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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

## To Book or Not to Book?

**Hammering Out the Pros and Cons of Using New & Newly Renovated Properties**

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## The Best Ways to Discover the Perfect Destination

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## Information Security

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Rendering courtesy of Omni Hotels



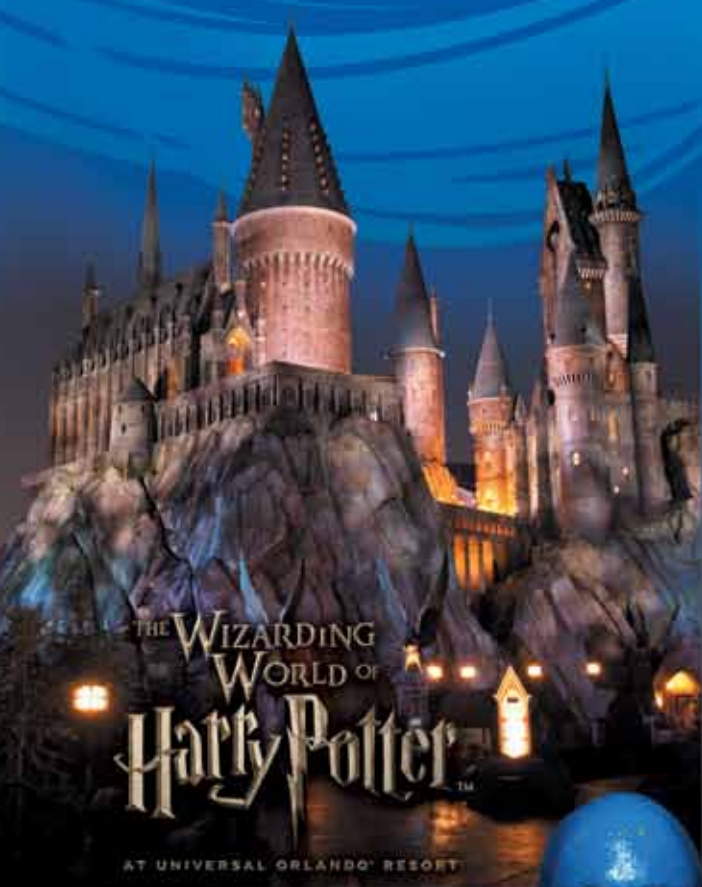
## Destination: Colorado

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Denise Doyle, Director of Conference & Meeting Services for HSF Affiliates LLC, Prudential Real Estate and Relocation, will bring one of the first groups to use the new Omni Nashville Hotel (rendering shown) after it opens later this year.





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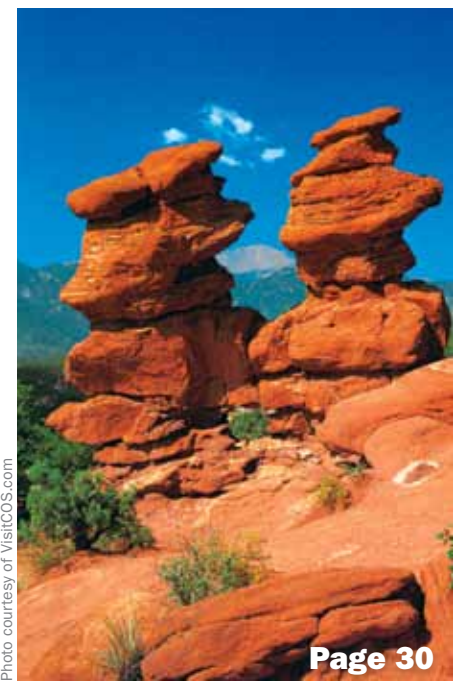


Photo courtesy of VisitCOS.com

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Planners must heed the advice of the experts and take every precaution to prevent the hacking of sensitive information at meetings and events.

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## Trust, But Verify

During his presidency, Ronald Reagan popularized the “trust, but verify” phrase — an old Russian proverb that suggests one should check out information even if it comes from a trustworthy source. Reagan so liked the phrase, he repeated it often — much to the chagrin of the Russians. “Trust, but verify” also reminds me of an exercise that professional meeting planners engage in day in and day out: site selection. In this month’s cover story “To Book or Not to Book?



Hammering Out the Pros and Cons of Using New & Newly Renovated Properties,” we learn how meeting planners who book events at their trusted brand’s new and renovated properties wind up winners.

For example, Denise Doyle, director of conference and meeting services for the Irvine, CA-based HSF Affiliates LLC, Prudential Real Estate and Relocation, who graces our cover this month, prebooked the still-under-construction Omni Nashville Hotel for a 2014 meeting for up to 5,000 delegates. Rising across from the much anticipated 1.2-million-sf Music City Center in Nashville, the Omni Nashville Hotel is set to open in late 2013 as the Music City Center’s new headquarters hotel. Doyle said Omni

pulled out all the stops to show her that they would be good and ready to host her event next year: “We did a site visit to Nashville, and were able to look at the room product that Omni had set up,” said Doyle. “It was in a different building, but it was the exact replica as far as size, soft goods and even windows. I also did a hard-hat tour of the meeting space in the hotel and looked at how the space would be configured. Some of that was finished.”

Doyle trusts Omni not only because of her history with the brand, but also because they addressed all her concerns. She commented, “I do know that Omni has an excellent training program for new employees; they invest a lot in that. And when they do open a new hotel, they bring in managers from other hotels for the opening. So I’m comfortable with that.”

Building attendance is another plus when using new and renovated hotels. Given a choice, attendees often will opt for the newest properties because the lure of the new and fresh is so great. Overall, the advantages of booking new builds and renovated properties is great, especially when engaged participants return home invigorated with fresh ideas and can’t wait to return next year.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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Anaheim Convention Center's Grand Plaza.

## Anaheim Convention Center's Grand Plaza Celebrates Opening

ANAHEIM, CA —The Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau (AOCVCB) commemorated the grand opening of the Anaheim Convention Center's Grand Plaza on January 24 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The Grand Plaza is a uniquely Southern California outdoor environment that can be utilized year-round for a wide variety of events, meetings and gatherings. The Grand Plaza enhances the open, campus-like space surrounding the Anaheim Convention Center and flows between the Hilton Anaheim and Anaheim Marriott hotels. The area also features a special Transit Plaza for efficient transportation flow. “The long-awaited Grand Plaza is a welcome addition to our meeting campus,” stated Charles Ahlers, president, Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau. “This new outdoor environment offers our guests, and meeting and event planners a place to call their own while they are in Anaheim.”

A special microsite showcases the space and features detailed information about the Grand Plaza, aerial photographs and a time-lapse video of the construction process. [www.anaheimoc.org](http://www.anaheimoc.org)

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## Borgata Launches In-Room Gaming

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — On February 18 Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, Atlantic City will launch Allin Interactive's ITV in-room gaming platform, DigiCasino. Approved last year by The New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement, this is the first time in-room gaming will be offered anywhere in the country. Borgata E-Casino will enable adult hotel guests who are My Borgata Rewards members the opportunity to wager on slots and video poker games brought to them via Allin's interactive high-definition television service featured in each of Borgata's 2,000 rooms and suites. Customers will be allowed a maximum purchase of \$2,500 in gaming credits for in-room gaming per 24 hours. The extensive controls to prevent access by minors that is included in the technology will be evaluated during the field trial. Allin has been providing interactive services including movies, room messaging, property events, account information and customer offers at Borgata since November of 2011. [www.theborgata.com](http://www.theborgata.com)



A guest room set up for in-room gaming at the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa.

## Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa Reveals Enhanced Meeting Space

DESTIN, FL — The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, the largest full-service beachfront resort on Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast, recently completed a \$5 million renovation of its meeting space, accommodations and fine-dining restaurant. The 598-room Hilton Sandestin Beach boasts more than 32,000 sf of flexible indoor meeting space that now features a fresh new design inspired by the resort's beachfront setting. Natural stones and tiles, a palette of indigos and sand dollar whites, modern lighting and cheerful accents combine to create an air of relaxed Florida charm throughout the resort's two ballrooms, breakout space, boardroom and prefunction areas. The 9,504-sf Emerald Ballroom, 5,600-sf Coral Ballroom, 20 breakout rooms and prefunction space have all been enhanced with an array of new light fixtures, custom Kinon finished pilasters, Axminster carpet, wall treatments and fresh paint. The renovation also incorporated state-of-the-art technology into new teleconferencing facilities in the boardroom and touch-screen lighting in the ballrooms. The award-winning Seagar's Prime Steaks and Seafood also received a facelift, and updates have also been made to the common space of the 400-room Emerald Tower. [www.hiltonsandestinbeach.com](http://www.hiltonsandestinbeach.com)

## Orlando World Center Marriott Completes Phase One of Renovation

ORLANDO, FL — Orlando World Center Marriott recently completed phase one of its multimillion-dollar transformation, which included enhancements to 14,000 sf of meeting space and 504 guest rooms and 10 suites in the North Tower, Hall of Cities meeting rooms, 110 guest suites, onsite Starbucks, as well as an expanded pool deck and lawn for poolside events and activities. The property will be fully operational throughout phase two of the renovation, currently underway, which includes enrichments to the Falls Pool inclusive of a poolside Bar and Grille, Splash Zone offering kids a zero entry pool and playground as well as a new Icon Slide Tower, and the Siro Italian restaurant. [www.marriottworldcenter.com](http://www.marriottworldcenter.com)

## Loews Hotels Buys The Back Bay Hotel in Boston

NEW YORK, NY — Loews Hotels & Resorts has agreed to purchase The Back Bay Hotel in Boston from The Doyle Collection. "Boston is one of the most vibrant markets in the U.S., and an excellent city for a Loews property," said Jonathan Tisch, chairman of Loews Hotels & Resorts. "This one-of-a-kind, historic hotel is a unique addition to our growing portfolio." Situated on the corner of Berkeley and Stuart Streets, The Back Bay Hotel was originally constructed in the 1920s as the Boston Police Department Headquarters and occupied as such until the late 1990s. The property, which was extensively redeveloped in 2004, features 225 spacious guest rooms, modern amenities, and meeting and event space. [www.loewshotels.com](http://www.loewshotels.com)



TISCH

## Dittman Launches New Recognition and Rewards Platform

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — Dittman Incentive Marketing, a leading performance improvement and incentive program provider, recently debuted Celebrating Success — a points-based rewards platform, which is an affordable, quick-start incentive and recognition website for small and mid-size organizations. Companies that use Celebrating Success can engage, reward and recognize their employees in a style that was previously available only to large corporations. Built on Dittman's Web-based TotalPRO performance recognition platform, businesses of any size can reap the benefits of engaging their employees. The turnkey program has no upfront costs — organizations pay for the rewards when they are redeemed — and requires minimal administrative resources to attain results. Celebrating Success offers two distinct modules: The Campaign Module provides the ability to post and communicate the rules for any client initiatives offering rewards to participants, which may include sales contests, wellness initiatives, referral, safety and other programs; and the Recognition Module that provides peer-to-peer and manager-to-participant recognition opportunities using themed eCards that can be personalized. [www.dittmanincentives.com](http://www.dittmanincentives.com)

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## New Awards for Hilton Orlando

ORLANDO, FL — In the first few weeks of 2013 Hilton Orlando was recognized with three awards for achievement, most notably in the service category. Hilton Worldwide executives present Doug Gehret, general manager of Hilton Orlando with honors: (L to r) Senior Vice President, Operations Eastern North America, Ted Ratcliff; President, Americas Joe Berger; Hilton Orlando General Manager Doug Gehret; President and Chief Executive Officer Chris Nassetta and Area Vice President for Florida Stan Soroka. The hotel was recognized as Hotel of the Year for 2012 by Hilton Worldwide and received the brand's Highest Guest Satisfaction Award based on overall service scores for 2012 making the resort the best of the best in the category with 500 rooms or larger. Also, Hilton Orlando was once again a recipient of the AAA Four Diamond rating. [www.thehiltonorlando.com](http://www.thehiltonorlando.com)

## Windstar Cruises Adds Three Seabourn Ships



Seabourn Legend and Seabourn Spirit are two of the three ships joining Windstar's fleet.

