 632-room Renaissance Hollywood Hotel, now named the Loews Hollywood Hotel. The property will remain open during a \$26 million renovation that starts later this year and includes event space, restaurants, the spa and pool terrace. Wolfgang Puck Catering will continue to cater the hotel's 25,000-sf ballroom.

San Diego

Everybody loves San Diego and for good reason. The city offers a modern and historic downtown, cultural attractions, great dining, hip nightclubs and a complete meetings infrastructure, including the San Diego Convention Center (SDCC). The facility offers a 526,000-sf exhibit hall, 204,000 sf of ball-



"We are told by planners of citywides as well as smaller groups that attendance is up when they meet here."

John Reyes, Executive V.P. of Sales and Service, San Francisco Travel
San Francisco, CA

room and meeting space, and is located within walking distance of more than 11,000 hotel rooms.

The number of new and improved hotel rooms continues to grow. The Hilton Carlsbad Oceanfront Resort & Spa opened in June 2012 with 215 guest rooms and 23,300 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space. The San Diego Marriott Del Mar Hotel recently completed a \$3.3 million renovation of its 284 guest rooms. The project also included upgraded event space, a new concierge lounge and a redesign of Arterra Restaurant. The hotel has more than 12,000 sf of meeting space, including a total of 13 meeting rooms.

In May 2012, the Holiday Inn Downtown San Diego hotel was rebranded as Four Points by Sheraton San Diego. The 220-room hotel is undergoing a \$2 million renovation that includes the lobby and First Avenue Bar and Grill. More than 22,000 sf of meeting space is available.

Elsewhere, The Westin Gaslamp Quarter has finished a \$25 million makeover of its 450 guest rooms and suites. The refurbishment also included 35,000 sf of meeting and event space and the WestinWorkout fitness studio. The hotel offers 35,000 sf of meeting and event space.

No group's visit to San Diego is complete without a trip to SeaWorld San Diego. SeaWorld offers numerous venues for banquets and receptions. The dining with Shamu venue, for example, accommodates 200 for banquets and 300 for receptions. Only minutes from downtown, Balboa Park features 15 museums, award-winning gardens and several performing arts venues. The 1,200-acre park also includes the San Diego Zoo.

San Diego was just the right match for a meeting held last year by a large law firm based on the East Coast. The three-day annual meeting of 375 of the firm's partners and employees took place at the 757-room Hotel del Coronado, a beach resort with 65,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space. The firm chose San Diego and the Hotel del Coronado over competitors nationwide, says Robert Sanders, general manager of meetings and events at Ovation Corporate Travel, a New York City-based travel management company. "We did an extensive search. They wanted people to meet in elegant class to do productive business and celebrate a recent acquisition. San Diego gave us everything we needed. It has an environment of elegance and lots of activities such as golf. It gave us great options to fly in. From a budgetary standpoint, it's not as expensive as some other top destinations and gave us good value compared to the other destinations we were looking at," says Sanders.

The meeting had extensive technology needs. Sanders and his team were onsite two days before the meeting started to

“San Diego gave us everything we needed. It has an environment of elegance and lots of activities such as golf.”



Robert Sanders, General Manager, Meetings & Events, Ovation Corporate Travel, NY, NY

work with hotel staff in setting up the technology. “We had a local audio-visual company help set up the AV we needed. We brought in another company to help set up a room with 40 laptops, all with Internet and teleconferencing ability. We had speakers from around the world who spoke to the group live via videoconferencing during two sessions. We also had breakouts every day, and on the high day there were eight or nine running simultaneously. Everything went smoothly,” says Sanders. Most of the meeting was business-oriented, but attendees enjoyed a range of San Diego activities. “There was an outdoor cocktail party by the ocean. We had one day of recreation that included a choice of golf, fishing, wine tasting at a local vineyard and a spa. Everybody loved it. The hotel performed beautifully from a service, and food and beverage level,” says Sanders.

Long Beach

Long Beach is one of Southern California’s top meeting and entertainment playgrounds. California’s seventh largest city offers urban sophistication, oceanfront hotels and more than five miles of beaches.

