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THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES



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The Odds-On-Favorite
for Meeting Success
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\$40,000 from the PwC Charitable
Foundation Inc. to help benefit
financial education at their school.*

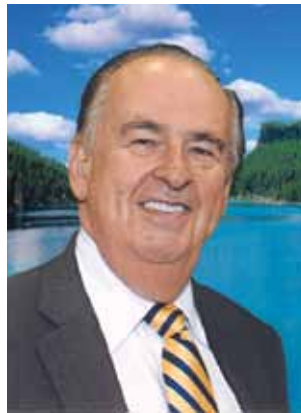
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Publisher's Message

New Solutions

For the first time, the Meeting Professionals International (MPI) Business Barometer reveals significant, uplifting shifts in the meeting and event industry. During the economic uncertainty and budget cuts, savvy meeting professionals learned how to adapt and persevere. After a three-year battle, they emerged leaner, meaner and equipped with “new expectations, new tools at their disposal and new opportunities to address the strengthening meeting and event market,” according to the February 2013 survey. In addition,



“technology, budgets, lead times, risk management, employment levels and fluctuating prices continue to be significant factors, but these challenges have new solutions.”

Chief among these “new solutions” is how meeting professionals combine new technology with the old-fashioned, trustworthy face-to-face approach to achieve the best outcomes.

In Jason Hensel's blog* “MPI TechCon Balances Technology and Humanity,” we learn how Kyle Hillman, co-chair of the MPI Chicago Area Chapter's popular, three-year-old TechCon used fresh, new influential speakers and innovative

venue modifications to wow attendees. The event featured an “interactive club-like exhibitor showcase.” According to Hillman, the new concept worked very well: “The lounge design created paths, not aisles, forcing attendees to mingle and walk around people and furniture, not past them. It also created lasting touch points for vendors in a more relaxed networking approach rather than a hard sell. A lot of suppliers have lost the art of connecting with buyers — we created an atmosphere that brought that back.”

I wholeheartedly concur with Hensel's conclusion: “Yes, technology may draw you there and may help with that first step, but it's the face-to-face connection that seals the deal. The MPI Chicago Area Chapter realizes that, and TechCon was a great success because of the balance between technology and humanity.”

This month's issue is chock full of “new solutions” to help you meet new challenges. Check out “The Wellness Prescription (page 14), “High-Tech Tools for Managing Meetings” (page 18); and “The Greater Good” (page 22), as well as the destination reports on Florida (page 28) and Las Vegas (page 36).

*Find Hensel's blog at www.mpiweb.org/blog/events

Harvey Grotsky

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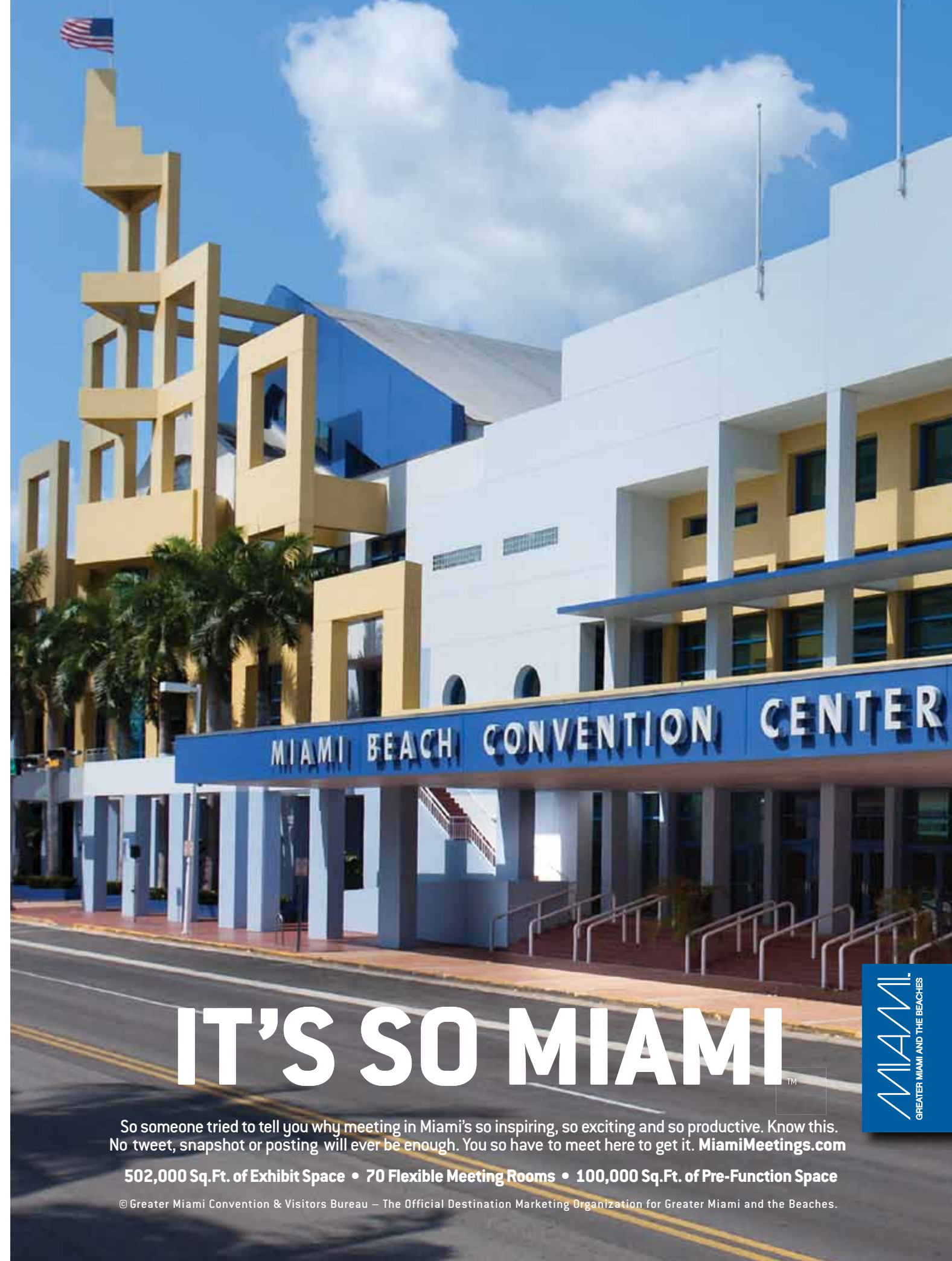
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Site Index: Motivational Events Industry on the Upswing

CHICAGO, IL — The Site International Foundation released results of the latest Site Index Annual Survey. The third year of the study measures movement in key indices as well as introduces new topics of discussion. “The Site Index results confirm that the overall use of motivational travel continues to be on an upswing,” said Stephen Powell, president of the Site International Foundation and senior vice president of Worldwide Sales for InterContinental Hotels Group. “After several years of intense scrutiny, companies are recognizing the role incentive travel programs played in their past success and are implementing new

programs to elevate future performance.” Key observations:

Respondents (86 percent) indicate that the use of motivational travel will increase or substantially increase in the next one to three years, with respondents significantly more positive about the short term (the next six months) than in previous years.

A majority of respondents continue to believe that the requirement to measure ROI or ROO, although still important, has stabilized.

While the convergence of meetings and incentives is slowing, inclusion of business meetings and similar components in motivational events will continue to experience some growth.

A significant majority of respondents say that the inclusion of corporate social responsibility and green initiatives in motivational events will continue to increase.

More respondents (58 percent) are asking for or providing more site selection/hotel placement-only services than in previous years.

As evidenced in the Site Index: Focus on Technology and Social Media, the use of mobile technology is increasing in importance.

Data for the Site Index are derived from the collective experiences and perspectives of a global group of incentive travel and motivational event users and providers. For this survey, responses were received from 112 people in 22 countries. The survey was supervised by Scott A. Jeffrey, Ph.D., Monmouth University, and Marion Joppe, Ph.D., University of Guelph, and was sponsored by the InterContinental Hotels Group. To obtain a copy of the Executive Summary of the Site Index annual survey, go to Site Index at www.siteglobal.com.

Disney Receives Destination & Travel Foundation Hospitality Award

WASHINGTON, DC — On March 13, The Destination & Travel Foundation honored Walt Disney Parks and Resorts with the Spirit of Hospitality Award, recognizing Disney's longtime advocacy for travel and tourism and its commitment to social responsibility. Craig Davis, president and CEO of Visit Pittsburgh and chair of the Destination & Travel Foundation, presented the Spirit of Hospitality Award to Randy A. Garfield, CTC, executive vice president, Worldwide Sales & Travel Operations, Disney Destinations, and president, Walt Disney Travel Company. Destination & Travel Foundation, formerly DMAI Foundation, is a combined effort of the U.S. Travel Association and Destination Marketing Association International. The mission of the Destination & Travel Foundation is to enhance the destination marketing and travel professions through research, education, visioning and development of resources and partnerships for those efforts. www.destinationtravel.org



Craig Davis (left), president and CEO of Visit Pittsburgh and chair of the Destination & Travel Foundation, presents the Spirit of Hospitality Award to Randy A. Garfield, CTC, executive vice president, Worldwide Sales & Travel Operations, Disney Destinations, and president, Walt Disney Travel Company.

Disney Unveils Vision for Disney Springs

ORLANDO, FL — Walt Disney World Resort recently announced the multiyear transformation of Downtown Disney into Disney Springs, a unique destination that will double the number of shops, restaurants and other venues for guests to explore, resulting in more than 150 establishments. Drawing inspiration from Florida's waterfront towns and natural beauty, Disney Springs will include four outdoor neighborhoods interconnected by a flowing spring and vibrant lakefront. Construction is slated to begin soon with new areas opening in phases. Disney Springs is expected to be complete in 2016.



1 Michael Gehrisch, president and CEO of Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI), welcomed nearly 1,000 industry professionals to the nation's capital for its renowned Week in Washington. The 20th anniversary of the Annual Destination & Travel Foundation Dinner & Dream Auction was held March 13 and Destinations Showcase, DMAI's largest face-to-face gatherings connecting DMOs and meetings professionals, took place providing meetings planners the opportunity to find the perfect destinations for their upcoming meetings, conventions or trade shows — in just one afternoon on March 14. **2** San Francisco Travel Association was represented at Destinations Showcase by John Reyes, executive vice president/chief customer officer and Sarah Smith, senior associate, convention sales, Eastern region. **3** Palm Beach County CVB staffers dressed in colorful, matching outfits greeted Destinations Showcase attendees. **4** In Boston, Massachusetts Lodging Association (MLA) Board Chair Adam Sperling presents Beth Stehley, vice president of convention services and sales for the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau with the Massachusetts Lodging Association Industry Partner of the Year Award at the Colonnade Hotel at the 2012 Stars of the Industry Awards Gala. **5** Mastercard's Paulo Fernandez addresses the participants at the Conferencia GBTA Mexico 2013, which was held in Mexico City, March 6–8. **6** Hosted by Site Belgium, the Site EMEA Forum 2013 was held March 11–13 at Radisson Blu Astrid Hotel, Antwerp. Site members and motivational events industry professionals hailed from all over Europe, the Middle East and Africa.