SEATTLE, WA — Xanterra Parks & Resorts, the owner of Windstar Cruises, has purchased three of Seabourn's fleet of six luxury, all-suite ships: Seabourn Pride, Seabourn Legend and Seabourn Spirit. The three ships each accommodate 208 passengers in 104 suites. The expansion doubled the size of Windstar's recently renovated, three luxury sailing yacht fleet, making the company the market leader in small-ship cruising with 300 or fewer passengers, with a total of 1,230 berths. The Seabourn Pride will be the first ship to enter into Windstar's luxury fleet in April 2014. Windstar Cruises will take possession of Seabourn Legend in April 2015 and Seabourn Spirit in May 2015. The fleet expansion will provide Windstar Cruises access to new destinations such as Asia and South America, in addition to the 50 countries the company already sails to. Windstar's operations will continue out of the company's Seattle, WA, headquarters. [www.windstarcruises.com](http://www.windstarcruises.com)

## Renaissance Washington, DC Downtown Hotel Unveils Redesign

WASHINGTON, DC — The Renaissance Washington, DC Downtown Hotel announced the completion of the redesign of its 807 guest rooms and suites. Each room has a soothing neutral color palate, and the leather lounge and desk chairs are inspired by 20th century modernism. LED reading pin lights are mounted on headboards with easy-to-reach plugs. The luxurious spa-like bathrooms have rain forest shower heads, backlit mirrors and accent wall coverings featuring a custom collage of historic events in Washington from 1940 to 1970. The rooms feature a large work surface, upgraded wireless Internet, 18-inch laptop safes, mini refrigerator, iPod docking station, Aveda spa products and 40-inch HDTV. With 64,000 sf of flexible function space and 30 breakout rooms, the lifestyle hotel is considered to be a premier meeting and convention destination. [www.dcrenaissance.com](http://www.dcrenaissance.com)



By Brooke Sommers, CMP, CMM

## Top 10 Meeting Planning Pet Peeves

If hotels would take the time to bring local planners in for think tanks once a year, I'm certain that the valued information they get would grow their business. There is nothing a seasoned planner likes better than to talk about how to improve the hotel experience. There are so many great changes going on in our industry, let's work together to make meetings the best that they can be. Here's my top 10 list of pet peeves, David Letterman-style.



### 10 Mentor, Mentor, Mentor.

We all have something that we can give back to the up-and-comers. Take the opportunity to put yourself out there as a resource. Each hotel sales organization should have a mentor program for new salespeople coming in to represent their properties. The same goes for planning companies and in-house meeting planners. Those of you who have been in the business for 10 years or more, shame on you if you are not mentoring.

### 9 Wow! to Whoops! Site Inspections.

Site inspections with the entire staff clapping your arrival: AWKWARD! We know you are trying to show the value of our meeting to your hotel, but do you really want to make us feel uncomfortable the minute we step into the lobby? Instead, if possible, have the rooms set up the way we set forth in the RFP. Have your senior-level hotel staff there to show that you value the meeting. Give your Hyatt friends a call to learn how to do "wow" site inspections.

### 8 Know Your Planner.

Take the time to research the planner who is coming to your hotel. If you know a little about them and the meeting they are potentially bringing, it will make a fantastic impression. Chain hoteliers, please don't waste your time on cold calls to every planner in your Rolodex — we all go to the national sales rep, and they will send the lead that fits your hotel. Maybe you should get to know your national sales office.



### 7 Hotel Brochures.



Why hotels produce brochures is beyond me. I do like the meeting space diagram printed on stock paper so that I can take notes and outline my specific space needs. Do not dare give me a glossy version that smears when writing with a pen. For the rest of the brochure, just have it online in a PDF as well as photos that I can put in my hotel site recap.

### 6 Website Wakeup.

Hotels should have a quick fact sheet on the front page of their websites. Many times we have very basic questions we need to know right off the bat, i.e., number of sleeping rooms; number of meeting rooms; distance to the airport. Make it easy for the planner to find that information; it may even help your transient guests. Oh, and just a side note for the national hotel brands: Could you add a search button on your websites that allows planners to search by hotel size and number of rooms specifically? This would make our jobs so much easier if there were a way to get to those hotels that fit our needs without having to spend hours weeding through all the different brand types within the chain.



### 5 E-proposals.

Why do hotels use e-proposals? As I sit on a plane writing this article, it just reminds me how irritated I get when I receive an e-proposal. First, you can't open it on a plane, or if you aren't in a wireless area, and, second, if you want to review it a few weeks later, many times the link has expired. If you are required by your management to send an e-proposal, do your homework and ask the planner first if they would like a PDF of the proposal to accompany the e-proposal.

### 4 Wall Plugs or Lack Thereof.

It is time to put wall plugs by every bed so I don't have to pull furniture away from the wall to find or unplug the clock to plug in my own charger or other device. And what about one on the blank wall so that we can iron our clothes somewhere other than the bathroom?



### 3 Room Amenities.

Yes, I admit that many planners love a glass of wine, but do hotel sales people really think we need an entire bottle in our room for a one-night site? Especially after you took us to dinner and poured Cakebread all night. And what about the cheese tray that sits in the room because we are not there to enjoy it? Do your job salespeople, vet out your visitors.

### 2 FAM Trips.



Do not have them, they aren't really that ethical if you think about your audience. Wouldn't it be better if you want to get a planner in your door that you offer some sort of educational enticement? Bring those 10 planners in for a round-table discussion with your senior management for a few hours. That will build a much more lasting relationship and get the A-list planner's attention.

### 1 Love 'Em and Leave 'Em. Sales 101 = build a relationship.

Each and every sale that the salesperson has could lead to a future booking, even a bigger booking. You must take every opportunity to build a relationship no matter the size of the current sale. You never know where that person will end up, and if you have built a strong trusting relationship, then you will have a partner for life. Also, how can you build relationships with virtual sales teams, especially teams that don't know each and every property intimately?



A final note to my fellow planners: Please don't forget to add CSR into every internal and external event you plan. **C&IT**

Calling all planners! Sound off about your own hotel pet peeves by writing to [ccceditor2@att.net](mailto:ccceditor2@att.net). Also tell us about your favorite meeting hotels and why, and we may include your comments in a future issue.

“Site inspections with the entire staff clapping your arrival: **AWKWARD!**”



#### Brooke Sommers, CMP, CMM,

owner of Strategic Conferences & Events LLC, has been planning meetings for more than 20 years and is currently focusing on Strategic Meetings Management and the value of meetings and events for corporations. Brooke left Sun Microsystems after more than 12 years, nine of which were with StorageTek prior to their acquisition by Sun. The events team at StorageTek managed 300 meetings and events per year. At Sun, Brooke project-managed the sales events for North America. Her article "Top 5 Meeting Planning Pet Peeves" originally appeared in the fall 2012 issue of *Colorado Meetings + Events*. [www.linkedin.com/in/brookesommers](http://www.linkedin.com/in/brookesommers)



## The Best Ways to Discover the Perfect Destination



By Stella Johnson

Site selection used to be easy. There were a few simple ways to approach the task. Nowadays, however, conducting business according to the “new normal” creates new opportunities (and obstacles) for meeting professionals. To discover the best way to perfect the site selection process, we asked the experts.

We’ll start with Mike May, CMP, president of Spear One — a Dallas-based full-service meetings and event planning company, which in January merged with Sunbelt Motivation & Travel, a group incentive travel company founded in 1980 by Bill Boyd, CMP, CMM, CITE.

May, a board member of the Incentive Research Foundation and the Performance Improvement Council of the Incentive Marketing Association, says it’s difficult to ascertain which are the most important criteria to consider during the site-selection process. Goals? Cost? Location? Senior management preference? Amenities?

May says one has to take everything into consideration. “Site selection is simply not based on any one variable decision, not anymore,” he says.

For May, shorter lead times are mud-

dyng the waters at the present. In fact, May observes that the combination of last-minute scheduling and lack of inventory create a recipe for disaster.

“Clients are overwhelmed doing the job of two or three people while on conference calls all day, and trying to stay ahead of 200 emails per day,” he says. “Then, senior management withholds the final budget and delays pertinent decisions that need to be made in a timely manner. Often, at the last moment and with minimal lead time, we are then asked to recommend destinations and venues. The challenge is then compounded further by shrinking hotel availability due to an increase in the number of meetings, and limited new hotel development as we have seen during the last five years,” May says.

For instance, a new Spear One client wants to schedule a sales training conference with only three months’ notice. Normally, the client would contract nine months in advance. But now, May notes that he is scrambling around to find suitable venues.

May explains, “This is all due to the fact that their internal staff is now stretched thin by a sudden growth in corporate sales, team turnover and corporate sourcing re-

strictions.” He notes that general session space for 250 sales reps and engineers is manageable, but space requirements for a large equipment exhibit eliminate many hotels from the playing field.

“Las Vegas is not an option because the client wants a new destination. So, we’re solving their needs with some flexible space planning at a New Orleans hotel yet to be announced,” May says. “A few large exhibits will be located in the hotel foyer and corridors. This will require extra security measures at night due to the size and value of the assets. Meals will overflow from two smaller ballrooms into a courtyard. And, the French Quarter location delivers good evening activities within walking distance, which was another requirement.”

However, this is not how Spear One usually operates. Instead, the company utilizes a proprietary process for site selection named DDX — Discovery, Design and eXecution.

“This discovery method is first and foremost in our methodology,” May says. “We discover the meeting type, audience demographics, pattern preference, target dates, desired locations, past meeting history, meeting room and AV requirements, and so on. Taking a little extra discovery time

always saves our clients time and money in the long run, and it works just as well for corporate meeting planners,” he states. “Even though I would say the company’s goals are always most important, value or budget probably have tied for the No. 1 criteria over the last five years. Then, I would say location and venue quality.”

May successfully used his DDX process for Regus, an international real estate client headquartered in the U.K. Spear One recommended several global venues, but ultimately selected Aria Resort & Casino in Las Vegas as the most convenient and cost-effective destination for the 100-attendee event.

Recently, Spear One arranged an event for a medical technology client, which generally holds an annual user group training conference of approximately 850 doctors and staff at a major Texas resort. “For 2013, a much smaller, doctors-only conference was held for 160 physicians rather than the hundreds of attendees. “With that decision we were able to upgrade the venue recommendation to The Ritz-Carlton, Dallas instead,” says May, named as the No. 1 large hotel by Zagat Hotels, Resorts & Spas.

### The A-to-Z RFP

Al Wynant, CEO of EventInterface, a Scottsdale, AZ-based company that provides innovative Web-based and mobile app software for meeting and

event planners, initiates the site-selection process with an extremely detailed RFP of the event.

Wynant, whose background includes managing events from 50 to 125,000 attendees in six countries, says, “In the RFP, we include everything from desired rates to the food and beverage budget, and whatever we think is so important that it can make or break a deal.” Wynant says he also includes: quality of airlift; availability of venues with the appropriate meeting room space/sleeping rooms under one roof; union or non-union; availability and quality of local vendors; local transportation; and area attractions.