Meeting facilities are top-notch. The Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center (LBCEC), located on the waterfront, offers more than 400,000 sf of flexible meeting space and 34 meeting rooms with the latest technology and wireless capability. The LBCEC encompasses the 825-seat Center Theater, 3,051-seat Terrace Theater and the 13,500-seat Long Beach Arena (LBA). The LBA is creating a loft-style ballroom that will add 45,000-sf of event space, doubling current capacity. The ballroom will feature LED, stage lighting and sound systems, and accommodate up to 5,500 people for dinners and concerts. The project is scheduled for completion in February 2013.

Other infrastructure improvements include the ongoing \$140 million renovation and modernization of the Long Beach Airport. The project includes upgraded passenger gates and a concourse with solar panels providing 13 percent of its energy. The concourse also will include an atrium and garden. Plans also include new passenger lounges, terminal modernization, a new parking structure, ramp improvements and upgraded concessions. The project is scheduled for completion in 2013.

Among meeting properties, the Hyatt Regency Long Beach completed a \$30 million renovation earlier this year. The project included the hotel’s 528 guest rooms and suites and Regency Club Lounge. Renovations included beds, leather headboards, new carpeting, linens and win-

dow coverings. Guest rooms also include a reconfigured workspace and more. The Hyatt Regency Long Beach offers 22,000 sf of meeting and function space.

Kelly Piedmont, manager of operations, West region, for Carlson Wagonlit Travel Meetings & Events, recently held her first meeting in Long Beach. She planned a four-day sales meeting that took place in March for 400 employees of a technology company. The Long Beach Marriott served as the headquarters hotel for the meeting.

Piedmont and the company chose Long Beach after considering several other destinations in California, Arizona and Nevada. “Long Beach isn’t usually the first thought when people think of going to California, but it’s a unique destination. The client was able to get good value for the event. The room rates they offered us, when weighing it against other destinations, is what nailed it down for the group,” says Piedmont.

The Long Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau provided valuable assistance. “We engaged with the CVB to talk with them about this group and the site selection. They were instrumental in helping us source the right properties that were close to each other. Some CVB officials came to the meeting to educate people about Long Beach attractions, shopping and other things. They also arranged for busing, sightseeing and a visit to the Aquarium of the Pacific. I would definitely consider going to Long Beach again if it were the right fit for a group,” Piedmont says.

Anaheim

Anaheim offers more for meetings than some larger cities. Visitors can enjoy 42 miles of coastline, meeting facilities, theme parks, hotels, shopping and golf. The city also features about 20,000 hotel rooms and top-notch meeting venues, including the Anaheim Convention Center, one of the West Coast’s largest convention centers. The facility offers 1.6 million sf of meeting and exhibit space, dedicated prefunction and registration areas, and a 38,058-sf ballroom.

The Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau (AOCVCB) recently introduced Grand PlazaVille, a new online application that allows meeting planners to visualize their event in The Grand Plaza, set to open in January at the Anaheim Convention Center. This new outdoor space, a 100,000-sf multiuse special event space, is located outside of the convention center’s front entrance and features a pedestrian-friendly campus with lush landscaping, expansive



“Grand PlazaVille will allow planners the opportunity to...customize events to meet their exact specifications.”

Charles Ahlers, President
Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau, Anaheim, CA



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The Grand PlazaVille app enables users to drag and drop an array of event elements such as food stations, tents or tables onto the Grand Plaza grounds thereby creating a virtual setup. Planners can use an existing template or choose from other configurations created by other users. Once complete, the customized configuration can be printed or saved.

According to Charles Ahlers, president of the AOCVCB, "Grand PlazaVille will allow planners the opportunity to use their imagination within the Grand Plaza and truly customize events to meet their exact specifications and see the results immediately. This is yet another way for us to raise the bar for events and meetings at the Anaheim Convention Center that will set our destination apart."