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Why Business Relationships Take More Than Texting, Friending and Online Connecting

It's official: Email, texting and social media are no longer just helpful supplemental business tools. They've taken over the whole game. Yes, technology has made many aspects of modern living more convenient and connected, but the pendulum has swung too far. Now, people are reluctant to do something as simple as picking up the phone, preferring to shoot off an email instead. And face-to-face meetings — well, we sure could use a lot more of them.

This "technology takeover" is not without consequence. Misunderstandings abound. Relationships stagnate. Trust is at an all-time low. And all of these issues are at least partially due to the fact that genuine human connections have been replaced by mouse-clicks and keystrokes.

Social media and technology do have their place, but they are not, and never will be, a substitute for in-person interaction. Your physical presence — or at least the sound of your voice — builds trust you can't even approach with a keyboard, screen or profile image.

Having boot-strapped a business from the ground up, I know what I'm talking about. Bonnie Harvey and I are the founders of Barefoot Cellars, the company that transformed the image of American wine from staid and unimaginative to fun, lighthearted and hip. When we started our company in the laundry room of a rented Sonoma County farmhouse, we knew almost nothing about winemaking or the wine business. Our new book, *The Barefoot Spirit*, tells our California-style rags-to-riches story in compelling and colorful fashion, and reveals just what it takes to succeed as an entrepreneur.

I can't tell you how many retailers, suppliers and potential customers I visited in person during those early years. What I can tell you is that I would have never gotten satisfactory results if I had tried to build those relationships via email and social media. The Barefoot brand would never have become a national best-seller without meetings, phone calls and recurring personal visits that kept relationships all over the country healthy and up-to-date.

Face-to-Face Meetings

People don't just buy your product; they buy you.

Of course, in a global economy, face-to-face meetings

are expensive. When clients, vendors and even employees are on the other side of the world, it's not economically feasible to hop on a plane every time a meeting is needed. In these cases, Skype is the next best thing to being there. We accomplish so much more when we become more than just an email address or a disembodied voice to one another. If you make the time necessary for personal meetings — if not in person, then via Skype or, at the very least, on the phone — others will not only remember you, but they will appreciate the effort you put forth.

Read on for seven specific advantages of real-time, in-person, face-to-face relationship-building:

- 1. The time investment shows you really care.** It's a fairly universal truth that human beings want to be valued and appreciated. Spending time with someone else, whether that's in person, face-to-face on a computer screen, or, if all else fails, via a phone call, is one of the best ways to convey these things. In essence, an investment of time says, "While there are many other things I could be doing, I'm choosing to spend my time with you. That's how important I think you are!" Minutes and hours spent with another person have the power to create a bond that money can't buy.
- 2. You're better able to give personalized attention.** This is perhaps the biggest key to successful sales and the establishment of any long-term relationship. Think about it: It's hard to multitask on something unrelated when someone is physically planted in front of you, demanding your attention. Unless you have no problem with blatant rudeness, you're focusing on the other person, responding not only to what they say, but also to their mood, movements and many other non-verbal signals. You will read these signs and adjust your behavior accordingly.
- 3. You're more effective in general.** When you're talking to someone else in real time, you can make progress in real time and solve problems in real time. (Believe it or not, lobbing emails back and forth isn't always the most efficient method!) Thanks to facial expressions, body language and tone of voice (see

below for more information on each), you'll usually find out more than just the basics when you have a verbal conversation. In fact, if you're really observant, you may notice things about the other company or clients that they themselves aren't even aware of.

- 4. Facial expressions help get your message across.** Did you know that the human face has at least 20 muscles that work in concert to create a myriad of telling facial expressions? When you put it that way, the process sounds complex, but amazingly (as you know!) we don't have to consciously think about forming those expressions at all. This is a powerful argument for face-to-face meetings, whether they're in person or via Skype.
- 5. Observing those expressions during verbal communication can give you instant feedback about how your message is being received.** You can quickly adjust your message on the spot to make it more meaningful or agreeable, and avoid possible misunderstandings.
- 6. So does your body language.** Unlike looking at a posed profile shot or any still image sent over email, being face-to-face with another person gives you the opportunity to see the other person's dynamic reaction and make adjustments to your own message. Real-time body language provides tons of non-verbal cues that are impossible to convey in a text or email. For instance, if you know that hands in one's pockets indicate boredom or disinterest, whereas leaning slightly forward indicates interest, you'll be able to respond more accurately to others and avoid sending messages you don't mean to...and so does your tonality. It's happened to everyone: You send an email that's laced with sarcasm or humor, which the recipient totally fails to pick up on. Oops! Now you're left frantically doing damage control. That's one major reason why texting, emailing and friending can be great ways to communicate while failing to succeed at relationship-building.
- 7. Your vulnerability shows (and that's a good thing).** In the virtual world, you can almost totally control the image you show to other people. You choose the pictures you post on your profile. You censor the information you do and don't want to share in your messages, posts and updates. And usually, you can think about and edit what you want to say before pressing "send." But in a real-time, face-to-face relationship,

the other person can see you in 3-D and observe your dynamic, spontaneous behavior including tone of voice, expression, dress and body language. The other party sees your human imperfections and is aware that you are vulnerable to potential personal rejection.

How to Use Tech Tools

Despite my belief that people want in-person attention, Barefoot didn't avoid technology as it developed — far from it. What's important is to use these tools appropriately and not let them become crutches.

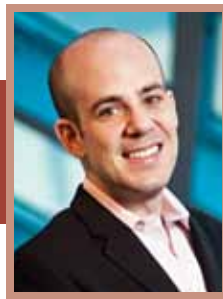
A relationship can start through text, email or social media; in fact, I encourage entrepreneurs and other businesspeople to utilize those resources. But in order to be lasting and dependable, a relationship has to grow in person.

Being face-to-face with another person gives you the opportunity to see the other person's dynamic reaction and make adjustments to your own message.

A good way to start is to eliminate virtual communication when in-person communication is possible or more effective. So shake hands and come out a winner! High touch beats high tech every time.

I&FMM

Michael Houlihan, author along with Bonnie Harvey of *The Barefoot Spirit: How Hardship, Hustle, and Heart Built a Bestselling Wine*, Evolve Publishing, May 21, 2013, started the Barefoot Wine brand in their laundry room in 1986, made it a nationwide best-seller, and successfully sold the brand to E&J Gallo in 2005. To learn more, visit www.thebarefootspirit.com.



8 Ways to Increase and Sustain Audience Participation

Planning and orchestrating a successful event is hard enough without having to worry about how presenters are going to consistently sustain interest and buzz for large and often diverse audiences over extended time-frames. Thankfully, you don't have to schedule 87 networking breaks, provide each registered guest a custom coffee IV drip, or hire fire-eaters and dancing horses to keep attention and conversation levels consistently high throughout any program.

Here's how to drive more audience interest, enthusiasm and participation around special occasions while keeping viewers both engaged and glued to the edge of their seats.

- 1. Invite advance contributions.** Long before delivering live programs, invite observers to participate via online channels such as via the Web and social media by submitting questions, suggestions, comments or feedback prior to your occasion. Submissions can be used to shape event programming (e.g. when weighing trending topics to feature), incorporated into presentations (i.e., by putting queries that participants have sent to featured experts), and used in supporting materials (e.g., video reels filled with testimonials, insights and real-world frontline commentary). Each presents a great way to heighten empathy, boost audience attachment and ultimately make attendee voices heard.
- 2. Request creative input.** Want to better underscore organization-wide support for various initiatives and programs? Ask participants to share their enthusiasm by submitting photos, slideshows, video commentary and more — all of which are easily posted to your event's website, social network page or online community to raise audience interest and involvement. Crowdsourcing (read: requesting creative contributions from your community) can also be a powerful way to invite attendee participation, bolster internal resources, and heighten contributors' emotional investment and takeaway. Consider this: "Submit your best designs for our new fundraising campaign's logo: Winners will be featured in our national ad spot!" Not only can such techniques improve contribution rates — they also can ensure that messages resonate better and hit closer to home, coming straight from an audience's peers.
- 3. Crunch the numbers.** Partner with your speakers and/or sponsors to conduct surveys, polls and studies, or provide audience questionnaires, both prior to and during your event — not just after presentations are delivered. Research and input can be used to craft more insightful programs, incorporated into call-and-response segments, or potentially debuted as part of special onsite announcements. Findings may even be used as unique value-adds: "All who attend will receive a copy of our 2013 industry awareness survey!" Data collected prior to, at or following your event can further be used as part of press releases, white papers and other novel takeaways — all built by and for attendees with their active input.
- 4. Surprise and engage.** Since when in the connected age does conversation work one way? Rather than delivering canned 60-minute speeches, consider stopping at regular, preset intervals during presentations to invite audience questions, conduct informal polls or source offstage input — all techniques that can help re-ignite interest and discussion. Reaching out to known experts in attendance ("I see marketing V.P. Jane Smith is here today: Jane, what challenges do you see this trend presenting?") also can help heighten programs' sense of dynamism and engagement. Talking with an audience, not simply at it, makes for more must-see sessions, and helps enhance participation, engagement and retention rates.
- 5. Add guest appearances.** Want to really shake things up? Use videoconferencing services (see: Google Plus' excellent Hangouts feature) to source live input from surprise guests wherever high-speed Internet connections are available. Via these platforms, top authorities including notable community members and organizational leadership can pay events

unexpected visits that keep viewers on the edge of their seats. Similarly, you also can beam in thoughts, opinions and live updates from events occurring simultaneously in other parts of the world. The next time international sales, marketing or management teams convene at distant locations, consider using these platforms to bring all closer together — and illustrate your organization's global impact.