Detail is important: “We also instruct on how information is to be presented back to us,” Wynant adds, “and can even reject proposals that do not meet our stringent RFP response requirements. Although we clearly outline in our RFP

what we expect, a very large percentage of venues send back boilerplate proposals.”

Wynant works very closely with the local CVB and makes site visits as needed. “We prefer personal relationships with local reps or onsite sales

*“Even though I would say the company’s goals are always most important, value or budget probably have tied for the No. 1 criteria over the last five years. Then, I would say location and venue quality.”*



Mike May  
President  
Spear One  
Dallas, TX

reps rather than national or regional sales reps based in call centers that support hotel sales,” he says.

“Overall, if we look at the big picture,” Wynant explains, “the three key factors that can make or break a deal for us are: Ability to meet the requirements set in the RFP; the ease of communications with the sales and catering team; and the excellence of service from all levels of staff at the venue.”

One of EventInteractive’s most recent meetings was for a software company at

## 10 Considerations for Selecting the Perfect Destination

Recognizing the need to identify and address the growing concerns that planners are finding in the marketplace, Destination Marketing Association International’s recommendations are:

- 1 What matters to your group in terms of cuisine, walkability, off-time pursuits, etc.?
- 2 Will you fit into the destination? Is there enough space? Small fish in a big pond and vice versa?
- 3 How will you get there? Assess air access and airlift as well as transportation in the destination.
- 4 Does the destination’s meetings and hotel infrastructure in terms of overall layout fit your group?
- 5 Are there enough things to do in terms of fun and unique amenities. Is it safe?
- 6 What is the lay of the land in terms of the meeting/convention package? Construction?
- 7 What is the ROI of your meeting in that destination? Affordable?
- 8 Are they green? Is it important that the city and hotels be environmentally friendly?
- 9 Does the city have destination appeal? Does it make people want to visit?
- 10 Is the CVB easy to work with in terms of its sales team, and are they relationship-minded?



the eco-friendly, downtown Scottsdale Firesky Resort & Spa, for 100 attendees. “The meeting was structured as a workshop and networking event, and the selected venue was ideal, offering cozy indoor and outdoor areas,” says Wynant. “Firesky’s setup encouraged networking in smaller groups, which is what the client wanted. The workshop space was bright with updated furniture and featured large windows so everything seemed light and airy. And best of all, service was excellent,” Wynant notes.

### Supply and Demand

Michael Patton, CMM, CEO of Pothos Inc., a San Diego-based certified meeting, conference and event management company, reminds us that the improving economy is a positive fact that can have a negative effect on site selection.

“As we’ve witnessed in the past several years, the meetings industry was suffering so much, that hotels were very aggressive in doing what they had to do in order to bring in the amount of business they needed to fill quotas. They were willing to work with meeting planners, acquiesce to concessions, be flexible and consider the dollar amount the booking was bringing in at the time of the scheduled meeting, as well as the future business it might bring in later,” Patton observes. “Now that has changed with some top-name hoteliers flatly saying, ‘We have this amount of rooms at this price, this amount of meeting space, this is the menu, these are the dates available, if interested sign on the dotted line and go and have your meeting.’

“I would say it is not so with hotel groups like Starwood and Hyatt, and the luxury brand hotels. They get it. But a lot of the others don’t. The danger is that everyone is getting placed into one big pot and the amount of business you represent now and into the future may not necessarily have the impact that one would expect.”

There’s still value to be found. Patton advises planners that clients must be flexible. “If they come to me and say we can only meet on this date, in this city, and at this hotel, then they’re going to get hit between the eyes on the cost and have little room for negotiation in terms of concessions. But, if they have some flexibility, and come to my company, let us do our research and our homework, and come up with a selection of possibilities at a good value, they can still get a good deal.”

### When Green Is a Requirement

DaVita University Manager Jeanie Kelley has other parameters she utilizes in the site selection process.

Kelley says that DaVita University, the dialysis division of Denver-based DaVita HealthCare Partners Inc., selects destinations based on their specific business needs.

**“Our own initiative...strives to reduce our carbon footprint. So recycling, energy efficiency and even healthy eating options are important to us and so is selecting a hotel that embraces those values.”**



**Jeanie Kelley**  
DaVita University Manager  
DaVita HealthCare Partners Inc.  
Denver, CO

driven on a very localized level, therefore we look for hotels in that geographic area. For our larger gatherings, we look for locations that will create an experience for our teammates and will be easy to travel to,” says Kelley.

Booking only those hotels that practice green initiatives will do. “At DaVita, we have our own initiative called Village Green that strives to reduce our carbon footprint wherever possible. So recycling, energy efficiency and even healthy eating options are important to us and so is selecting a hotel that embraces those values,” Kelley notes.

Kelley says she finds that most hotels

have green programs, including the hotel where they staged a meeting for 1,000 of DaVita’s medical directors. “This particular property clearly had an emphasis on recycling as each of its shared-space receptacles had three compartments for plastics, papers and trash,” Kelley says. “In addition, the hotel provided a large bin in our team’s office, which allowed us to recycle any papers we discarded as opposed to just throwing them away. Also, we see more and more hotels provide water stations as opposed to water bottles, which has such a large carbon impact as we all know.”

### When the Golden Rule...Rules

After all is said and done, don’t forget the golden rule: Know your group. Indeed, it can be worth its weight in gold especially for smaller corporate meetings such as the upscale outings that David Weaver of The Rawls Group in Orlando, FL, generally arranges. As a certified succession planner and certified executive coach, his mission is often to advise owners, management and family members of closely held entities on how to ensure they are fully prepared for the succession of their business to future generations of the family or to external buyers. Weaver avoids large meeting-style hotels, to insure that his group doesn’t play second-fiddle to larger groups. Thus, he seeks intimate, award-winning resorts such as Barnsley Gardens Resort in Adairsville, located 60 miles outside of Atlanta, GA. The historic resort, set on 3,300 acres with 160-year-old gardens and luxurious cottages, has made *Condé Nast Traveler’s* “Gold List” for the past three years and was ranked No. 2 out of 25 Southern U.S. Golf Resorts.

“By holding meetings in the cottages where we were staying, we felt we were in more of a lodge-type setting, much more appropriate for our group of men,” explains Weaver. “High-level executives expect to be pampered, and they are at resorts like this,” says Weaver.

All in all, these relevant suggestions from the experts will help guide planners as they meet the constantly changing landscape of the “new normal” and lead to simplifying the site-selection process in the months ahead. **C&IT**

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# NEW & RENOVATED

An artist's rendering of a ballroom at the new Omni Nashville Hotel, which will open in late 2013.

## To Book or Not to Book?

### Hammering Out the Pros and Cons of Using New & Newly Renovated Properties

A few years ago, after months of negotiation, Anne Albright, executive vice president of Wyndham Jade, a meeting services company in Plano, TX, booked a large event at the Fontainebleau in Las Vegas. The hotel never opened. "It was a massive piece of business," says Albright. "The biggest risk of booking a hotel that's not open is that it will not open in time. We tracked the news as problems began to emerge and as we got to six months before the event we cancelled. "It was very hard to find a replacement," says Albright, "and in fact we had to go to another city."

Experiences like that do make planners wary of booking new hotels before they are able to visit it after completion — or at least until a break-in period has passed. That is also true, though to a lesser extent, of major renovations when meeting spaces and guest rooms bear little resemblance to their previous configurations.

A lot depends on a planner's history with a hotel brand. Denise Doyle, director of conference and meeting services for HSF Affiliates LLC, Prudential Real

Estate and Relocation, will be bringing between 3,000 and 5,000 delegates to the new Omni Hotel in Nashville in 2014, a much anticipated venue because it is the headquarters hotel for the huge new Music City Center (the hotel opens late this year and Music City Center opens this May).

While Doyle was not able to visit the completed hotel before she made the booking, she's comfortable about the event for several reasons. "We work with Omni mainly for our annual conferences which range from 3,000 to 10,000 people.

"We did a site visit to Nashville, and were able to look at the room product that Omni had set up. It was in a different building, but it was the exact replica as far as size, soft goods and even windows. I also did a hard-hat tour of the meeting space in the hotel and looked at how the space would be configured. Some of that was finished."

While there are always concerns about whether a hotel will be finished and whether it will be operating at its best,

By Harvey Chipkin

Doyle says, "I raised those questions with Omni and they were answered well. I do know that Omni has an excellent training program for new employees; they invest a lot in that. And when they do open a new hotel, they bring in managers from other hotels for the opening. So I'm comfortable with that."

In fact, says Doyle, "We've been very fortunate to have our meetings in quite a few new hotels." But Doyle agrees with many of her counterparts in saying, "Typically, I do like to give it at least six months."

Similarly, says Albright, "We normally do not like to put clients in a hotel until it's been open for six months — and that's based on experience. There are exceptions to that, and they usually involve clients who insist on a location. We will go through the pros and cons of that but sometimes a rate is so attractive they will decide the pros outweigh the cons.

"After six months," says Albright, "your client gets all the benefits of a new hotel without the negatives. That is es-

pecially ideal for an incentive where you want things to be perfect."

And Leslie Graham, global event planner for Callaway Golf Company, says, "I would worry about a hotel opening on time if I had a program very close to a hotel opening date. I wait to make sure a hotel is open prior to booking a program."

#### Communication and Contracts

It's important, according to planners, to lay out the facts for superiors about any possible issues that might arise in a new or renovated space — even if the novelty of a new venue or an attractive rate is particularly appealing. Says Albright, "We will make clients aware of all the risks involved and put penalties into the contract. Many things become negotiable with a new or renovated property. Not all hotels will agree to all of those penalties so then you have to let your clients decide how much they want to gamble on their event."

Doyle agrees: "We do build performance clauses into all of our contracts and there may be additional issues with a new or upgraded hotel."

Companies are frequently persuaded by post-opening deals to get into a hotel "they ordinarily couldn't afford," says Albright. "The people attracted to those first critical months are those who will not be able to afford it later. Even so we will put all sorts of penalties into the contract." Graham adds that any kind of rate deal "depends on availability."

#### Service Issues

While physical completion is an overriding issue, the adeptness of staff in a new or altered space, is a priority. Says Albright. "When you have a new property and people who haven't worked together, service can really be affected. ...Although we will probably be able to overcome any service issues before the client notices them, that makes our job tougher."

Last fall, says Albright, she managed a 2,000-person convention at a new hotel and while the onsite experience was fine, "the billing was a nightmare. The accounting department didn't have its act together, and we took a lot of time cleaning it up. Who would expect that?"

One corporate planner says she had

a strategy session for 23 executives at the recently expanded Hanover Inn at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. And while there was a technological "glitch" in one meeting room, the overall experience was very positive. The conference

center hotel faces the Dartmouth College green. It has, said the planner, "high ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows and a lot of light, which really lent itself to the nature of the meeting, which was strategic planning. At the same time, it was easy to get a secure and confidential feel because of the safeguards they have in place. We would be happy to go back despite that glitch."

#### What's Good About What's New

Technology is only the beginning of what might be better about a new hotel — although state-of-the-art technology is not a given. "Most clients," says Albright, "really like the hottest and latest place. Most of the time the technology is upgraded, especially at meeting hotels. However, you'd be surprised. ...Many times I have been in a new ballroom with poor connectivity. It's not a given that a new hotel will have state-of-the-art technology although that is often the case."

Adds Doyle, "Meeting planners see the value of new hotels in the architecture as well as the technology. There are no pillars and the space is generally more user-friendly. Also older hotels tended to have thicker walls that make wireless connectivity more difficult.

"With all the new technology and changing audio-visual needs," Doyle continues, "it's sometimes better to be in a new hotel where even the furniture is more adapted to the use of technology."