Newport Beach

Looking for a new destination for a not-so-big group? Consider Newport Beach. Located just six miles from John Wayne-Orange County Airport, Newport Beach bills itself as an ideal destination for small to mid-size meetings. The fashionable seaside city offers 10 miles of pristine beaches, more than 300 restaurants and more than 3,000 hotel rooms. Over the last six years, all eight of Newport Beach's full-service hotels have undergone renovations or sought improvements, according to Visit Newport Beach, the city's CVB.

Newport Beach also provides more than 170,000 sf of hotel meeting space with additional space available at oceanside restaurants, golf course clubhouses and yachts. Few venues are more distinctive than the many yacht charters available for groups of up to 500 passengers.

Avid golfers will love the Newport Beach area's golf destinations, including the San Juan Hills Country Club and the Aliso Creek Inn & Golf Course.

An accounting company recently held a training conference for about 100 clients at the Balboa Bay Club & Resort in Newport Beach. The 170-room property includes 17,000 sf of event space. The company selected Newport Beach for several reasons, says its meeting and procurement manager, a CMP. "It offers an upscale and sophisticated environment combined with the Southern California beach culture. There are a variety of high-quality hotel properties of different sizes and scopes, as well as a lot of offsite venues and activities to serve every need. You can do high-end events, water events and beach events. Within a short drive of the town itself there a lot of options for offsite events. It is also very easy to get to because of the proximity to the airport," says the meeting manager.



The 969-room Disneyland Hotel, located adjacent to the Downtown Disney District, sports a large Mickey Sorcerer's Hat.

Photo courtesy of Disneyland Resort

The Balboa Bay Club & Resort was selected because the group preferred a smaller property in an intimate setting. "It is right on the water and has the feel of a private club without being pretentious about it. We are also aware that some small groups get ignored for larger groups at big properties. So I will typically try to find smaller hotels that may be a good fit for us where we can be the big fish. Obviously, if it's a convention hotel of, say, 3,000 rooms that's not a good fit for our small groups," the meeting manager says.

Newport's CVB provided valuable assistance in locating the right property. The CVB helped with the RFP, checked constantly with the planner to meet her needs and arranged for a site visit. The

CVB also provided promotional materials to send to attendees, and gave amenities to company VIPs upon their arrival. The group remained onsite for the two-day conference, holding a reception on a large lawn overlooking the beach with stations serving foods from around the world. They also enjoyed the beach and the hotel's amenities.

San Jose

San Jose is California's third largest city and an epicenter of business because it is located in the heart of Silicon Valley, about 50 miles from San Francisco. As a complete meeting destination in its own right, San Jose has more than 90 hotels that accommodate large and small meetings.

San Jose's meetings mainstay, the San Jose McEnergy Convention Center, is undergoing a \$120 million expansion and renovation that will add 125,000 sf of flexible meeting and event space, including a 35,000-sf ballroom and 25,000 sf of meeting space. The project will include a new grand ballroom, more breakout space, outdoor event space and upgraded technology. The project is scheduled for completion in late 2013. The convention center is located downtown within walking distance of five hotels and currently offers 425,000 sf of exhibit, ballroom and meeting space.

A new convention center hotel is on the way. The Westin San Jose is scheduled to open in July 2013 across the street from the San Jose Convention Center. The Westin will open on the site of the Sainte Claire hotel after renovating and re-flagging the historic property. About 10,000 sf of renovated meeting space will be available. Meanwhile, the 234-room Hyatt Place San Jose-Downtown opened earlier this year with 6,500 sf of meeting and function space.

The Golden State is sun and surf, Hollywood glitz and glamour, a pop-culture trendsetter, renowned wine-maker and sustainability leader. Planners would add that California is an extraordinary event-maker, too, a place where the meeting experience is golden indeed.

C&IT



ON THE MOVE



MITCHELL

The Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina, San Diego, CA, has named **Russ Mitchell** as director of sales and marketing. He previously served as director of sales and marketing for The US Grant, San Diego, CA.