- 6. Promote running commentary.** Courtesy of online connectivity, every smartphone-, tablet- and laptop-wielding audience member is now a potential broadcast announcer or program participant. Running streams of questions and feedback from viewers can be projected live on screens for speakers and viewers to see throughout events, courtesy of Twitter and other services, helping guide ongoing discussion. Attendees also can be given tools, links and access to share live blog streams, chats and event highlights via their own websites or social channels, helping all promote and drive conversation around presentations as they unfold — and allowing your efforts to reach a wider target audience. Invite sharing, streaming and ongoing online discussion, and you instantly boost interactivity and impact.
- 7. Better leverage speakers.** With so many hard-to-pin-down experts onsite and available for audiences to engage with, why limit their exchanges to cookie-cutter keynotes alone? Question-and-answer sessions, meet-and-greets, book signings, breakout sessions and panel appearances can all help attendees enjoy further access to these luminaries. Have a smartphone or spare audio recorder handy as well? You know what they say about free press — make a point of creating and archiving film or podcast clips with them on topics of interest for sharing online via your website, social or digital channels to boot. Consider asking speakers to share each of these assets, and additional insights, with their own audiences, too. The practice can help increase your reach, add value for viewers no matter which channel they discover you through, and potentially generate more publicity ops for your event or organization.
- 8. Create unique takeaways.** Everyone loves seeing his/her name in lights. Letting you capture and record onsite learning as well as audience insights or

reactions, a video camera can be an event planner's best friend — always keep one handy. Make a point of interviewing attendees to get their thoughts on programs or key takeaways, and setting aside space where they can share stories or expert tips, hints

Rather than delivering canned 60-minute speeches, consider stopping at regular, preset intervals during presentations to invite audience questions, conduct informal polls or source offstage input.

and advice on primary event topics. Material can then be edited into standalone segments or short packages ("5 Reasons Great Customer Service Matters") for sharing during or after the gathering via YouTube, DVD or video learning archives. Alternately, contributions can be transcribed and used in newsletters, eBooks or blog posts that help highlight your community all year long.

I&FMM

Scott Steinberg, a top-ranked international event speaker on the lecture circuit, is a best-selling expert on leadership and innovation, and the head of strategic consultancy TechSavvy Global. Steinberg is listed among today's most well-known providers of keynote speeches, training workshops and seminars, as seen in 600+ outlets from CNN to NPR. Contact Steinberg at his website www.akeynotespeaker.com.

The Wellness Prescription



Meetings + Spa Resorts = Smart Business

By Stella Johnson

When employees need more than a hearty belly laugh to lessen stress-related workplace issues, a suitable antidote is a visit to a spa for an hour, a day or many days.

Spa treatments such as hot stone massage, aromatherapy, exercise, deep breathing, warm baths, mindfulness massage, meditation and the like all lessen stress, according to Susie Ellis, president of SpaFinder, one of the largest spa marketing companies in the world. Ellis explains in her blog (blog.spafinder.com) that increases in spa visitations are due to the fact that “people are more

stressed out than ever, and professionals at spas are dedicated to caring and nurturing guests who are seeking what spas offer,” she says. “While a visit to a spa or wellness destination may not magically turn someone from unhealthy to healthy, it can certainly help people change directions in their lifestyles,” Ellis adds. “Stress is at an all-time high. Spas reduce stress. Most people who have been to a spa (25 percent of the U.S. population) would agree with those statements,” says Ellis.

Ellis has a point: The industry is growing by leaps and bounds. According to the International Spa

Association (ISPA), there exists today approximately 20,000 various types of spa facilities across the country. ISPA’s most recent U.S. Spa Industry Study, released in 2012, reported that consumers spent \$13.4 billion on a wide range of traditional and cutting-edge spa treatments and services in 2011, as compared to \$12.8 billion in 2010 — an increase of 4.5 percent. And, spa visits jumped from 150 million to 156 million — an increase of 4.1 percent.

Experts tell us that happy, engaged employees mean greater productivity and improved ROI. Even hotels are getting on the wellness bandwagon.

Healthy + Hotels = Top Trend

Heading the list of SpaFinder’s Top 10 Spa Predictions for 2013 is Healthy Hotels (visit blog.spafinder.com for the other nine predictions). “Expect corporate wellness and wellness tourism to become huge,” Ellis says. “In 2013 and beyond, what constitutes a true vacation will be redefined, and hospitality will be rewritten. We’ll see an explosion of new wellness-everywhere hotel chains and spa environments becoming more mainstream. In the past, gyms and spas have been positioned as mere amenities, but now these walls are being conceptually and literally broken down. Established hotel chains are rebranding around wellness, and it’s not just about fitness.”

Anna Bjurstam, CEO and owner of Stockholm, Sweden-based Raison d’Etre, a full-service spa management company, is a spa consultant who has worked with more than 100 spas in 60 different countries, created eight of the world’s most well-known spa brands and helped educate more than 150 spa managers.

As a research presenter at the 2012 International Spa Association (ISPA) Conference & Expo held in October at Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center near Orlando, Bjurstam notes, “The concept of the vacation and business traveler is being rewritten. It’s not just about experiencing the hotel, but being well in it, meaning eating well, sleeping well and training well.”

Like Ellis, Bjurstam says that the wellness-everywhere hotel trend is taking place around the world as evidenced among such major hotel brands as Westin Hotels & Resorts, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts and MGM Resorts International, among others.

For instance, at MGM Grand Las Vegas, 42 Stay Well guest rooms were recently introduced. Each one offers more than 12 health and wellness features including vitamin C-infused shower water, which neutralizes chlorine for healthier hair and skin; various advanced lighting features that can regulate sleep/wake cycles or increase energy and reverse the effects

of jetlag; EMF protection from electrical equipment, which emanates sleep-disruptive electromagnetic fields; and an air purification system that reduces allergens, toxins and pathogens.

The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess recently introduced new spa offerings designed for groups at its 44,000-sf Well & Being at Willow Stream Spa. The new offerings are specifically designed to reduce stress and increase productivity, not to mention overall health, and can be customized for groups of all sizes with a variety of options — from teambuilding activities to group workouts, and from classes to workshops. Another corporate-style program at the resort is “The Healthy Executive.” Designed for individuals, this is an exclusive full-day plan that includes private consultations with the spa’s on-staff physician, nutritionist, and an exercise physiologist among other options.

The goal at Westin Hotels & Resorts is to feel better when you leave than when you arrived, and its Westin Essence program is designed to do just that. Since Westin’s signature Heavenly Bed was first introduced in 1999, Westin has broadened its base of health and wellness options with a variety of amenities including SuperFoodsRX dishes for nutrient-rich but flavorful meals when away from home; exercise studios and running maps; Gear-Lending, a special program that allows guests to travel light by renting exercise clothing and sneakers freshly provided onsite by New Balance; clutter-free meetings with fully equipped and streamlined workstations; and a customized in-room spa basket, with everything from flowers to music and aromatherapy oils.

Even Whole Foods is talking about developing a new health resort in Austin, TX — the company’s headquarters and the home of the first Whole Foods. The new project will focus on healthy lifestyle education, according to Whole Foods co-founder John Mackey. “Think of it as a center where people would go for a

day, a weekend or a week for healthy lifestyle education,” said Mackey in *USA Today*.

East + West = Wellness

Sometimes “the spa” encompasses an entire center devoted to more healthful lifestyle choices. Deepak Chopra, M.D. and David Simon, M.D. opened the Chopra Center for Wellbeing in 1996. Located at the newly renovated **La Costa Resort and Spa** (611 guest rooms and 110,000 sf of indoor-outdoor space) in Carlsbad, CA, the Chopra Center offers a wide variety of programs and retreats that integrate the healing arts of the East with the best in modern Western medicine.

Recently added is the center’s new Workplace Wellbeing curriculum of pick-and-choose workshops designed to enhance any group meeting in the form of half-day, full-day and multi-day retreats.

According to Chopra, “Research shows that approximately 15 percent of the work force in the U.S. is ‘actively disengaged.’ The cost of actively disengaged workers in the American work force is about \$350 billion a year. There are another 57 percent of people who are not actively disengaged, but they’re disengaged, which means they’re just punching the clock, just ‘getting through the day’ without achieving anywhere near their true potential. That leaves only about 28 percent of workers who are actively engaged.”

Monica Graves, program manager at the Workplace Wellness Center states that last year a worldwide, industry-leading financial institution elicited the help of the center’s Workplace Wellbeing programs to create a customized wellness incentive retreat for 50 of their top-performing financial advisors.

“The group demographics consisted of 90 percent men with an average age of 65. The participants experienced three days of balance, transformation and inspiration through a thoughtful modernization of the ancient

techniques of yoga, meditation and Ayurveda, a 5,000-year-old healing arts philosophy,” she says.

According to Graves, The Chopra Center educators taught the group practical and powerful tools for stress management, work-life balance, inspirational leadership and successful collaboration in the workplace. Also, the attendees had a “rejuvenating experience through the Ayurvedic meals, spa treatments, beach excursions and leisure time in the beautiful setting of the La Costa Resort and Spa,” she says. “It was so successful that an alumni program is now in development for some time this year.”

Golf + Spa = Perfect Combo

Many planners seek out resorts that combine golf and spa, which provides attendees with the best of both worlds. That combination works very well ac-

cording to Rod Provart, consultant for Provart Global Event Marketing LLC in Hopkins, MN. Provart says that many of his clients prefer a resort with golf and spa, as does one client who regularly books **The Sanctuary at Kiawah Island Golf Resort**, Kiawah Island, SC (255 guest rooms and 35,000 sf of meeting space).

Provart’s choice of The Sanctuary was easy as “several of the firm’s top managers actually have homes on Kiawah Island,” he relates. “The event has been very successful because of the casual opportunities for discussion and work, and the opportunity to relax and enjoy some golf or spa activities as many do.”

Choices abound at Kiawah Island Golf Resort, home to five championship golf courses including the famous Ocean Course, site of the 2012 PGA Championship.

Provart’s group, a leadership meeting, numbers about 45 attendees but does not include either spouses or guests. Attendees use the spa on an individual basis.

“The spa director works with us to schedule individual spa appointments based on attendees’ schedules. She also designs personalized spa gift baskets for each guest that books the spa, which rounds out the whole spa experience and provides something to take back home,” Provart says.

“While the resort provides a relaxed environment in which to conduct business, it also fosters camaraderie amongst the attendees who, in this case, were from top management. They love the beautiful golf and the spectacular spa offerings. And, although our selected spa treatments are the standard facials and massages, I do believe they help make for a more

productive meeting when it comes time to get down to the meeting itself.”