Graham says, "I'm always interested in exploring new properties in the north county area; it's great to have new options for our events. I was so excited when the Hilton Carlsbad Oceanfront Resort & Spa (in Carlsbad, CA) opened. We had our first event there in January, and it was a huge success. New venues tend to bring fresh ideas into my events." However, Graham did add that any pluses as far as technology "depend on how the venue is designed."



*"Omni has an excellent training program for new employees. And when they do open a new hotel, they bring in managers from other hotels."*

#### Denise Doyle

Director of Conference & Meeting Services  
HSF Affiliates LLC, Prudential Real Estate and Relocation, Irvine, CA

"Clients are always asking about new hotels," says Albright. "And I've been amazed that so many new properties are opening after the lull in recent years. It is definitely an attention-getter and attendance-driver."

"A new hotel does drive attendance," agrees Doyle. "Our attendees have to pay to attend the events, and it helps with attendance to be able to promote a new hotel. If there is a choice of hotels in our bloc, they would tend to opt for the new one."

#### Hoteliers Trumpet Newness

For their part, not surprisingly, hotel operators are very positive about the benefits of a fresh or refurbished venue.

Perhaps the most dramatic opening in the near future will be the aforementioned Omni Nashville Hotel, which will offer 800 guest rooms, more than 80,000 sf of meeting space, a spa, and five culinary and entertainment venues.

"Omni has a reputation and history of successful openings as is evident from The Omni Dallas, Omni San Diego and the Omni Fort Worth," says Tod Roadarmel, director of sales and marketing for Omni Nashville. "Our brand is trusted by meeting professionals, and they know what to expect when working with us. For our pre-sells, we released a virtual tour video, which shows the meeting professionals exactly what we will look like when complete, from the hotel entrance to the rooftop pool. We also built out a fully plumbed king and double queen guest rooms, which are exactly what our guests will experience when we open — from the bed linens to the artwork to the bathroom makeup mirrors and lighting."

The property, says Roadarmel, "will



**“Clients are always asking about new hotels. ...It is definitely an attention-getter and attendance-driver.”**



**Anne E. Albright**  
Executive Vice President  
Wyndham Jade  
Plano, TX

had a fantastic location but the product was not necessarily up to Grand Hyatt standards. We reimagined the product and brought in planners to help us do that.”

The Grand Hyatt San Francisco, a 40-year-old hotel, has undergone a \$70 renovation that saw the gutting of the hotel and the reconfiguration of meeting space that now allows for meetings of 350, up from 250. Kovac says, “It’s easy to convince veteran planners because we actually reached out to planners during the design process. We asked ‘what are you looking for?’

“One of the biggest challenges with new space,” says Kovac, “is that while new technologies may work perfectly,

have high-speed wireless Internet access throughout the hotel, and meeting professionals will have state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment available to ensure their event goes off without a hitch. We keep meeting professionals updated on the progress.”

Sherry Romello, senior director, Hilton Meetings and Product Management, Hilton Worldwide, notes, “New and renovated hotels provide a blank slate that can be custom-designed to meet the current needs of travelers and planners based on the location of the property and the type of travelers who commonly visit the hotel. ...Many team members at new or renovated hotels have experience working at other Hilton properties so they understand the accommodations and service that planners require and expect. Meeting planners are looking to non-traditional venues to hold their meetings including restaurants, lobbies and lounges. ...These types of spaces within the hotel complement traditional conference room and ballroom meeting space. Also, Hilton is incorporating brand standards for meeting space wireless Internet, which will increase available bandwidth to accommodate more devices per user.”

### A Changing Market

Frequently, hotels have to change to meet the demands of the meetings market. Matt Kovac, director of sales and marketing for the Grand Hyatt San Francisco, says, “We needed to do something to stand out from the pack and to reach out to new markets which did not consider us before. This hotel has always



Loews Miami Beach Hotel's new Soak cabana deck is designed for small meetings, events and entertainment.

planners may not be familiar with them. We had to educate planners in those new technologies because we are ahead of the curve on them. For instance, we have a new lock system that allows planners complete access to their rooms and ties into the property management system. Also, says Kovac, “we don’t have groups into a new space until two weeks after the construction people turn it over to us.”

### Cutting-Edge Cool

Sometimes a change is so radical that planners may not have seen its like before. The Loews Miami Beach Hotel, for instance, opened the Soak cabana deck recently. While cabanas are usually associated with lounging by the pool, these were designed for small meetings, events and high-end entertainment. The eight

private cabanas offer air conditioning, living spaces, private bathrooms and showers, refrigerators, Apple TV, iPads, smart device docking stations, Wi-Fi, safes, second floor seating space and cutting edge technology such as video distribution capabilities on flat-screen televisions.

Cindy Fisher, vice president, global sales for Carlson Wagonlit Travel, held an event at the Loews Miami Beach that incorporated the new cabanas. It was a sales meeting for 45 associates from North and South America. “We used the cabanas,” says Fisher, “for the opening reception. We had small meetings in those units, which comfortably hold four to six people. It was all very casual. (The setting) was very conducive to achieving our goals. We always look for an environment that supports the objective of the specific meeting, which in this case was networking and sharing information.”

Michael Darst, executive director for catering and conference management at Loews Miami Beach, says, “We sold the cabanas to planners when they were under construction with constant communication, backup plans and lots of visual assets. The most alluring aspect of a new build or renovation to a property is the peer pressure to be the first to experience it — and that makes the risk worth it. In today’s meeting market, there is a

sense of peer pressure to book meetings in the hottest new venues, with the most creativity to wow their participants and keep them coming back year after year.”

In fact, adds Darst, hotels have become ever more adept at handling newness. He explains, “An addition like the Soak cabana deck presents few setbacks because the resort is operating and allows plenty of time to test the product before deploying it to market. New and renovated hotel issues for brands like Loews can be a thing of the past. Hotel brands have taskforces, pre-opening operating procedures and guidelines that ensure proper deployment of a product before it touches the consumer.”

For more on new and renovated properties, see the special section starting on page 17. **C&IT**

## NEW & RENOVATED

# Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa and Casino

**H**yatt. You’re More Than Welcome.” That’s the motto at one of Tahoe’s most luxurious group destinations. This lakefront resort offers 50,000 sf of indoor/outdoor function space, including the area’s only shoreline ballroom. The Lakeside Ballroom was also part of a just completed \$20 million transformation.

Among other resort-wide improvements, the Spa Conference Center underwent a \$500,000 makeover, creating a fresh style with upgraded audio-visual and technology capabilities. Two of four onsite eateries were also transformed. The award-winning Lone Eagle Grille now showcases a more open, richly appointed lakefront lounge with massive rock fireplace. The Sierra Café presents an entirely new, mountain contemporary look for all-day service in the expansive, lodge-like dining room and on the seasonal mountain-air deck.

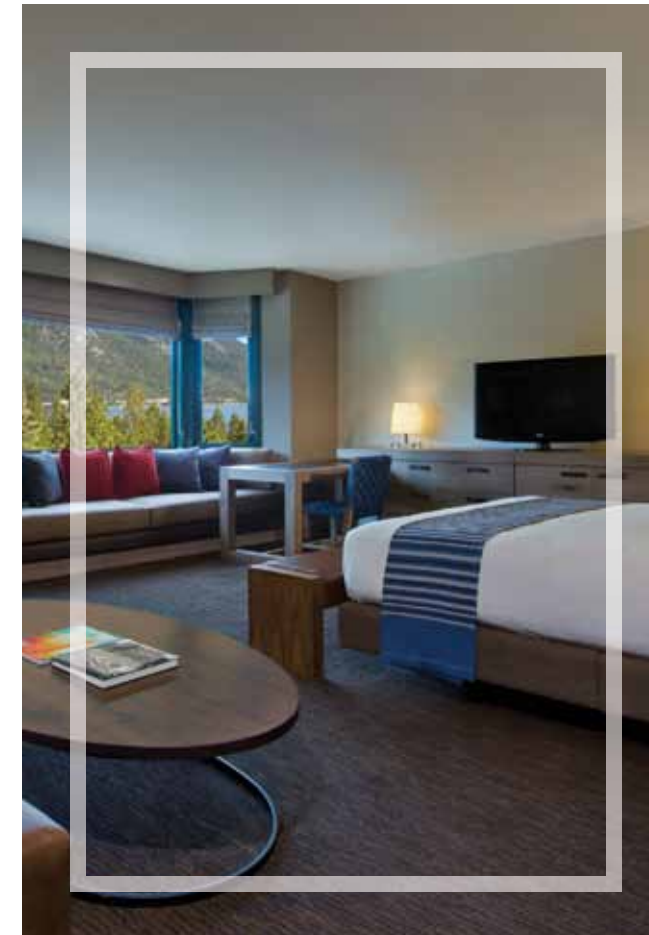
These stylish surroundings echo the contemporary Grand Lodge feel of 398 all-new guest rooms and suites. Multimedia hubs offer high-tech entertainment. New baths make a modern statement in granite and glass. Brushed steel, wood and dark leather create a striking ambience.

What else could influence a group to clear their calendars? Perhaps the 20,000-sf Stillwater Spa, or the private resort beach, or casino entertainment... Or being only five minutes from lakeview skiing and championship golf.

Naturally, the Hyatt’s sensational transformation calls for a celebration. That means great offers for groups signing contracts by May 31, 2013 for events held by December 31, 2014. Call group sales 888-899-5017 for details (minimum 10 rooms on peak). **C&IT**

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## Foxwoods Resort Casino

Situated in the heart of the Mashantucket Pequot Indian Reservation, Foxwoods Resort Casino is the largest resort casino in North America, providing more than 6 million sf of excitement through endless, exhilarating entertainment options — from six casinos, world-class dining and AAA Four Diamond accommodations, to vibrant nightlife, pampering spas, award-winning golf and luxury shopping.

### Renovations Underway

Throughout 2013, Foxwoods will undergo renovations with the groundbreaking of a retail outlet mall, adding more than 75 stores to its current retail offerings and putting Foxwoods on the map as a shopping destination in addition to a meeting planner's paradise.

Foxwoods is already remodeling parts of the concourse area throughout its main corridor, unveiling attractive new storefronts with a sleek, modern design and bringing

a host of new shopping and dining options to entertain attendees.

Boasting more than 150,000 sf of meeting space, Foxwoods' mission is to provide companies with the ultimate meeting destination, offering sound technological infrastructure, world-renowned chefs, gourmet catering services, certified meeting professionals and unmatched après meeting amenities and accommodations.

From the 50,000-sf, column-free Premier Ballroom to 15 flexible meeting rooms, Foxwoods delivers impeccable service for flawless execution of events. With limitless tailored meeting options, from towering ice sculptures and show-stopping desserts, to

check-in services and personal butlers for VIPs, Foxwoods transforms events into dynamic successes.

With 2,200 rooms spanning four very different hotels, Foxwoods offers planners accommodations to please every group's distinct travel tastes.

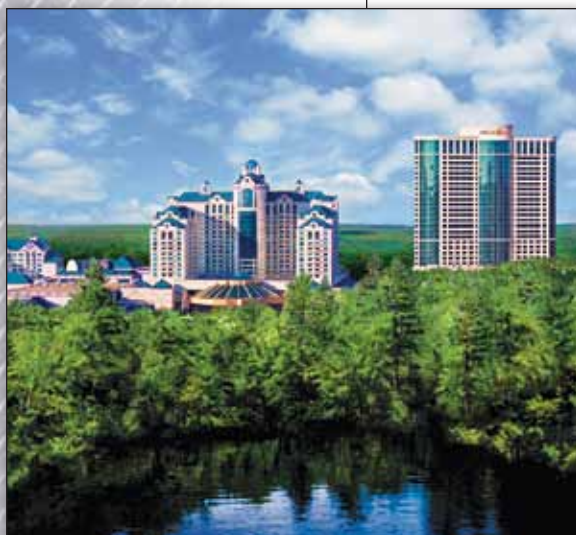
At the AAA Four Diamond MGM Grand at Foxwoods, it's all about anticipation just steps away from modern gaming, pulsing with music and surrounded by celebrity-chef dining, shopping and a grand outdoor pool. MGM Grand at Foxwoods' guest rooms and suites are outfitted with retro-chic, modern décor, featuring the latest technology for the savvy traveler.