Visit Orlando, Orlando, FL, has appointed **Hayat Pronovost**, CMP, as senior national sales executive within the convention services and sales department. Based in Chicago, IL, he is responsible for the Midwest market. He was most recently director, national accounts, at Gaylord Hotels in Chicago.

Christopher Baran has joined M Resort Spa Casino as assistant director of sales, responsible for the Western region of the U.S. and the Pacific Rim. He most recently was national sales director at Loews Miami Beach Hotel, FL.

Tiago Sarmiento was named director



BARAN

of sales and marketing at The St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico. He formerly was the director of sales and marketing who launched the recent opening of The St. Regis Tianjin, China, as well as the opening of The St. Regis Mexico City.

The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs, CO, has named **Pierrette (Pierre) Stone** as director of incentive and insurance sales. She formerly served as The Broadmoor's conference manager.

Tania Lynn was named national sales manager, Southeast market, at The Renaissance World Golf Village Resort, Convention Center & Beach Club, Jacksonville-St. Augustine, FL. She most recently was senior sales manager at the Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL.

Erik Dombroski was named director



SARMENTO



STONE

of sales and marketing for the Gateway Canyons Resort, located southwest of Grand Junction in Gateway, CO. He most recently served as director of sales at the Topnotch Resort and Spa, Stowe, VT.

Kathy Botero Frantz, CMP, was named regional director of meeting and incentive sales, responsible for the Southeast region for the All Inclusive Collection's Hard Rock Hotels in Mexico and the Dominican Republic. She formerly served as regional director of group sales, Southeast for Melia Hotels International.

The Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau, Anaheim, CA, has named **Dan Ketelsen** as convention sales director. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing for the Hyatt Regency Orange County, Garden Grove, CA. **C&IT**



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33	San Francisco Travel Association	415-227-2616	www.sanfrancisco.travel/meeting-planners	Lysa Lewin	llewin@sanfrancisco.travel
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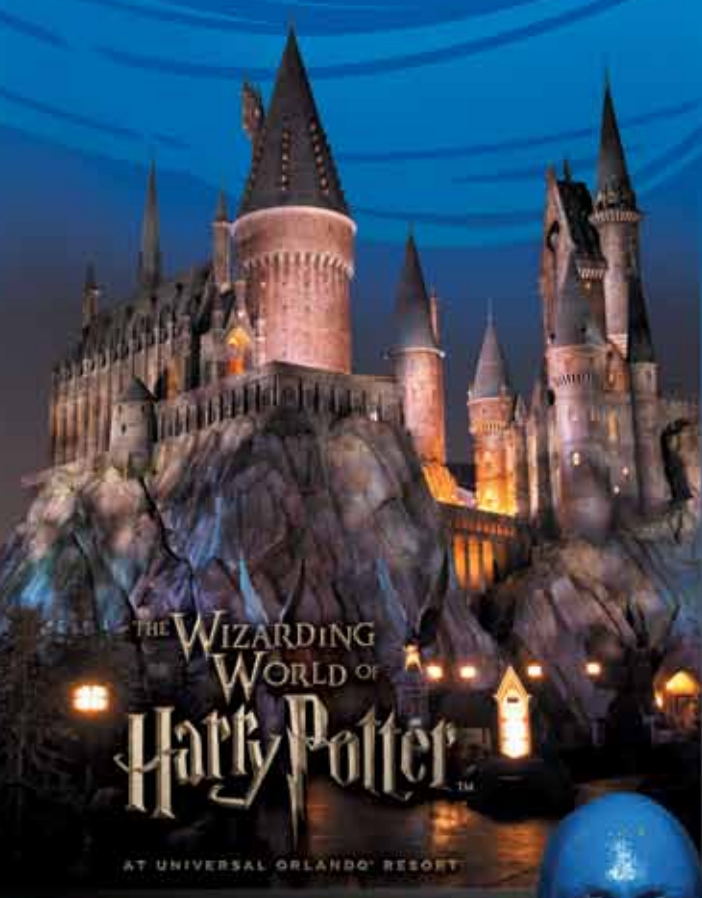


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