Creativity + Interactivity = Great Networking

Jim Post, partner and vice president of operations at Advantage Destination Management Services in Miami, FL, used his creativity to come up with a solution to meet his client’s needs. Post needed a specific spa-related program that fostered networking among the attendees — a must-have ingredient for his meeting customer.

Because the spa resort did not offer such programs, Post chartered a yacht for an afternoon cruise that included sightseeing as well as basic spa services on the deck provided by certified technicians. Afterwards, attendees were treated to a simple spa menu of mimosas, tea sandwiches, fruit and yogurt.

Noting that there was something for everyone, Post adds, “Some guests were there for the sightseeing, some for the spa treatments and spa menu, and some for the luxury of the cruise experience.”

Post believes that “spa activities are great when they are interactive with the entire group so that they can still network and get to know each other. Spas are just coming on board with that idea; but they need to have the right person in place, someone who’s bubbly and knows how to work with the group.”

For another client, Post arranged a meeting in Palm Beach that also featured a full day of spa activities by the resort’s swimming pool. “We had cabanas set up as day spas with an array of spa treatments. Everyone signed up for at least one or two sessions,” says Post. “It was very well received, especially after a few days of being in workshops and attending seminars.”

For his corporate groups, Post is in favor of arranging 30- to 45-minute spa breaks rather than coffee breaks. Chair massages and hand-wrist massages get the blood flowing and make attendees more alert at meetings, Post notes.

One more benefit of meeting at a world-class spa resort, according to Post, is that “the group is content to stay on the property because the whole spa philosophy saturates the premises and makes the stay so pleasurable and rewarding.”

Newsworthy

The G Spa at **Foxwoods Resort Casino**, Mashantucket, CT, recently received TripAdvisor’s Certificate of Excellence for 2012. The spa specializes in Native American-inspired specialties including moisturizing wraps, massages and mani-pedis that utilize milk and honey, chamomile extract, sea minerals, essential oils, red clay, vitamins A and E, grape seed extract and more.

In Las Vegas last fall, **The Spa at Wynn Las Vegas** reopened with newly designed interiors that promote a feeling of health, wellness and a sense of relaxation. With 45 renovated treatment rooms, the spa sports new sig-

nature treatments including Tropical Journey — a steamed compress and body massage using coconut and ginger oil, and Xtremities Indulgence, which targets the head, hands and feet.

Meanwhile, **The Spa at Encore**, Wynn’s sister property with 51 treatment rooms, has added two new spa experiences: Nalu Body Ritual, a Polynesian fusion massage, body exfoliation and coconut oil scalp treatment; and Fire and Ice Stone Ritual, an infusion of heat with cool stones for contrast.

Final Thoughts

Wellness is certainly catching on in the workplace, which is a good for all concerned. As Deepak Chopra reminds us, “Once people begin participating in a healthy, balanced lifestyle, they suddenly feel quite good. Well-being is actually addictive, but it’s a healthy addiction that benefits individuals, companies, the community and the world.” **I&FMM**

Spa + Resorts = Self-Improvement

A Q&A with Steve Auer, CEO of Cadence Inc. Based in Chicago, with offices in New York and Los Angeles, Cadence plans and produces a wide array of meetings for both internal and external business groups.

IFMM Why are spa resorts great choices for insurance and financial meetings?

AUER A spa resort adds a deeper layer of networking and socialization for attendees and their guests. They also make a great incentive reward for achieving sales quotas. And, if the spa menu has a health and wellness angle, that’s even better. If the entire resort is designed to provide a holistic experience, this creates a serene environment for attendees where it is easier to concentrate, relax and focus on the purpose of the meeting.

IFMM How do you select the right spa resort for the group?

AUER We judge a spa resort by how it actually adds to the event. Hosting a meeting at a spa puts an emphasis on self-improvement and this often parallels the business objective of the meeting.

IFMM In what other ways does a spa resort influence the success of a meeting?

AUER The resort environment encourages attendees to make healthy decisions by bringing the tools to do it to their doorstep. An attendee may think, “Oh, here’s this nice walking path, I’ll go for a run today.” This mindset can



Auer

then influence their approach to business and encourage them to engage more, listen more or make more connections.

IFMM Is there a fear that attendees might get too relaxed at a spa resort to want to get down to business?

AUER If you look at the top creative agencies and design firms, you’ll notice that their offices are all designed to be conducive to creativity and openness. This same idea and design principle applies to meeting environments. There is an intrinsic link between the

context of the environment and the flow of communication, productivity and creativity. The key is to not look at spa resorts from a luxury angle, but rather as a backdrop for self-improvement that is conducive to the business mission of the event.

IFMM What about optics? How does a meeting at a spa resort avoid being perceived incorrectly?

AUER In this economy and climate, there’s an amount of fiduciary responsibility that we have to be cognizant of. From a business perspective, we use resort destinations within the context of learning and personal development. The spa is just a piece of the destination, not the destination itself. The spa component at a resort should parallel the purpose of the meeting and enhance what the attendees are learning and experiencing. — SJ



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High-Tech Tools for Managing Meetings

And Proving Their Value

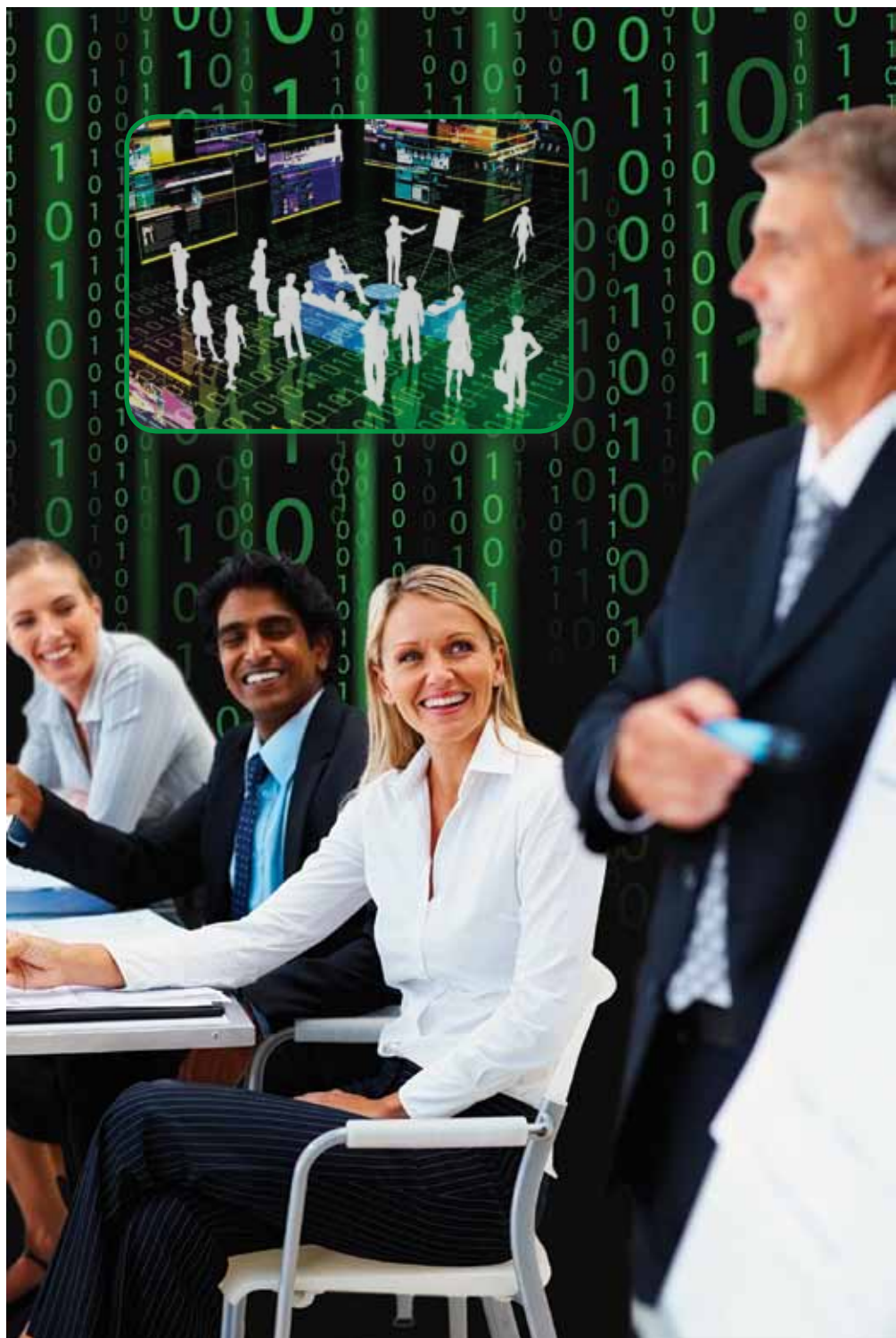
By George Seli

The functionality of today's meetings management tech tools is quite robust, making them more like "tool belts" that typically include modules for meeting registration, hotel sourcing, budgeting, generating reports, surveying internal clients and more. A planner can certainly use some or all of these features without having a strategic meetings management program (SMMP) in place at his or her firm. But the converse is not so certain.

Automation and Efficiency

If a planner is working within an SMMP, it is very difficult to do it properly without using a tool like Cvent or StarCite, simply because an SMMP requires company-wide tracking and control of meetings activity. That's often a tall order to fill, and many planners feel it calls for a system that centralizes and automates the various planning processes, from site sourcing to expense reports on the tail end.

"Technology does not make your SMMP, but it certainly is necessary to keep it all in motion," asserts Amy Harris, SMMC, vice president, enterprise marketing and activation, with Atlanta-based SunTrust Banks Inc. In particular, a meetings management tech tool "allows you to consolidate and slice and dice the meetings data, and customize reports for the internal stakeholders," she says. The customized reports can break down meet-



ings spend and savings by department, with particular hotel chains, by category (e.g., sleeping rooms, F&B), across certain time frames, and so on.

"I suppose you could do the tracking and reporting 'old school' with Excel spreadsheets," Harris adds. "But the time it would take you to do it would be ridiculous." Just how long it would take depends on the amount of meetings activity, of course, but it's surely time that could be better spent on other tasks.

Tim Brown, CEO of Irvine, CA-based Meeting Sites Resource, which licenses Meeting Evolution technology, notes, "Some of our customers are very decentralized, but procurement still has their finger in the pie. They said it was taking them between eight and 20 hours to do that reporting because they were dealing with data spread in so many different places." An SMM tech tool essentially brings it all into one place, and outputs it quickly in a digestible format.