Foxwoods' tradition of elegance awaits guests at the AAA Four Diamond Grand Pequot Tower. Flanked by striking art and architecture, the soaring lobby leads to a tower of spacious deluxe rooms and plush suites. In 2013, guests will begin to see a new design concept introduced in rooms and hallways, including contemporary décor with a blend of seafoam blues and soft ecru accents. Fine dining at Paragon Restaurant, relaxation at Norwich Spa and some of the most popular casinos are minutes away.

Guests at Great Cedar Hotel will enjoy 327 spacious accommodations, recently renovated to a new level of sophistication, landing Foxwoods the 2012 Connecticut Building Congress Project Team Award in the category of Major Renovations. Located in the heart of the casino, attendees are close to dining options, exciting entertainment and boutiques.

A country retreat located beside the main complex, Two Trees Inn provides a perfect destination for guests who want a relaxing experience a step away from the energetic pace of the main resort and casinos. With a delicious restaurant, merry bar and heated indoor pool of its own, the restaurants, spas and casinos are still only a short walk or complimentary shuttle away. **C&IT**

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# New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center

In perfect harmony with her timeless charms, New Orleans' newest great improvisation — The Great Hall — which will be the future site of many a command performance, debuted January 2013 in the Crescent City. The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center now features the 60,300-sf divisible Great Hall, boasting 25,400 sf of multi-use prefunction space and hotel-like appointments throughout.

## The Great Hall

The impressive 1.1-million-sf center, which so perfectly complements the city's walkable hotel packages, is now more attractive than ever to groups large and small.

Additional features of The Great Hall include a 4,660-sf junior ballroom, complete with a 3,420-sf rooftop terrace, a 980-sf indoor balcony and a 5,700-sf executive club lounge. A new pedestrian plaza provides a grand sense of arrival to all attendees and serves as a seamless connection to nearby hotels.

## Technological Opportunities

The ballroom expansion project is the latest in a series of \$140 million in upgrades to the facility since 2006. The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center — the sixth largest convention center in the nation — boasts a 1 gigabyte fiber optic Internet backbone that is 100 percent redundant, providing meeting planners with unlimited technological opportunities to extend programming to attendees and exhibitors.

In addition to a repainted exterior

and extensive landscaping, the center's vast lobby features comfortable furniture groupings in more than 150,000 sf of space for registration, information kiosks and sponsor banners.

Attendees will enjoy learning the origins of unique New Orleans words via an interactive QR code on the "Word Wall." The lobby's decorative banners feature iconic New Orleans images of art, music, food, history and architecture, and purple-coated "Fleur de Lis Ambassadors" greet attendees at every entrance.

Digital, flat-panel audio-video information systems are strategically placed throughout the main lobby, meeting room levels and in prefunction areas. In addition, key card access and a fully integrated, digital signage system with screens were implemented in all 140 meeting rooms and throughout public space.

The center's highly qualified and experienced production team offers a full menu of integrated services for all lighting, audio, video and rigging needs in-house or to support selected contractors.

The center offers a full suite of high-definition video equipment for a variety of satellite broadcasts, presentations or recording formats and the trained personnel to design, capture and edit programs onsite.

The full-service UPS Store provides show management, attendees and exhibitors a full range of services including large-image, onsite printing of meter boards, directional signs and banners; in-bound and out-bound small package handling; and a satellite mobile kiosk for printing, packing and shipping.

The center's food service contractor, Centerplate, is committed to providing the essence of the New Orleans food experience, operating three onsite restaurants featuring live local music and menus of iconic Louisiana dishes by award-winning chef Donald Link.

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The site of many a command performance, the Crescent City's long revered convention center now features a 60,300 square foot, column-free, divisible ballroom with 25,400 sq ft of multi-use pre-function space all with hotel-like appointments throughout. This impressive 3.1 million sq ft center, which so perfectly complements the city's walkable hotel packages, is now more attractive than ever to groups large AND small. Additional features of note include the 4,660 sq ft Rivergate Room, contiguous to 1.1 million sq ft of exhibit space, 140 meeting rooms, a 4,000 seat theater and a 36,000 sq ft ballroom.



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**The Newest Accommodations**

The Loft at The Peabody is the Orlando luxury hotel's newest accommodations experience, expanding its acclaimed service with boutique accommodations and upscale amenities.

The Loft comprises 52 rooms located within three private-access floors in the Mallard Tower. Each guest room is elegantly appointed with premium comfort items, including plush blankets, robes and slippers, and upgraded bath amenities with aromatherapy products for a spa-inspired experience. Additionally, a Keurig Brewing System is provided along with complimentary coffees and herbal teas — adding extra taste and convenience for travelers.

Access to the private lounge furnished with spacious seating and contemporary décor completes The Loft experience. Guests of The Loft are invited to enjoy a complimentary glass of wine and gourmet snacks

during The Loft's daily wine reception from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

For guests with discerning tastes, The Peabody Orlando's 1,641 comfortable guest rooms feature contemporary décor and amenities. Among the hotel's 10 delectable dining and entertainment options, NAPA offers wine country-inspired gourmet cuisine, while Rocks, a 6,000-sf lounge, serves lively libations.

Relaxation is provided in the hotel's 22,000-sf spa, salon and fitness center, along with its three luxurious pools. And, who could forget the world-famous March of The Peabody Ducks? A twice-daily tradition enjoyed by all.

**Unparalleled Meeting Facilities**

The Peabody Orlando's 300,000 total sf of flexible function space includes the pillar-free 54,652-sf Peabody Grand Ballroom, the 34,378-sf Windermere Ballroom, the 26,923-sf Plaza International Ballroom, two junior ballrooms and 105 meeting rooms. In addition, the meeting space offers state-of-the-art telecommunications technology, audio-visual, production and business support services, as well as outstanding banquet and catering services — everything today's professional meeting planner could possibly need.

From unparalleled hospitality and contemporary amenities, The Peabody Orlando's location is also something to be desired. Nestled in the heart of Florida, it is central to all of the state's world-famous theme park destinations, restaurants, beaches, premier shopping outlets and specialty shops and cultural arts.

Situated within the International Drive Convention and Entertainment District, and next to Pointe Orlando's dining and nightlife, two covered sky bridges connect The Peabody Orlando to the Orange County Convention Center, a 2.1 million sf facility housed with exhibition and meeting space.

**C&IT**

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## The Villas of Grand Cypress

The Villas of Grand Cypress is ready to reveal a whole new look. Located within minutes of Orlando's top entertainment attractions, the resort has spent the past four months transforming all 146 Club Suites and one- to four- bedroom Villas.

### The Vision and Design

The property-wide renovation of The Villas of Grand Cypress had an impressive budget of more than \$100,000 per villa. Living areas throughout the redesigned Club Suites and Villas are spacious, inviting and residential in style. Fine furniture in Italian and midcentury modern styles includes American leather sofa sleepers and club chairs. Pulling inspiration from the area's surroundings, custom-designed woven carpets from Axminster feature the magnified lines of topographic maps that evoke the natural landscape. Artwork includes eye-catching original bronze sculptures, custom chandeliers and expressionist designs. Select villas offer sleek dining room tables generously sized for 10 and gas-lit fireplaces. Stylish beds with upholstered headboards illuminated by ambient bedside lighting are inviting with elegant bedding, plush pillows and 300-thread-count linens. Outdoors, guests can enjoy expansive private patios or decks overlooking the fairways or waterways of the North Course.

Guests can retreat and relax in the luxurious five-fixture bathrooms, which feature stacked stone, crisp white porcelain and polished chrome. Glass encased walk-in showers include a European shower tower featuring body jets, hand-held shower wands

and rain shower heads. The bathrooms also showcase deep-walled bathtubs set upon stone platforms and custom quartz counters with double sinks topped with polished chrome Kohler faucets and illuminated mirrors integrated with a 19-inch television.

The Villa kitchens include top-of-the-line, stainless steel GE appliances, quartz countertops, stainless steel sinks and polished chrome fixtures. Walnut wood cabinets feature stainless steel hardware, while the floors are adorned with porcelain tiles.

A new Fitness Center has also been added in the pool area for the exclusive use of guests and features state-of-the-art cardio, each with built in home theaters, and resistance equipment.

### Executive Meeting Center

The Executive Meeting Center offers four separate meeting rooms totaling 7,200 sf of meeting space, which can be divided into eight self-contained, soundproof meeting and banquet rooms. The meeting rooms surround an open atrium and overlook a scenic garden terrace. Additional updates include a new, climate-controlled and fully outfitted pavilion, which offers an additional 3,280 flexible sf of seasonal meeting space, bringing the total space to 10,480 sf.

Convenient to Orlando International Airport and within easy access to the many famed local attractions, the Villas of Grand Cypress offers true sanctuary in the heart of Orlando. This self-contained retreat presents a nurturing environment conducive to successful and productive meetings.

In addition to 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature-designed golf, the resort's Grand Cypress Academy of Golf is rated as one of the "Top 25 Golf Schools in America." This 21-acre facility features golf schools, lessons, clinics and more, perfectly equipped for personalized programs and events, with the latest state-of-the-art technologies, and PGA-certified instructors.

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**Guest Villas:** 146  
**Meeting Space:** Nine meeting rooms and 10,480 sf.  
**Special Services & Amenities:** Flexible meeting space, teambuilding, tropical outdoor venues for themed events, and 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature-designed golf. Offering newly remodeled luxury accommodations, a true sanctuary in the heart of Orlando.

AMAZING VIEWS.  
AND THAT'S JUST IN THE NEW SUITES.



Be the first to experience the spectacular new Villas of Grand Cypress in Orlando, Florida. The accommodations feature completely redesigned interiors, new fixtures and finishes, upgraded furniture, enhanced in-room technology, as well as a brand new state of the art fitness center. Essentially redesigning the resort into a one-of-a-kind first-class sanctuary.

Your attendees will embrace abundant recreation, 10,480 sq. ft. of flexible meeting space, clubhouse, on-site dining, and 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature-designed golf.

\*Book your group by 6/30/2013, stay by 12/31/2013 and receive 3% credit to the Master Account, plus a complimentary spa service for you!

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\* Offer must be mentioned upon initial inquiry and is not applicable to existing bookings. Based upon availability. Book by 6/30/2013 and meet by 12/31/2013. Minimum 15 rooms peak, 2 or more nights, complimentary spa service choice of a mani-pedi, or a 1-hour massage.



## NEW & RENOVATED

# Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa

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Matthew Price, Director of Sales  
and Event Planning  
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**Guest Rooms:** 598

**Meeting Space:** More than 32,000 sf of indoor and more than 20,000 sf of deck areas.

**Special Services &**

**Amenities:** Award-winning spa and six onsite dining options including a AAA Four Diamond restaurant.

With a long-standing tradition of providing award-winning facilities, deluxe accommodations, impeccable service and luxury resort amenities on Florida's Northwest Gulf Coast, the 598-room Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa is raising the bar with \$5 million of recent enhancements to its meeting space, accommodations and fine-dining restaurant.