More Transparency

Tracking meetings-related spend has certainly improved in recent years, thanks in large part to such tools. JR Sherman, senior vice president of business solutions for Active Network

ure was 0.5 to 1 percent. So it's not that much more money is being spent on meetings; rather, organizations are now doing a much better job of tracking that spend," Sherman says. "There is a lot more transparency now, and I think technology has played a big role in that. And as soon as CFOs start realizing the amount of money being put

into meetings and events, it's going to become critical that the company buys a system that can track that." Especially at insurance

our product," reports Sherman. "The industry is really driven by compliance and duty of care, which makes an enterprise application around strategic meetings management really critical to be able to track the spend associated with customers."

New Solutions for Big and Small

About 15 months ago, Active Network launched its Business Solutions division and acquired StarCite. Sherman explains the motivation for the



"Technology does not make your SMMP, but it certainly is necessary to keep it all in motion."

Amy Harris, SMMC, Vice President, Enterprise Marketing and Activation
SunTrust Banks Inc., Atlanta, GA

and financial firms, and especially in a post-recession world, the careful tracking and reporting of meetings spend is de rigueur. But not all firms accomplish that via an SMMP. "The adoption of SMMPs has been more limited in the insurance and financial industry than in others," observes Issa Jouaneh, vice president and general manager, American Express Meetings & Events. "We see that more companies in the sector have a meetings policy,

acquisition: "Coming out of the recession and trying to prove more of the value of meetings and events, we realized there was a big piece of the events industry that we were not touching. And that was the procurement-driven side of meetings and events, or strategic meetings management. That led us down the path of adding StarCite to the family." Since then, Active Network has tried to tar-

get StarCite to midmarket companies as well as the big firms. "StarCite was traditionally seen as an enterprise solution, and what we have done is added the ability to have a much more self-service, simplified, low-cost user interface for small businesses, while still giving them access to tools like RFP outsourcing and expense track-



"Some of our customers are very decentralized. ...It was taking them between eight and 20 hours to do that reporting because they were dealing with data spread in so many different places."

Tim Brown, CEO
Meeting Sites Resource, Irvine, CA

and based in Wilton, CT, cites an Aberdeen Group study stating that on the average, 9 percent of an organization's budget is spent on meetings and events, and the figure will rise to 20 percent in the next couple of years.

"Just two years ago the estimates in the marketplace were saying the fig-

and some form of reporting on meeting spend, but the level of strategic management of the spend varies from company to company."

Still, many of the larger firms in that sector are indeed using SMM tech tools. "We have 10 of the top 15 financial institutions currently using

ing. The real advantage of StarCite is its robust global platform, and now we are working to try to bring that functionality to the midmarket clients."

More recently, in October, American Express Meetings & Events partnered with Cvent. "The client reaction has been very positive," says Jouaneh. "Since the partnership launch, we have

implemented Cvent across a number of geographic regions, and over the next few months we will complete the global rollout.” American Express Meetings & Events’ existing Meetings Expert solution was enhanced by the relationship with Cvent, which added a new meetings portal that “brings the request process online and provides a seamless automated experience,” according to Jouaneh. The Web portal’s features include a centralized meetings calendar; a Meeting Requestor tool to help automate meetings sourcing; and a Request History tool, which provides a database of past meeting requests. American Express Meetings & Events clients also will have limited-time exclusive access to Cvent’s Meeting Cost Estimator.

While Cvent and StarCite have long been the big players in this arena, there are other formidable contenders that are continually ramping up their offerings. In February, San Francisco-based Certain Inc. launched the Certain Certified Meeting Management Program, a new partner program that enables meeting management companies to deliver differentiated and more profitable services. The program provides access to Certain’s award-winning technology platform, certified

“enlighten” users about their company’s meetings activity, the product has features like My Dashboard, where users can access all reports and What’s Happening Now from a single page; a meetings calendar; and a report generator. Also included are Zentila’s standard sourcing tools, such



“As soon as CFOs start realizing the amount of money being put into meetings and events, it’s going to become critical that the company buys a system that can track that.”

JR Sherman, Senior Vice President, Business Solutions
Active Network, Wilton, CT

as the eRFP Genie and hotel search engine, along with new features such as Preferred Hotels and pre-populated meeting concessions.

“Supplier network is key,” says Harris, whose company has been using Cvent for more than two years. “They’re starting to add alternate venues, not just hotels but also restaurants and other offsite venues, which is a good resource.” She notes that the Cvent site search mechanism implements two valuable cost- and time-saving criteria: first, hotels in the search area with cancelled space, where a

if you can meet our terms and conditions, we will elevate you to the top of our search list,” Harris adds.

Customized Contracts

The contracting process itself is greatly facilitated by meetings management tools such as Meeting Evolution, which, Brown notes, was

the first APEX-compliant system and just last month integrated APEX’s Post-Event Report. APEX is the Accepted Practices Exchange, a voluntary meetings industry compliance initiative of the Convention Industry Council promoting the use of standardized tools to facilitate the exchange of information. “We can put our different customer contracts in the system, allowing us to customize a contract in minutes for a specific meeting,” says Brown. “It auto-populates all performance clauses based on lost profit,

not lost revenue. Then we can easily prepare a cost savings and contract risk-reduction report by meeting,” he explains. The company’s new Event Workspace module allows collaboration between planners as well as suppliers within the system. “It takes your counter-signed contract, with all your details of the meeting including your agenda, functions and space, and drops it down into a BEO (banquet event order). There will be hotel access to it when you’re adding table settings, floral and other aspects of production, and it expedites the entire process to manage the logistics of the meeting and have real-time cost analysis at every phase.”



“More companies in the (insurance and financial) sector have...some form of reporting on meeting spend, but the level of strategic management of the spend varies from company to company.”

Issa Jouaneh, Vice President and General Manager
American Express Meetings and Events, Toronto, ON

training and support, marketing and sales opportunities, and early access to new features.

And Zentila, the first online sourcing and booking solution for meeting planners, has entered the SMM space with its recently launched Enlightenment tool. Designed to

booking would absorb monies due to the hotelier as a result of SunTrust’s cancellation (per the company’s contract rider); and second, hotels known to accept the rider, which expedites the booking process and is especially helpful for short-term meetings. “It also helps us tell a hotel property that

Mobile- and Social-Enabled

Sherman identifies two other cutting-edge features, exemplified by StarCite: First, one-to-one meeting capabilities allowing individuals to “book” meetings with other individuals within a larger conference; and second, the integration of meeting management tools with mobile technologies. “For example, on our supplier side, hotels can now receive and review feeds from buyers via a mobile device,” he says. “So if they’re not in their office and an RFP comes in they can actually view it and reply to it, etc. And the person that is in the chain of command for approving the spend can do that with our system from a mobile device, so that it doesn’t hold up the decision process for the meeting. With everything we are doing we are making sure that mobile is a critical way to access that information.”

Norwalk, CT-based etouches is another meeting management software company that is immersed in the mobile app and social media spaces with its eMobile and eSocial solutions. And last summer, Atlanta-based SignUp4 acquired RappidApp, a leading software company specializing in the user-driven creation of mobile applications, expanding SignUp4’s current suite of event, travel and spend management products to include mobile platforms.

According to James Spellos, CMP, president of Meeting U., “To say that functions like registration and attendee management are the only part of meeting management technology is to miss a huge revolution that started in the past seven years with social media and mobility.”

Scalability

Now, a planner may decide he or she doesn’t need a given feature in a meeting management tool, but two criteria are always important to keep in mind: scalability and service.

As to the first, “consider what your company’s needs may be three years from now, and choose a platform that can scale to those needs,” Sherman advises. Globalization is an important trend in this regard. Companies that are global or moving in that direction will want to funnel all the meetings planned internationally through the system as well, and the system must be able to handle that along with the domestic meetings. With Active Network’s cloud computing system, scaling, adding features and maintenance are all done from Active Network’s end. “We don’t install software in our client’s offices or on their servers at all; it’s on our servers within what is called the ‘cloud’ and they access it via the Internet. That makes it much easier to enhance the applications,” Sherman explains.

Service and Responsiveness

As to service, it’s not just about how easy it is to adopt the system, but how responsive and accommodating



“I think it’s important that when a planner is looking at a tool that they have a checklist of the functions they need, as well as a ‘wish list’ of functions they want.”

Deborah Borak, CDS, SMMC, Director of Global Accounts
ConferenceDirect, Littleton, CO

the tech company is to a customer’s needs. “What I like about Cvent is that if you ask if some feature can be added, they will immediately escalate it to their engineering team and put it into a queue,” Harris says. “If it’s something other people have asked for, it goes higher in the queue, and even if it’s something no one else has asked for they will take a look at it to see if it improves functionality. I feel like they really listen.” The company is also regularly in touch with Harris about updates and offering training if desired, she adds.

Deborah Borak, CDS, SMMC, di-

rector of global accounts at ConferenceDirect in Littleton, CO, participated in a Cvent focus group. She notes that Cvent continues to add international hotels into their supplier network in response to client demand. “They do not have all the hotels in the world in there, but if they are missing one, we are able to let them know about it and they add it in,” she says.

Customer service and scalability, then, should be among a planner’s “must-haves” for an event management tech tool. “I think it’s important that when a planner is looking at a tool that they have a checklist of the functions they need, as well as a ‘wish list’ of functions they want,” Borak sums up. One narrows down the product choices to those that meet the checklist, and then decides between the remaining few based on the wish list.

Or the decision might be between different products offered by the same company. For instance, etouches offers a “Quad” package, which includes basic features such as eReg (registration), eMarket and eSurvey; a “Pro”

package that subsumes the Quad features and adds eProject, eScheduler, eBudget and eWiki (for collaboration between event teams); and “Plus+” which adds further functions to Quad or Pro, such as eMobile, eScan (badge scanning) and eRFP.

Products like these are practically “build your own” tools, and a planner must really put some thought into what features are essential (perhaps because they support an SMMP) and which can be eschewed to bring down cost. Improving ROI for the event is key, but so is improving ROI for the event management software. **IFMM**

The Greater Good

How CSR Adds Value to the Community and the Company

By John Buchanan

As companies strive to earn a bigger return on investment from their meetings and events, more and more are discovering the power of a simple formula: the combination of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or community service-related activities with teambuilding. And insurance and financial services companies are leading the way when it comes to innovation and creativity.

"Of all the industries we work with, financial and insurance conference planners have really been drawn to these types of activities," says Alan Ranzer, co-founder and managing partner of Florham Park, NJ-based Impact 4 Good, an eight-year-old company that specializes in tying CSR projects into meetings and events. "And that just makes sense when you think of insurance companies, for example, because of their traditional ties to the community. But it's also very true of financial services companies today. And when you think about it, both industries are largely based on trust, so there's nothing surprising about the fact they're increasingly drawn to these kinds of activities."

For Sherri Lindenberg, senior vice president of marketing at Crump Life Insurance Services in Roseland, NJ, such initiatives are nothing new. "It's something that I've always felt very strongly about," she says. "And one of the things I've always talked about is that nobody is going to want to do business with us unless they know us, like us and trust us. And you're not going to get people to trust you if they don't know you and like you. And the best way to accomplish those things is to get out into your community and do good things. And when you do that, business opportunities just seem to follow. So I've brought that philosophy to every organization I've ever worked for."

Lindenberg and her fellow executives have a clear understanding of the business benefits they get from such activity. "It strengthens the bonds our people feel for each other, because it helps them get to know, like and trust each other," she says. "It also helps them feel good about one another as human beings, in addition to just feeling good about one another as professionals. The second thing is it strengthens the bonds between the company and our

people, and by doing that it strengthens the commitments of our people to the company. And it also enhances our ability to recruit and retain employees."

Over the last few years, Lindenberg has observed an ongoing change that will lead to even more CSR activity as

a key element of many meetings. "It's becoming an easier sell to management executives," she says, "because it's more common and also more expected now that you take time out from a business agenda that is budgeted and paid for with company dol-

lars to do a CSR activity. It is more acceptable, whereas before the thought was sort of, 'We should be doing this before or after normal business hours.' Now we realize that by adding value to the community, we're also adding value to the company."

PwC's CSR

A recent blog post on *Causecast.com* by Ryan Scott provided an example of how extending a corporate identity and mission into the community yields a greater good all around. Financial services giant PwC is engaging employees through its newly launched financial literacy program "Earn Your Future." The program is a \$160 million total investment in youth education, combining \$60 million in cash donations and 1 million service hours. The effort, launched last summer, will reach more than 2.5 million students and educators in the United States over the next five years, according to PwC.

Among the range of projects planned to support the commitment, Scott noted in his blog that on Martin Luther King Jr. day recently PwC employees spent the "national day of service" teaching financial literacy modules in schools and hosting career exploration programs for youth organizations. In the fall, the Earn Your Future effort partnered with Knowledge@Wharton High School in Philadelphia to offer a three-day, all-expenses-paid financial literacy training seminar for 150 educators — the first in a series of seminars.

Heather Wright, corporate responsibility director at PwC told Scott, "It's a shared value concept. PwC is helping our youth develop strong financial foundations that enable them to contribute to a growing workforce and healthier economy; and we're providing our partners and staff opportunities to both develop their leadership skills and give back to our communities."

PwC's national and local nonprofit partners include MIND Research Institute, Junior Achievement and *DonorsChoose.org*.

PwC's International Leadership Development Program targets developing countries to introduce financial literacy and entrepreneurship into public school curriculum. Since 2008, the annual Project Belize effort involving more than 760 PwC interns, partners and staff has donated 15 tons of school supplies, granted 600 high school equivalent scholarships and delivered PwC's financial literacy curriculum to more than 3,000 students.

C&IT

Since 2008, through Project Belize, more than 760 interns, partners and staff of PwC have delivered its financial literacy curriculum to more than 3,000 students.

Photo courtesy of PwC

A Growing Trend

Hillary Smith, CMP, CSEP, a partner at independent meeting and event planning company Koncept Events in Fort Lauderdale, FL, is another long-time champion and practitioner of CSR-related teambuilding. "For really progressive companies, these kinds of activities have been around for years," Smith says. "But their use has also accelerated over the last three years or so. It's been particularly true since the recession. More and more companies have felt the need to give back to their communities. And they've also found that such activity adds a different kind of value to their meetings and events."

And an increasing number of insurance and financial companies are embracing that unique value proposition because it can improve the connection between the company and third-party agents and brokers.

Ranzer agrees that there has been a marked increase in such activity over the last few years. "And a lot of that has

"You're not going to get people to trust you if they don't know you and like you. And the best way to accomplish those things is to get out into your community and do good things. And when you do that, business opportunities just seem to follow."

Sherri Lindenberg
Senior Vice President, Marketing
Crump Life Insurance Services
Roseland, NJ

to do with all the talk about perception in the meetings industry since 2008," he says. "So more and more companies are now saying, 'We're going to have this meeting in such and such a location. But we're also going to make a difference while we're there.' And



A corporate group's incentive event in Hawaii organized by Impact 4 Good resulted in the donation of 56 bookshelves, 560 school supply backpacks and a 448-panel mural to schools on the Big Island.

these activities don't just make a difference in the local community. They also make a difference in the lives of the attendees at the meeting."

At the same time, many planners are realizing that it's possible to extend the impact of teambuilding activities by giving them more social significance.

"The other important thing that's happening now is that more and more companies are learning that just going out and having the same old kind of traditional teambuilding activity that



everyone has been doing forever does not deliver the same ROI from the meeting as doing a CSR-type activity," Smith says. "You can host an event at a local restaurant and have everyone go around and play a 'Minute to Win It' game as a way of getting to know one another and interact. But that doesn't really deliver any kind of real personal satisfaction. It's an entirely different thing to be part of building prosthetic limbs for people in Cambodia who are still stepping on land mines. That gives you a chance to really change people's lives."

Setting an Example

A current exemplar of a company that has mastered the practice of inte-

grating CSR into its brand image and some of its most important meetings and events is Farmers Insurance.

"As a company, we feel that it's important to give back to the communities where we do business and where our people live and work," says John Chisholm, the company's Westlake Village, CA-based director of operations. "And that's because we want to feel very connected to our communities and have that be something that differentiates us as a company."

Farmers has a formal CSR outreach program that is based on three carefully built pillars: education, public safety and civics. Company-wide activities that stretch from headquarters to regional and local offices are geared around those three foundational elements, which in turn often drive meeting- and event-related programs.

"For example," Chisholm says, "we are the No. 2 national contributor to March of Dimes. And as part of that, we stage our own fund-raising 'telethon' event. In turn, that trickles down to our regional and local offices, and to some of our meetings and events, because we take a very integrated approach to doing what we do. And district managers, agents and other employees have been very creative about the ways in which they integrate these activities into their operations."

A perfect example of how Farmers creates a high-profile CSR program and then integrates it into the culture of the company is the annual Farmers Insurance Open golf tournament, a nationally televised event held each year at fabled Torrey Pines Golf Course in San Diego. Tiger Woods won the 2013 event in January.

"It's an event that builds a lot of awareness for the company, but also a lot of enthusiasm and pride among our employees," Chisholm says.

That's because the well-planned and expertly executed event is far more than just a golf tournament. It's a company-wide and very public CSR juggernaut.

For example, the tournament is designed to raise \$2.5 million that is donated to 200 charities in the San Diego area.

Farmers also hosts a special incentive program that brings the top 100 performers from its 15,000 nationwide agents to the event, where they participate in a meeting that highlights the company's CSR program for the year and individual activities.

"The agents that earn that trip are the best of the best, and they're being recognized for their performance," Chisholm says. "But they're also being given the opportunity to participate in a special weekend that really celebrates the CSR activities of the company."

The highlight of the weekend is a Saturday morning meeting attended by company executives, district managers from across the U.S. and the 100 incentive-recognition winners. It was held this year at the Hilton La Jolla Torrey Pines. "And that helps strengthen the relationships we have with our top producers," Chisholm says.

In turn, that benefit is extended when the winners return to their local offices and talk about the experience they have just had. "As a result of that, they also get very involved in the activities in their local communities that are related to the national charities that we support, such as the (American) Red Cross, Food Share and

The First Tee, a school-related program for young golfers," Chisholm says. "In essence, they become brand ambassadors for us by talking about how we give back to the community. And the typical feedback we get is that they've never been to anything like this before. Everyone feels energized and motivated to go back to their offices and do an even better job than they have before. And it enhances their pride in being part of the Farmers brand."

As a result, the company recently launched a new recruitment website, *BeAFarmersAgent.com*, which prominently highlights its CSR activities.

Extending the Impact

Although not all companies aspire to the heights achieved by Farmers, or have the resource to get there even if they want to, every organization can learn a fundamental lesson from the way the company does what it does. And that is to take a long view of how CSR activities can be leveraged, as opposed to treating them as an isolated incident related only to a particular meeting or event.

"For example," Smith says, "a lot of companies now focus on this kind of activity throughout the course of the

"Everyone feels energized and motivated to go back to their offices and do an even better job than they have before. And it enhances their pride in being part of the Farmers brand."



John Chisholm
Director of Operations
Farmers Insurance
Westlake Village, CA

ing focus is a key to success. "We encourage our local offices to do CSR activities, and we do recognize them each quarter," she says. "Our president does a quarterly business update webinar and includes that kind of recognition for our local offices in them. We also highlight the activities in our corporate newsletter."

Smith cautions, however, that too many companies new to the practice still make the mistake of perceiving a meeting-related CSR activity as "a four-hour slot in the meeting agenda," as opposed to something designed to have enduring resonance.

"Too many planners get stuck thinking only in terms of blocks of



PGA Tour pro Ricky Fowler tees off at the 2013 annual Farmers Open at Torrey Pines in San Diego. The tournament raises millions of dollars for 200 San Diego charities.

year so that it has longevity and lasting impact. It's no longer about saying you have 2½ hours to do something and make a difference."

Lindenberg agrees that an endur-

time, because that's how their brains work when they're doing their job," she says. "But when they really understand the value they can get out of these kinds of activities, it's like they

“More and more companies have felt the need to give back to their communities. And they’ve also found that such activity adds a different kind of value to their meetings and events.”

Hillary Smith, CMP, CSEP
Partner
Koncept Events
Fort Lauderdale, FL



have a ‘eureka!’ moment. Then they start to think differently about how to do it and have the impact last over time. And that’s when they really start to get the ROI from doing it.”

Once a company understands that, Ranzer says, they start to develop ways to extend the activity beyond a particular meeting and keep it alive at a local level year-round. For example, he says, a CSR project staged at an annual meeting to benefit a major charity can easily be extended into a year-long campaign that, in turn, recognizes the most productive participants with a special event at next year’s meeting. “And I’m even seeing vendors begin to get involved in these kinds of activities,” he says, “as a result of going to a meeting where it’s being done. So that is another way the impact and benefit to the company can be extended.”

And, says Smith, “in instances where regional or local offices, or individual business units, compete against one another to see who can produce the biggest results, that makes it even more of a teambuilding activity. And it keeps the momentum going.”