### Meeting Facilities

The largest, full-service resort on Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast, the Hilton Sandestin Beach boasts more than 32,000 sf of flexible meeting space, showcasing a fresh new design inspired by the resort's beachfront setting. The renovation includes many details incorporating state-of-the-art technology, with new teleconferencing facilities

in the boardroom and touch-screen lighting in the ballrooms.

With its 9,504-sf Emerald Ballroom, 20 breakout rooms, 106-seat theater, and more than 20,000 sf of deck areas overlooking the Gulf of Mexico, the Hilton Sandestin Beach is able to effortlessly accommodate more than 2,000 guests in a variety of settings.

Seagar's Prime Steaks and Seafood, a AAA Four Diamond 150-seat restaurant, has blended its tradition of excellence in culinary creativity and service with sophisticated new décor. In addition to new furnishings, there also is a new semiprivate dining room created to showcase Seagar's 600-label wine list. Named one of *Condé Nast Traveler's* "Top 20 Florida Golf Resorts," "Top 100 U.S. Spas" and "Top 150 U.S. Resorts," Hilton Sandestin Beach continues to distinguish itself as a premier resort hotel. **C&IT**

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Enjoy 32,000 square feet of award-winning meeting space – completely renovated in January 2013 – and now ready for your group! Bring your next meeting to Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, the largest full-service beachfront resort on Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast. Let our experienced team of professionals create an enviable meeting that only looks like you worked hard to put it together! We make planning your next meeting easy...freeing you to enjoy your time with us. Visit [hiltonsandestinbeach.com/meetings](http://hiltonsandestinbeach.com/meetings).



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## INFORMATION SECURITY

Technology security experts worry about meeting planners who fail to implement even the most basic of safeguards to protect attendee information on computers, laptops and handheld devices.

Such planners don't include Cassie Brown, chief experience officer of Charlotte, NC-based TCG Events, which plans corporate meetings, events and incentives. Brown takes several basic measures to protect her own data and that of clients. "We use a technology company that deals with all of our computer issues. We change our passwords every three months, and they aren't all stored in one place. Most of our information is on a server that is backed up twice offsite. When interns leave, we change passwords they used," says Brown.

She also makes it a point to inquire about the security of

meeting registration and management websites and software that TCG may use onsite to collect attendee and client information. "We have always asked a lot of questions and delved deep into the security of websites. It comes down to having a conversation about how they secure data and what happens to it at the end of the event. You also want to know if there is an online backup and how they secure credit card data," Brown says.

According to security experts, planners must make information security a top priority for several reasons:

- They use a growing variety of PCs, laptops and handheld devices to store and transmit huge amounts of client and attendee data.
- They increasingly use standalone meeting planning and registration software available for free or for a fee.
- They hire third-party meeting management services that often use their own proprietary systems to manage meeting information.
- They hold meetings at the growing number of hotels, convention centers and other venues offering free and open Wi-Fi, which is notoriously vulnerable to hackers.

Needless to say, hacking is a growing

problem. According to the latest study from the Identity Theft Resource Center, during the first six months of 2012: "Malicious attacks involving 'hacking' continue to represent an ever increasing growth, with 30.5 percent of the breaches so far this year identifying hacking as the root cause, up from the 27.7 percent reported for the same period in 2011. If this rate increase continues, 2012 will be on pace to have another record-high year in this category."

Some planners, especially small independent shops, have weak information security measures because they lack computer savviness, are too busy to obtain it, or don't have an in-house or third-party IT consultant. However, securing information isn't rocket science. Following are examples of actual information security practices and the areas they cover.

Robert Glowczwski, DMCP, director of operations, Access Destination Services—Orange County, describes practices for protecting his company's information. "Our general practice is to use an enterprise anti-virus system because it's easier to maintain at all work stations instead of having individual products that would have to be updated at individual work stations," he says. "We have multiple

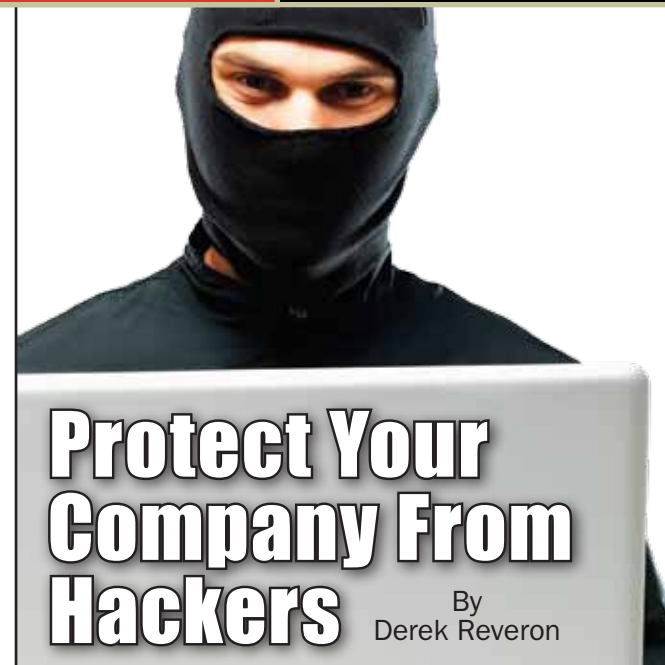
backup systems on- and off-premises. A good firewall and password authentication are important as is a good spam monitoring system because there are many phishing emails and viruses."

Access educates employees on anti-virus practices, creating strong passwords and avoiding unknown websites, pop-up ads and links. The company also uses third-party registration systems that follow industry standards for handling credit cards and have state-of-the-art security and efficiency, says Glowczwski.

He adds that Access works with IT professionals to ensure optimal security. "That would be a smart thing to do for those who aren't technically savvy. If you can't afford to have an IT person on staff at least try to have regular conversations with a reputable IT professional who can help you with the basics," Glowczwski advises.

American Meetings Inc. (AMI), a Fort Lauderdale, FL-based meeting management and event marketing firm, guides its security practices with an 82-page security policy document. AMI, which handles meetings worldwide, provides the document to potential corporate clients who request it as part of an RFP, says CEO Andy McNeill.

The company continuously updates





and strengthens its security policies following a few security close calls early on in the company's founding. "We have independent, cloud-based servers for each client, and each one is an encrypted enterprise server to ensure 100 percent uptime," says McNeill. "We have four levels of backup both onsite and at remote servers across the U.S. and in Europe."

Unlike many companies, AMI doesn't keep client information indefinitely because it's a security risk. "We keep all data for at least 12 months, although some clients require up to 36 months. We deal with large corporations, and we are often the conduit between one division and another, one brand manager and another. They sometimes come back to us needing information for a program because they don't have it internally, so it's critical that we have it, and that it's secure," McNeill says.

AMI's information security measures reflect those that large corporate clients typically require as part of master service contracts. "They might require us to have multiple backups of their content or attendee information they are using our servers to hold," says McNeill. "That's pretty common. Another question might address our policy on physically guarding computer equipment and information. We get asked that a lot. They ask what we do with credit card information and registration forms after the event. Some require us to hold the information and then delete it after a certain length of line, depending on their policy."

### The Perils of Free Wi-Fi

McNeill takes steps to ensure that any Wi-Fi network AMI offers is secure. "If we are providing a Wi-Fi network, we will make sure it has encryption and work with the venue to make sure that it's in place. If you are on an open or free Wi-Fi network, you must assume that someone else is looking at your data," says McNeill.

Many information thefts occur via Wi-Fi. Such thievery should be a big concern to planners due to the vulnerability and growing use of free Wi-Fi in a wide

range of meeting venues, experts say. According to an ITRC survey, about 40 percent of people don't know there are ways to protect data when using Wi-Fi, and nearly 80 percent believe that using the technology can lead to identity theft.

That finding isn't surprising because it's relatively easy for anybody with basic technology knowledge to obtain software online that monitors and "grabs" information via Wi-Fi connections, says Robert Siciliano, an identity theft and personal security expert, author, CEO of *idtheftsecurity.com* and a McAfee online security expert.

Siciliano explains that there are generally two types of Wi-Fi available to meeting participants. One type is free or public Wi-Fi that anybody can easily access. Free Wi-Fi usually doesn't require a password and lacks encryption, says Siciliano. The other level of Wi-Fi requires a password or username, and usually includes encryption, which is often not an option at most large venues and functions, Siciliano says.

As a result, attendees and planners typically access the free variety. That is unsafe, says Siciliano. "If they have their devices set up in



**John Sileo**, CEO, The Sileo Group Inc., Denver, CO

***"What's free is not the Wi-Fi service, but your data because it's beamed out with little or no protection. The issue is how to set up a secure connection between attendees' computers and the device providing the wireless service."***

certain ways, for example if they are sharing files on their devices, they are at risk. Open wireless is generally subject to 'sniffers,' a hacking term for software that seeks out vulnerable connections to free wireless," says Siciliano.

John Sileo, CEO of the Denver, CO-based Sileo Group, an information economy think tank that trains organizations to secure and leverage the power of their digital privacy, identity and reputation, is also an author and speaker. He describes the risk of using free Wi-Fi another way: "What's free is not the Wi-Fi service, but your data because it's beamed out with

little or no protection. The issue is how to set up a secure connection between attendees' computers and the device providing the wireless service. The ideal would be that every person registering for meetings gets a username and password. That's time consuming and expensive, and that's why people don't do it," says Sileo.

Most planners appreciate free Wi-Fi as an attendee convenience. However, planners typically don't consider the security risks of Wi-Fi, says Brown. "For planners, using free Wi-Fi to access things like registration systems and getting into your own network or cloud to look at things like client information and budgets is just not a great idea. But it's not uncommon to do so because of the cost of setting up hard lines in conference centers and hotels," says Brown.

Remember these tips when dealing with free Wi-Fi:

**Give attendees a heads-up.** "Make them aware if it's not secure," says Brown. "You see it sometimes in registration and conference materials where it will say, 'Free unsecured Wi-Fi available.'"

**Turn off file sharing in computers and mobile devices.** "You might have

file sharing running in your home or offices so you can see files on other devices in your network. You want to turn it off because hackers may be able to access your files," says Siciliano.

**Use a virtual private network (VPN).** Individual planners can do this by purchasing a wireless card to use in a computer. Or planners can use a smartphone with wireless service to "tether" to their computers, says Siciliano. The VPNs are considered more secure because they are encrypted by carriers. "There are also free and paid tools anyone can download that allow them to surf on Wi-Fi more se-

curely using a VPN that basically encrypts communications," says Siciliano.

**Read the terms and conditions of Wi-Fi services** to understand the risks and encourage attendees to do the same.

**Don't forget to ask questions.** "Know what type of Wi-Fi security is in place," says Brad Neuman, director, Attend-eSource Technologies, a suite of web-based planning solutions at metroConnections, a Minneapolis-headquartered company that plans corporate meetings, events, in-

***"Ask if anyone is going to help monitor activity on the Wi-Fi network so that you have assurances there are no hackers trying to get information from attendees. A monitored network helps protect users."***

**Brad Neuman**, Director, Attend-eSource Technologies metroConnections, Minneapolis, MN

centives and conferences. "Ask if anyone is going to help monitor activity on the Wi-Fi network so that you have assurances there are no hackers trying to get information from attendees. A monitored network helps protect users," says Neuman.

Neuman also suggests asking: How many other groups will be using the network at the same time? Is there technical service available during the actual meeting and when planners are working? What is the maximum bandwidth we will use? Do you have the total bandwidth we will need?

There is one step that planners can take to limit the damage — minimize data collection and storage. "Planners are so used to collecting attendee information and keeping it for historic reference," says Brown. "We don't always go back and get rid of information we don't need anymore. As an industry, we have always collected addresses, phone numbers, credit card data and other information. You have to be aware that you don't need to keep some information," says Brown.