For example, Koncept Events used a philanthropic teambuilding program for a client, developed by Odyssey Teams Inc., in which participants assembled artificial limbs for victims of land mines in Cambodia. Event organizers make sure that participants later see a video in which people are actually receiving their new limbs. “It’s a way of reminding people of

what they’ve done and the difference they’ve made,” Smith says. “In that example, they have literally changed someone’s life for the better. And seeing that play out is a very powerful experience that you don’t forget.”

Lessons Learned

Despite her three decades of experience incorporating CSR activities into her meetings and events, Lindenberg has recently learned that such practices can always be improved upon.

“One thing I’ve learned lately is that there are some great third-party vendors out there that can help you do this,” she says. “We used Impact 4 Good to help us create the CSR activity we did on behalf of a local children’s hospital at our annual sales meeting in Atlanta earlier this year, and that was a really positive experience,” she says. “Impact 4 Good han-



A corporate client of Koncept Events participated in a CSR teambuilding program in which artificial limbs were assembled for donation to Cambodian land mine victims.

dled everything for us, and that made it easier on me and my team to do this kind of thing, because...we didn’t know much about a local community and had to do a lot of homework to find out about the kinds of things we could do. Impact 4 Good has that information at their fingertips.”

The other key thing Lindenberg has learned, she says, is to listen to your employees. “You have to know the kinds of things they are involved with and the things they feel passionately about,” she says. “And if you do, that makes it much easier to do things they will really get excited about.”

The overarching consideration, however, is that CSR-related activities and projects can deliver a tangible, powerful benefit not generated by traditional teambuilding activities.

“It’s something that fuels people internally, so in that sense, you can’t do anything that delivers more ROI,” Smith says. “These kinds of activities are things that people don’t forget about. It’s something they’re proud of. So that means the activity continues to have impact within the organization. And for a lot of companies today, that impact continues year after year.”

Given that, Ranzer says, the practice has gone far beyond a trend, to become a next-generation best practice.

“If this kind of activity was just a trend,” he says, “it would have gone away by now. But it’s something that planners now really know can bring a lot of value to their events. It’s really something that can set the tone for a meeting and help make it more successful.” **I&FMM**

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Florida also is home to many large businesses that hold countless meetings of all sizes throughout the state.

For example, every year Florida Blue (the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plan for Floridians) holds 50 to 75 meetings throughout Florida that last at least two days and have 10 to 300 attendees.

The Dream Destination

By Derek Reveron

According to Kathleen Zwart, CMP, corporate meeting and travel services manager for Jacksonville-based Florida Blue, these meetings also include two annual incentives for approximately 100 attendees. "We are lucky because we have so many places that we can choose from in Florida that gives the reward we want to provide without leaving the state,"

says Zwart. "We can go all over the state and present them with different options every year. There are dream locations whether your business is located inside or outside of Florida."

In addition, Florida is a popular destination for meetings held by Blue Cross Blue Shield companies in other states. Every year, employees in similar departments from the "Blues" in other states hold two- or three-day meetings in various locations nationwide to compare practices and do benchmarking, says Zwart. The Blues hold dozens of such meetings annually ranging in attendance from 30 to about 100 attendees.

Three to five of the meetings are held in Florida every year. "They all want to come here, especially in the winter. These meetings are always better attended when they are held in Florida. I have one that wants to meet in August of this year and another one

that I'm working on. Some are held in Jacksonville because we have an 11,000-sf conference center there. We also have met in St. Petersburg and other parts of the state," says Zwart.

Orlando

No other destination offers so many hotel and resort rooms located so closely to one of the world's great collections of theme parks. Groups enjoy Orlando so much that they return year after year, sometimes moving from one property to another. For example, Brown & Brown Inc., a Daytona-based insurance company with offices nationwide, held its annual sales incentive at the Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center for the last seven years before moving to the Hilton Orlando, which is connected to the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC). Both hotels offer top services and value, says Diane Jones, Brown & Brown executive assistant and meeting planner.

Brown & Brown's three-day incentive honors the company's 1,500 top producers. During the incentive, attendees get plenty of rest and relaxation and enjoy Orlando at their leisure. "We used to offer them buses to the theme parks and a mall for their leisure time. But we found that what they mostly want to do is lie by the pool and relax or golf. Every year, we have a general session, black-tie dinner and costume theme party. Last year, the theme was superheroes and everybody dressed up as one. This year, the theme is rock stars," says Jones.

In addition, for the last five years Brown & Brown has held its annual leadership meeting for 200 managers at the Hyatt Regency Orlando International Airport. "We used to have them fly into Orlando and drive to our headquarters in Daytona and have the meeting there. But we found that we can save money by having them land in Orlando and meet there instead of renting cars to drive to Daytona and stay there. And the Hyatt gives us a good rate," says Jones. The company also held a two-

day meeting last year for 50 accounting managers at the Renaissance Orlando at SeaWorld.

New and Renovated

Orlando, the nation's second largest hotel market, continues to increase its supply of more than 120,000 guest rooms and suites. Rosen Hotels & Resorts is constantly improving every aspect of services and amenities. The company owns seven properties in the Orlando area including three convention hotels: Rosen Centre Hotel, Rosen Shingle Creek and Rosen Plaza Hotel.

Rosen Plaza Hotel (800 guest rooms; 60,000 sf of meeting space) has renovated its guest rooms with new furnishings, carpeting, crown molding, TVs and 32-inch flat-screen TVs. The **Rosen Centre Hotel** (1,334 guest rooms; 124,000 sf of meeting space) has renovated its guest rooms, Grand Lobby, hospitality suites and three Presidential Suites. Meeting attendees can walk



Kathleen Zwart, CMP
Corporate Meeting and
Travel Services Manager
Florida Blue
Jacksonville, FL

to the nearby OCCC via the covered Rosen Centre Skywalk.

Harris Rosen, president and COO of Rosen Hotels & Resorts, announced plans to build a skybridge connecting the Rosen Plaza Hotel with the OCCC. The pedestrian skybridge will be named the Gary Sain Memorial Bridge in honor of the Visit Orlando president and CEO who passed away

suddenly in May 2012. Sain had led the agency since 2007, bringing about reorganization, a new vision and a name change to CVB. Construction of the \$1.5 million bridge will be funded by Rosen Hotels & Resorts, completing the final link in connecting OCCC with adjacent International Drive hotels. "I am honored to dedicate this project to my friend and colleague Gary Sain," said Rosen in a statement. "It is entirely fitting that this pedestrian skybridge named in his honor will be used to benefit thousands of visitors to Orlando, a destination he worked tirelessly to build and strengthen during his time with us. Rest assured, Gary's legacy continues here today."

Rosen Shingle Creek (1,500 guest rooms; 445,000 sf of meeting space) recently enhanced its 50,000 sf of outdoor meeting space with an additional 16,000 sf.

In other hotel news, **Wyndham Orlando Resort** (613 guest rooms; 60,000 sf of meeting space) launched a multi-million-dollar renovation scheduled for completion in May 2013. The project includes a makeover of all guest rooms and suites, and an additional 25,000 sf of meeting space that brings the total to 60,000 sf.

The **Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate** (720 guest rooms; 128,000 sf of meeting space) recently added the 46,000-sf Osceola Convention Center and Ballroom bringing total meeting and banquet space to 128,000 sf. The venue also features eight meeting rooms, each equipped with the latest audio-visual equipment, and a 30,000-sf exhibit hall.

Attraction Updates

SeaWorld Orlando's largest expansion ever will debut with the spring opening of Antarctica-Empire of the Penguin. The new theme

"We can go all over the state and present them with different options every year. There are dream locations whether your business is located inside or outside of Florida."

park will include a penguin habitat and an interactive ride that journeys through the Antarctic and mimics a penguin's life.

This summer, **Universal Orlando Resort** will premier Transformers: The Ride – 3D. The attraction will feature characters from the Transformers movie series in HD CGI media with special effects.

Walt Disney World Resort continues the expansion of Fantasyland with the opening later this year of Princess Fairytale Hall, where visitors can interact with characters such as Cinderella and Aurora in Fantasyland's Castle Courtyard.

On Florida's Space Coast, in July the **Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex** will open a 90,000-sf facility that will house the Space Shuttle Atlantis, which was retired in 2011. Visitors can view the shuttle and enjoy interactive exhibits highlighting accomplishments of the spacecraft, the International Space Station and Hubble Space Telescope.

Jacksonville

The state's largest city is becoming a more popular meeting destination. Jacksonville books more than 400 meetings, conventions, trade shows and sports tournaments every year, according to Visit Jacksonville, the city's convention and visitors bureau.

Jacksonville offers more than 18,000 guest rooms at several meeting properties, including the **Omni Jacksonville Hotel** (354 guest rooms; 14,000 sf of meeting space). The property has renovated its lobby and restaurant, and plans to renovate all guest rooms in 2014.

Golfers will love Jacksonville, which offers more than 70 golf courses. Just south of Jacksonville in Ponte Vedra Beach is the famed **Ponte Vedra Inn & Club** (250 guest rooms; 25,000 sf meeting space). The AAA Five Diamond property's amenities include the largest spa in north Florida at 30,000 sf, 36 holes of golf, including links-style with ocean breezes, 15 tennis courts, an ocean-

front gym, four restaurants, three lounges, eight shops and boutiques, and four heated pools in a beachfront setting.

The **Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort** (404 guest rooms; 80,000 sf of meeting space) recently completed an extensive \$85 million re-imagination. From the new lobby located in the new Oceanside wing to the new outdoor area with the largest pool deck in Northeast Florida, spectacular Atlantic Ocean views abound.

Miami

Chic hotels, a cosmopolitan metropolis, pulsing nightlife and a true tropical climate make the Miami area one of the world's top meeting destinations says Valerie Bihet, owner of the Vibe Agency, a corporate meeting and event planning firm with offices in Miami and New York. "Miami is a great destination because it's a vibrant city with a lot of culture, great weather and friendly people," Bihet says. "Miami has an air of intrigue to it. It also encourages attendees to be happier, more creative and receptive. There is a certain vibe that you don't necessarily get in other cities," Bihet adds.

Many groups choose trendy and ever-popular Miami Beach. However, some insurance firms and financial companies prefer to meet out of the limelight. "Some companies want to keep a low profile and not have a leisure image," says Bihet. "I had that issue with a bank that I was planning a meeting for recently, so I advised the company not to stay on Miami Beach. I told the client that Coral Gables, Coconut Grove and the downtown Bayside area of Miami are considered to be more business-driven."