Sileo agrees. "Planners tend to collect more personal information from attendees than they need. They may intend to use the information for marketing, feedback or future meetings, but for whatever reasons they don't and end up keeping it," says Sileo.

### Change Passwords Often

Planners' information can never be truly secure unless they have a policy for creating and securing passwords. "Creating safe passwords is a huge issue and managing it is even huger," says Siciliano. "Managing several passwords correctly can be an overwhelming task for some people. One way to do it is have an IT person install password management software."

Short of that, there are several basic precautions



that planners can take to thwart password theft. Make sure that each password includes upper and lower case letters and at least one number and character. Never use the same password for two accounts. Many people create one long and complicated password and use it repeatedly, making only small changes at the end. Such passwords are relatively easy for hackers to exploit, says Sileo.

Technology experts also suggest that planners ask questions about the security of meeting management software they download online or use via third parties. The tip applies especially to free software available online, says Siciliano. "Generally with free software, they may not have allocated the resources for application security, which involves basically trying to hack the software during stages of development so that it's relatively bulletproof when it's ready for prime time. With free software, you want to know the pros and cons and ask questions," he says.

Experts suggest asking: What part of the budget went into application security? What risks do I take by using the software? Is the software periodically updated or improved? Also read the terms of service agreement for any mention of security or encryption. The following question is especially important for reg-

istration systems: Does it comply with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard for processing, storing and transmitting credit card information?

### Thieves Are Everywhere

There is more to information security than preventing access via technology. Planners must also guard against data thieves who pilfer laptops, computer notebooks and handheld devices at meetings, says Sileo. "If a thief can go to a conference where there are 1,000 executives and steal three or four devices, not to mention a planner's equipment, why should he spend hours and hours trying to hack into a system that has security?" asks Sileo.

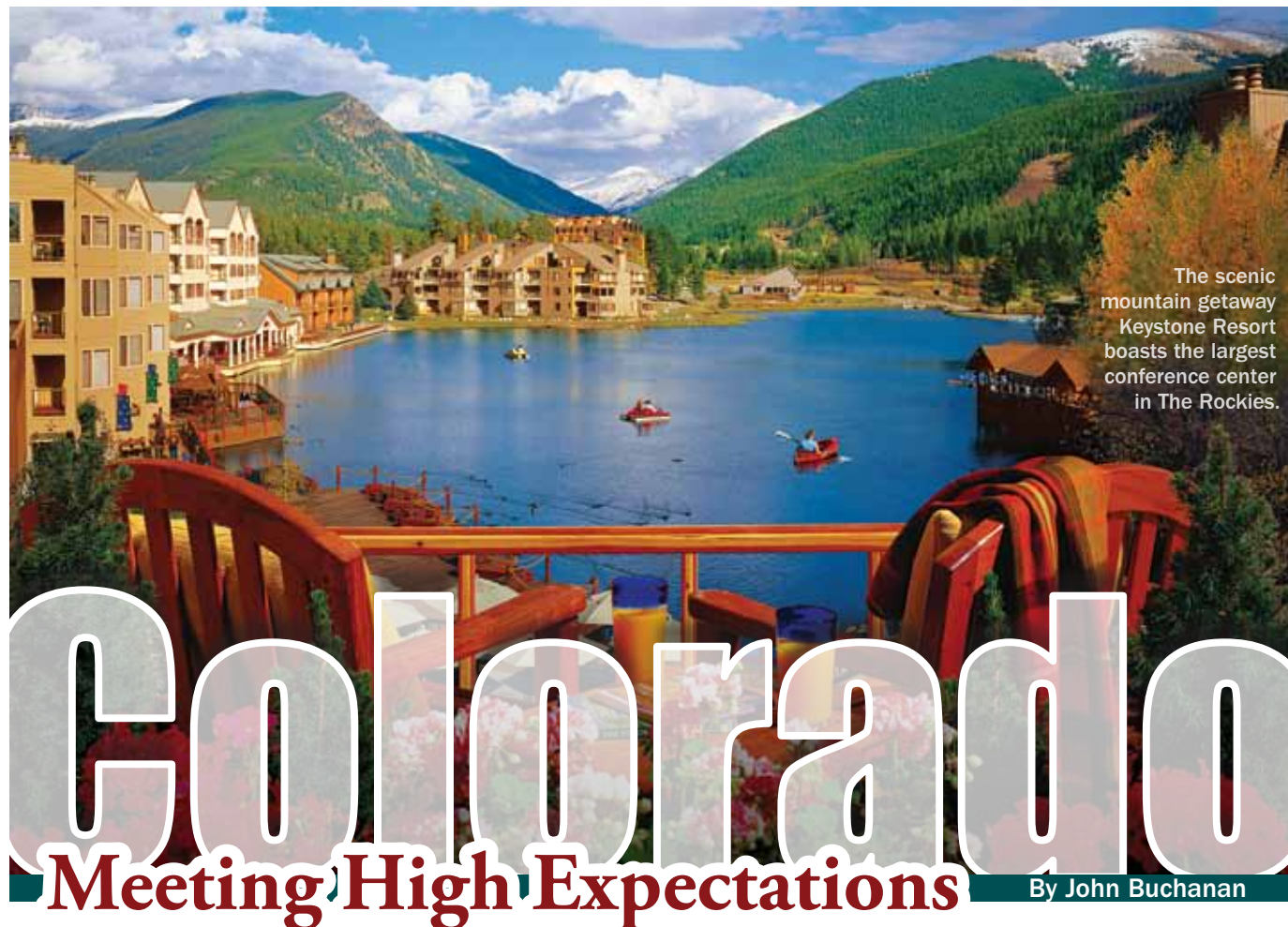
Sileo conducts tours of meeting rooms to show how vulnerable the equipment is: "Before speaking, I have somebody walk around the room with me, sometimes planners. I touch laptops and notebook computers, or pick them up and put them back down, to show how many I could have taken. At one conference, I touched 87 laptop bags, and told them during the speech," says Sileo. He also sees planners' printed documents and paper notebooks and files left unattended.

Brown agrees. "Unfortunately, it happens all the time. That (non-computer) notebook is a planner's bible that has all kinds of documents. Sometimes planners have been working long hours and haven't had a lot to eat, and as the conference progresses, they may leave it where someone can get it. You can lose client and personal proprietary information," says Brown.

Implementing all types of information security measures requires planners to work closely with their clients. That will continue to be true for independent and corporate planners, says Neuman. "While many corporate planners have an IT team to guide them, both corporate and independent planners should know the meeting owner's security policies and be an advocate for the owner when looking at protecting attendees' private information. Be sure to capture best practices from each event so you can handle security better in the future," Neuman advises. **C&IT**



# DESTINATION



The scenic mountain getaway Keystone Resort boasts the largest conference center in The Rockies.

Whether it's the rustic Rocky Mountain landscape of Colorado Springs, the urban sophistication of Denver or world-famous ski resort towns such as Vail, Colorado offers a tantalizingly extensive list of memorably scenic settings for meetings.

## Colorado Springs

Located 65 miles south of Denver and ranking as the state's second-largest city, Colorado Springs is a favored destination for many loyal planners because of its spectacular landscape and roster of offsite venues and attractions.

Kevin Fleetwood, marketing director at Atlanta-based financial software provider CRIF Lending Solutions, used Colorado Springs — and Colorado — for the first time last September for a four-day, three-night user conference for 28 attendees.

"We have offices in five cities across the U.S.," Fleetwood says. "And each year, we try to pick a location that is close to one of those offices. We happen to have an office in Denver, so we decided to go to Colorado this time around."

After doing his initial research on Colorado destina-

tions, Fleetwood chose the AAA Four Diamond **Cheyenne Mountain Resort** (316 guest rooms; 40,000 sf of IACC-certified meeting space) because of its unique rustic location and ambience. He also liked the offsite options available in Colorado Springs. "There are multiple venues in Colorado Springs for unique evening events," he says. "For example, we did a behind-the-scenes evening event at the U.S. Olympic Training Center. Our theme for the meeting — which was about elevating the use of our products and elevating the bottom lines of our customers — was partly elevated by the fact that we were in Colorado Springs and could do an event at the Olympic Training Center. And it fit in very nicely because 'stronger, faster, higher' is a theme of U.S. Olympic athletes, and that really struck the tone we wanted during the meeting." The U.S. Olympic Complex is home to the U.S. Olympic Committee and the Olympic Training Center programs.

The evening included a tour of the facility, as well as a sit-down dinner in one of the gyms. "We had a demonstration from the men's gymnastics team, which had just returned from the London Olympics," Fleetwood says. "We also had a fencing demonstration. So it was a very special evening."

The Olympian motto "stronger, faster, higher" fit the meeting theme for CRIF Lending Solutions, which held events at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs.

Photo courtesy of CRIF Lending Solutions



The company also arranged local tours for small groups of attendees to the spectacular outdoor mountain venue Garden of the Gods, Pikes Peak and the U.S. Air Force Academy.

"Colorado Springs has many, many interesting tourist attractions that most people aren't familiar with," Fleetwood says. "That really adds to a meeting."

Based on his experience, Fleetwood recommends Colorado Springs to planners who have never considered it. "Because of its proximity to Denver, Colorado Springs gives you multiple ways of getting people in for the meeting," he says. "That means it's very easy to get people in and out. And as I said already, there are just so many venues in town for doing special events or arranging tours for attendees. They have a lot of very nice restaurants. And it's also just a pretty unique destination, so it turns out to be a very nice surprise when you get there and actually experience it. It's a very charming, interesting place. We couldn't have asked for a better destination for this particular meeting."

Fleetwood also gave a glowing review to Cheyenne Mountain Resort, which completed a \$20 million, property-wide renovation in 2011. "The property was just perfect for the size of our meeting, with just the right kind and amount of meeting space," he says. "The sleeping rooms and meeting space are both very nice. And we liked the whole setup of the hotel, including the European Plan for meals and their AV facilities. In general, Cheyenne Mountain just had the overall look and feel that we wanted for this particular meeting." A European Plan includes breakfast, lunch and breaks in the room rate. For Fleetwood, it represented great value. "Nobody ever wanted for food during the day," he says. "And the food was excellent."

"It's the first time we've ever gotten a 97 percent approval rating on the hotel from attendees for any meeting or event we've ever done," Fleetwood concludes. "And in fact, in my 30 years of doing meetings, it's the highest rating I've ever seen a hotel receive from the people who attended the meeting. That pretty much tells you all you need to know."

## Denver

Thanks to the status of Denver International Airport as

hub for United Airlines, the Mile High City delivers easy access. The consensus among planners who use Denver for the first time is that it's a surprisingly cosmopolitan city, with world-class meeting amenities that include formidable air-lift, an assortment of high-quality meeting hotels, and a local dining and entertainment/arts scene that makes for memorable offsite activities.

"I'm not a native, but I came here 20 years ago and never left, because I love the city and the community," says Melissa Risteff, senior vice president, enterprise engagement, at locally headquartered social technology software provider NewsGator. "We're blessed with access to the Rocky Mountains and temperate weather year-round. And because we're centrally located, most people can get here pretty easily. We have a great airport and are a hub, so there are many different ways to get here. We have a great food scene and great museums. So it's just a great destination."

Risteff is also a big fan of Denver's A-list hotels.

For the last three years, she has hosted NewsGator's annual user conference, as well as several other meetings, at **The Ritz-Carlton Denver** (202 guest rooms, 13,000 sf of meeting space, including a 6,264-sf ballroom and 1,960 sf junior ballroom), the city's first and only AAA Five Diamond hotel. The company held its most recent meeting, its annual kickoff conference, for 100 attendees, in January. In March, Risteff will host her annual user conference.

Why is she so loyal to The Ritz-Carlton?

"Hands-down, it's the service we get from the people we deal with," Risteff says. "We've been dealing with the same team for three years now, and they do a great job because they have top



*"In my 30 years of doing meetings, it's the highest rating I've ever seen a hotel receive from the people who attended the meeting."*

Kevin Fleetwood, Marketing Director  
CRIF Lending Solutions, Atlanta, GA

talent. So that means I don't have to start from scratch every year. But even back the first time we did a meeting there, it was probably one of the most pleasant experiences I've ever had — not just in making sure that everything has been put in place properly, but also onsite for the meeting. Their staff is just amazing. They anticipate your needs, and everything they do is spot-on. We've never had any kind of problem or issue."

Risteff also cites the hotel's convenient location, near the company's headquarters, and praises its food and beverage. "The food is just incredible," she says.

Risteff also gives high marks to The Ritz-Carlton's meeting space. "Its configuration is perfectly suited to our meetings," she says. "For example, we hold our general sessions and cocktail receptions in a ballroom. The hotel also has



*“We cater to many of the world’s top brands... and we want them to feel cherished.”*

Melissa Risteff, Senior V.P.  
Enterprise Engagement  
NewsGator, Denver, CO



the right amount of space for the exhibition portion of our meetings sponsored by our partners. We also do a lot of boardroom-style executive meetings. And the hotel is a perfect fit for all of those.”

The Ritz-Carlton also projects the right image, Risteff says. “We cater to many of the world’s top brands, such as General Mills, Kraft and Proctor & Gamble, and we want them to feel cherished,” she says. “And part of that is taking them to a property where we know they will be treated well and get the kind of service that will make them feel comfortable.”

Because of NewsGator’s blue-chip client list, the upscale, sophisticated local dining scene is also an important attribute of their major meetings. Risteff goes offsite at least once for every meeting, often to the trendiest “foodie” restaurants. Among her recent favorites is Elway’s Downtown, a critically acclaimed steak-and-seafood house, located within The Ritz-Carlton and



Photo courtesy of Hewlett-Packard



Photo courtesy of Visit Denver

Hewlett-Packard’s “Rock On” training event utilized the Hyatt Regency Denver (above) and the adjacent Colorado Convention Center (right).

owned by legendary former Denver Broncos quarterback John Elway. The restaurant offers private dining for up to 50 guests.

Risteff also likes TAG, which offers a next-generation flourish on the small plates craze. “They do things like Kobe beef sliders,” Risteff says. “The place is very upscale and the food is just superb. They have a nice private room downstairs with a dedicated bar. We usually do heavy hors d’oeuvres there. That makes for a very nice evening.”

## Rock On

Jeffrey Wood, vice president, product management, at Hewlett-Packard, based an hour north of Denver in Ft. Collins, CO, is another fan of the Mile High City. For the last seven years, HP has held its annual “Rock On” training event in Denver, bringing in 1,000 attendees from across the U.S. and around the world. Last December, Wood hosted the five-day event for the first time at the AAA Four Diamond **Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center** (1,100 guest rooms; 60,600 sf of meeting space).

Like Risteff and many other planners of major meetings, Wood finds Denver very convenient thanks to its access. “It’s easy for us to bring in a large community from around the world,” Wood says. “And that is increasingly important to us, because the meeting is growing in size.”

As a result, he says, for the December meeting the company moved up to the Hyatt Regency and into the adjacent Colorado Convention Center for its general sessions and breakouts.

“We simply outgrew the hotel we had been using previously,” Wood says. “And the Hyatt Regency is just a fantastic venue. They have enough sleeping rooms and suites to meet the exact needs of our group, plus they are located next to the convention center so that makes it very convenient. And moving the meeting itself into the convention center really allowed us to spread our wings.”

The event featured main stage presentations on two mornings, with more than 50 breakout sessions over ensuing days.

“The facilities at the convention center are fantastic,” Wood says. “But an ever bigger benefit is their ability to accommodate us from a food-and-beverage point of view with excellent onsite catering.” The convention center provided F&B services for daily lunches and breaks. The Hyatt Regency catered an opening night welcome reception in one of its ballrooms. “The food and the service were really excellent,” Wood says.

On the second night, attendees had free time, so small groups of coworkers or team members could go to local restaurants for dinner. “And there are a lot of good places to eat around the hotel and convention center,” Wood says. “That is a huge factor for us, because social activity and networking are important parts of the meeting. And Denver is a very good destination for that because attendees can walk to lots of places near the hotel. And that means you don’t have to coordinate transportation to move people around. And another thing is that we have people coming in from all over the world, including places like Asia. And there is a good restaurant close by to satisfy any type of dining or personal taste.”

For the company’s closing-night dinner and reception, Wood used The Cowboy Lounge, located near Coors Field, where Major League Baseball’s Colorado Rockies play. “We did a buyout and did an evening of dinner and dancing,” he says.

Hyatt Hotels also operates the AAA Four Diamond **Grand Hyatt Denver**, (516 guest rooms; 60,000 sf of meeting space), which is currently undergoing a \$28 million renovation of its guest rooms, conference center, lobby and 38th floor Pinnacle Club. Last fall the hotel opened Skycourt, downtown Denver’s only outdoor rooftop jogging track and tennis court.

## Mountain Resorts

Along with Aspen, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge and Keystone, Vail is one of Colorado’s upscale, wildly popular Rocky Mountain ski destinations. But each of those locations also offers spectacular scenery and a pristine environment year-round.

For the last three years, Pearl Izumi, a Louisville, CO-based manufacturer of apparel for runners, bicyclists and triathletes, has held its annual sales meeting at tony **Vail Cascade Resort Spa & Condominiums** (292 luxury rooms, and 80 condos and private residences; 45,000-sf conference center). For the last two years, sales operation coordinator Kimberly Copanas has planned the important, much-anticipated six-day meeting, which is held in conjunction with parent company Shimano American Corporation, the Irvine, CA-based U.S. operation of global bicycling hardware manufacturer Shimano. In May, Pearl Izumi and Shimano will return to Vail Cascade for the fourth consecutive year.

“Vail is just a great location for our particular national sales meeting and for our company, which is deeply involved in the running, cycling and triathlon industry,” Copanas says. “So for our sales meeting, we need access to really good road riding for bicycling and mountain-bike riding, both of which are immediately accessible right off the Vail Cascade property. And for the size of our group and the length of our stay, and our specific needs for meeting space, which includes running a lot of breakout sessions simultaneously, Vail Cascade has a unique feel, unlike what’s generally in a ‘big box’ hotel. But it also provides the kind of meeting space we need that you don’t often find at smaller, boutique-style hotels.”

In addition to the facilities and amenities at Vail Cascade, Copanas and her attendees and management also like the cozy, exclusive Vail Village for its offsite venues including trendy local restaurants. One she favors is Mango’s Mountain Grill, in the nearby small town of Red Bluff. “And on the way there, you pass two old silver mines,” Copanas says.

She also likes Bøl in Vail Village, which serves creative Asian fare. “It’s a very stylish, contemporary place,” Copanas says. “And they also have a 10-lane bowling facility in the back. For the past two years, we’ve done a buyout of the bowling lanes and had our food served back there. And the bowling is a neat teambuilding activity.”

Although Vail offers a surprising number of offsite options for such a relatively small place, it is the atmosphere and amenities at Vail Cascade that keeps Pearl Izumi coming back.

“What we really like about it is that it’s a high-end property, but it’s also very comfortable,” Copanas says. “And when you have very little turnover in your company and you keep going back to the same place every year, that just creates a sense of comfort for our attendees because they are familiar with the facility and they know how to navigate it. It just works very well for us, also because I get to work with the same group of people every year. And every year, they meet or exceed my expectations.”



Vail Cascade Resort Spa & Condominiums combines high-end amenities and experiences with impressive meeting space.

## Largest Conference Center

Planners looking for spectacular mountain settings as backdrop for meetings large and small also would do well to consider **Keystone Resort**, which boasts the largest conference center in the Rockies. Combined, the Keystone Conference Center, the AAA Four Diamond Keystone Lodge & Spa and The Inn at Keystone provide 100,000 sf of meeting, exhibit and function space. A total of 1,200 lodging units are available across the area, as is world-class skiing, a state-of-the-art spa, two championship golf courses and more than 25 dining venues.



*“Social activity and networking are important parts of the meeting. And Denver is a very good destination for that.”*

Jeffrey Wood, Vice President  
Product Management  
Hewlett-Packard, Ft. Collins, CO

Keystone Meeting Planners can assist with meeting logistics as well as teambuilding programs that include Colorado-themed activities such as:

- Winter Olympics: Groups engage in a selection of activities such as the Snowshoe Shuffle, Nordic Express Tubing Challenge, Retro Ski Relay, Biathlon, and more.
- 4x4 GPS Road Rally Race: Teams compete in an accelerated take on the traditional scavenger hunt.
- Amazing Race: Teams race across town to solve riddles and compete in challenges.

In keeping with its pristine outdoor environment, Keystone Resort’s sustainability efforts over the past 15 years have prevented 138 tons of emissions from being released into the atmosphere, a plus for planners with a green meetings mandate.

No matter where a meeting lands in “Colorful Colorado” — from ski country to the Springs to the Mile High City — the highest of expectations are met — and often exceeded. **C&IT**



# ON THE MOVE



SALERNO

Catherine Salerno was named director of sales and marketing for the Hamilton Park Hotel and Conference Center, Florham Park, NJ. She most recently was area director sales for HEI Hotels and Resorts in Virginia.

The Venetian and The Palazzo have named Lori Aparicio as director of national accounts Northeast; and Karen Petty as director of national accounts Midwest. Aparicio most recently was director of national accounts/pharmaceutical-medical specialist for Gaylord Hotels, Nashville, TN. Petty was director of vertical sales for Gaylord Hotels.

The Lodge at Torrey Pines, San Diego, CA, has named Andrea Greene as director of accounts, Northeast



PETTY

region; and Beth Webster as national sales manager, Southeast and local San Diego regions. Greene was most recently director of regional accounts, Western region, Wynn Resorts in Las Vegas. Webster most recently served as national sales manager at the Catamaran Resort Hotel and Spa and director of sales for the Grande Colonial Hotel in La Jolla, CA.

The St. Regis Aspen Resort, Aspen, CO, has named Justin Todd as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing at The Little Nell, Residences at The Little Nell and the Limelight Hotel, both in Aspen.

The Bonaventure Resort & Spa, Weston, FL, has named Amy Hyde as small markets sales manager; and



HYDE

region; and Beth Webster as national sales manager, Southeast and local San Diego regions. Greene was most recently director of regional accounts, Western region, Wynn Resorts in Las Vegas. Webster most recently served as national sales manager at the Catamaran Resort Hotel and Spa and director of sales for the Grande Colonial Hotel in La Jolla, CA.

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PUCCIO

Deborah Puccio as senior sales manager. Hyde was group sales manager for the Charlottesville Albermarle Convention & Visitors Bureau, Charlottesville, VA. Puccio most recently served as national sales manager at LaPlaya Beach & Golf Resort, Naples, FL.

Alan Feuerman was appointed director of sales and marketing at The Westin Cleveland Downtown, Cleveland, OH, scheduled to open in spring 2014. He was most recently the director of sales and marketing at Embassy Suites Cleveland Downtown.

Mandarin Oriental, Atlanta, GA, has named Tony Jones as senior corporate sales manager. He formerly served as business travel manager for the Atlanta Marriott. C&IT



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