The bank took Bihet's advice and met at the **Four Seasons Hotel Miami** (221 guest rooms; 14,931 sf of indoor meeting space), located in the Brickell Avenue financial district located downtown near Biscayne Bay. "It suited the client because it wasn't too bling-bling. It was very business-oriented. It's not a hotel

that you would necessarily go to for a vacation but for a business meeting, and for a good price and good value," says Bihet.

The bank's three-day strategic planning meeting for 50 top managers included a unique teambuilding activity. Attendees were divided into groups to use Miami as a backdrop for making a movie to identify issues with the bank's business model. "They all assumed different roles of actors, producers, writers, camera operator and lighting people. They made a movie to explain problems and find solutions. Instead of being in a plain meeting room in front of a flip chart, we decided to do it outside in a different environment. They did teambuilding and got to see Miami at the same time. At a gala dinner, we did an Oscar-like ceremony and reviewed the movie," says Bihet.

Miami is full of unique teambuilding possibilities. Bihet offers another example: "Last year, we had another bank that met at a hotel in downtown Miami. We went to the **Biltmore Hotel** (275 guest rooms; 75,000 sf of meeting space) in Coral Gables for a three-hour cooking class," says Bihet. "We divided people into teams to prepare different parts of the meal like entrée, desert and appetizers. We mixed up the teams so they included people who didn't work together often. After preparing the dinner, they ate together and discussed business issues."

Bihet's clients also enjoy many only-in-Miami extra touches that can bring a meeting alive. For example, she brought in the Miami Heat cheerleaders for a three-day incentive meeting for an international financial firm with operations in the United States. "We had one meeting with lot of financial numbers, reports and announcements, and we needed to provide a different rhythm. So we used the Miami Heat cheerleaders. They did periodic cheers individually and as a group. They also cheered during the awards ceremony. This kind of thing is very memorable for guests. The



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group also did a city tour of Miami and a dinner cruise in Biscayne Bay. They want to come back to Miami for another meeting,” says Bihet.

Hotel Update

Miami properties continue to improve their facilities and amenities. The **Doral Golf Resort & Spa** (700 guest rooms; 86,000 sf of meeting space), now part of the Trump Hotel Collection, is undergoing a \$200 million transformation starting with the redesign of the resort's guest rooms. New room furnishings, colors and art work will reflect the sport of golf. Renovations also will include conference space, the main building, pools, clubhouse and all four golf courses. Upon completion in 2014, the resort will be renamed Trump Doral.

The Sheraton Miami Airport Hotel & Executive Meeting Center (405 guest rooms; 20,000 sf of meeting space), formerly a Wyndham hotel, boasts a 17,000-sf Executive Meeting Center certified by the International Association of Conference Centers.

In downtown Miami, the **JW Marriott Marquis** (313 guest rooms; 80,000 sf of meeting space) reopened after a development project that includes retail outlets, condos and offices. The hotel also has a 50,000-sf sports and entertainment facility.

The Upper Keys

The Ocean Reef Club (175 inn rooms, 100 one-, two- and three-bedroom villas, and private homes; 30,000 sf of meeting space) is located in Key Largo, in the Upper Keys about an hour south of Miami International Airport.

The club, a private, member-owned property, features more than a dozen restaurants, a 175-slip marina, a private airport, 54 holes of golf, a shopping village, tennis courts, salt water lagoon, beach, pools and more. Group activities can include chartered yacht dinners, beachside events, eco-tours, and teambuilding programs such as cooking school, golf cart scavenger hunts, cardboard

boat regattas and beach olympics to name a few.

The 8,000-sf Spa at Ocean Reef just completed its own multimillion-dollar makeover in December.

Palm Beach County

More than 38 municipalities are located in Palm Beach County, which is larger than the state of Rhode Island.

The county offers



Valerie Bihet
Owner
Vibe Agency
Miami Beach, FL

“Miami has an air of intrigue to it. It also encourages attendees to be happier, more creative and receptive. There is a certain vibe that you don’t necessarily get in other cities.”

47 miles of beaches, more than 170 private and public golf courses and about 200 theaters, museums, art centers and other cultural venues. The county is well known for Palm Beach's Worth Avenue — a high-end shopping area known as the “Rodeo Drive of the East Coast.”

Palm Beach County offers more than 16,000 guest rooms and is home to some of the finest properties in Florida. More are on the way, including a 400-room Hilton, which is scheduled to open in 2015 next to the **Palm Beach County Convention Center**. The 350,000-sf center features a 100,000-sf exhibit hall, a 22,000-sf ballroom and 21,000 sf of flexible breakout space divisible into 19 rooms.

Eager to show off all that Palm Beach County offers, in December the Palm Beach County Convention and Visitors Bureau facilitated a meeting for 30 meeting planners at the **PGA National Resort & Spa** (379 guest rooms; 39,000 sf of meeting space) in Palm Beach Gardens, FL, home to the

PGA Tour Honda Classic. The three-day meeting included planning education sessions on Florida attractions, contract negotiation strategies, golf tournament planning and teambuilding. Planners also became more familiar with Palm Beach County's meeting facilities, venues and attractions.

PGA National Resort has finished a four-year, \$100 million makeover that includes new furnishings, carpet and bedding for all 397 guest rooms and suites. In addition, each of the resort's five championship golf courses received new irrigation and turf systems, expanded tee and green facilities and rebuilt bunkers. Meeting facilities include the 39,000-sf Meetings & Conference Center. Amenities include nine restaurants, bars and lounges; the 33,000-sf Health & Racquet Center; and the 40,000-sf Spa at PGA National.

Looking for a perfect site for a small meeting, executive retreat or buyout? Consider this gem in downtown Palm Beach: The landmark, award-winning **Brazilian Court Hotel** (80 guest rooms), a historic Florida resort offering completely renovated studios, one-, two- and three-bedroom suites as well as flexible indoor and outdoor meeting space. The Brazilian Court Pavilion is an executive meeting facility, offering a state-of-the-art conference room.

Paradise Coast

Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades, collectively known as the Paradise Coast, offer world-class accommodations for groups of 20 to 2,000 people or more. The Paradise Coast features a laidback setting with posh shopping boutiques, nearly 90 golf courses, fine dining and tours of the Everglades.

The Paradise Coast's top hotels offer sparkling renovations. The land-

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mark **Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club** (317 guest rooms; 34,000 sf of meeting space) has completed the latest phase of its renovations and remodeling, including a makeover of guest rooms in the resort's Florida Wing; the new 5,000-sf Everglades Room, a ballroom with views of the Gulf through a wall of windows; and renovation of two meeting rooms and adjacent prefunction space on the property's Gulf side. With the completion of this latest phase, all guest rooms and suites have been renovated over the last three years. There also is an onsite championship golf course.

Last year, a regional bank held an incentive for 350 employees at **Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club and Spa** (727 guest rooms; 65,000 sf of meeting space.) The bank's meeting planner was impressed by the property's size and amenities, which include two private golf courses, eight restaurants and a full-service spa.

"It had everything we needed," the planner says. "It had the ballroom space, and the sleeping rooms had a great feel to them with views of the water and island. Throughout the planning process, the hotel conference person was on top of everything. Many times the conference people are on their toes with planners but not always with guests. But I had so many guests tell me how great the service was. I don't normally repeat properties, but we would certainly consider repeating this property at some point."

Daytona Beach

Every Florida destination is associated with at least one world-famous attraction and in Daytona Beach it is Daytona International Speedway, a magnet for corporate incentive groups. Daytona Beach boasts 23 miles of beaches, some of Florida's best deep-sea fishing and several golf courses designed by some of the sport's greatest stars such as Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Gary Player and others.

Planners have a choice of more than 200 hotels offering more than

12,000 guest rooms including those at **The Shores Resort & Spa** (212 guest rooms; 20,000 sf of indoor-outdoor meeting-event space) located in Daytona Beach Shores, just a short drive from Daytona Beach. The guest rooms at the AAA Four Diamond oceanfront resort offer views of the Atlantic Ocean or the Intracoastal Waterway. The hotel's many amenities include fine dining, an upscale spa, poolside cabanas and oceanside fire pits.

The value offered by The Shores has encouraged many companies, including some based in Florida, to regularly hold their board meetings at the property. For example, Brown & Brown held its board meeting at the property for at least the last 19 years, says Jones. Currently, the 10-member board convenes four times a year. "We like The Shores because it's the nicest hotel in Daytona. We like the services, the quality of food, the meeting space and the price," says Jones.

Tampa, St. Petersburg, Clearwater

The Tampa Bay area is known for its quality hotels, theme parks, scenic Gulf views and beaches. Popular activities include visits to Busch Gardens, Ybor City's Latin Quarter, museums and golf at more than 76 courses in the area.

The Tampa area is home to more than 70 hotels and resorts with more than 20,000 guest rooms. Here's the latest news on properties in the area:

Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Tampa has finished a \$75 million expansion. The hotel's casino floor now has more space than five football fields and offers 110 table games, 50 poker tables and 5,000 slot machines. The project also includes a new pool area.

The Hyatt Regency Tampa is undergoing a renovation and will be reflagged as the **Hilton Hotel Downtown Tampa** (521 guest rooms; 30,000 sf of meeting space) later this year following an acquisition by Driftwood Hospitality Man-

agement in December. The renovation is scheduled for completion by the first quarter of 2014. The project includes guest rooms, meeting space and a Starbucks outlet.

Emerald Coast

Located in the Florida Panhandle, planners will find the Emerald Coast communities of Destin, Fort Walton Beach and Okaloosa Island, each offering Southern flavor and hospitality. TripAdvisor named the Emerald Coast one of the nation's Top 25 Destinations because of its features such as 24 miles of pure white-sand beaches and more than 400 restaurants. Golfers and fishing fans appreciate the region's more than 1,080 holes of golf and one of the state's largest fleet of charter boats.

The area's main meeting and convention facility, the **Emerald Coast Convention Center** (ECCC) (35,000 sf of meeting space), is located on picturesque Okaloosa Island. Facilities include 12 breakout rooms and a 21,000-sf ballroom. The ECCC accommodates 1,400 people for banquet seating and 2,350 people for a theater layout.

The Emerald Coast offers more than 16,000 hotel rooms including those at the **Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa** (598 guest rooms; more than 32,000 sf of meeting space), which has completed a \$6.5 million renovation. The project included 17,000 sf of new outdoor deck areas with ocean views. While the resort attracts meetings held by corporations based nationwide, it also is very popular among companies headquartered in the South.

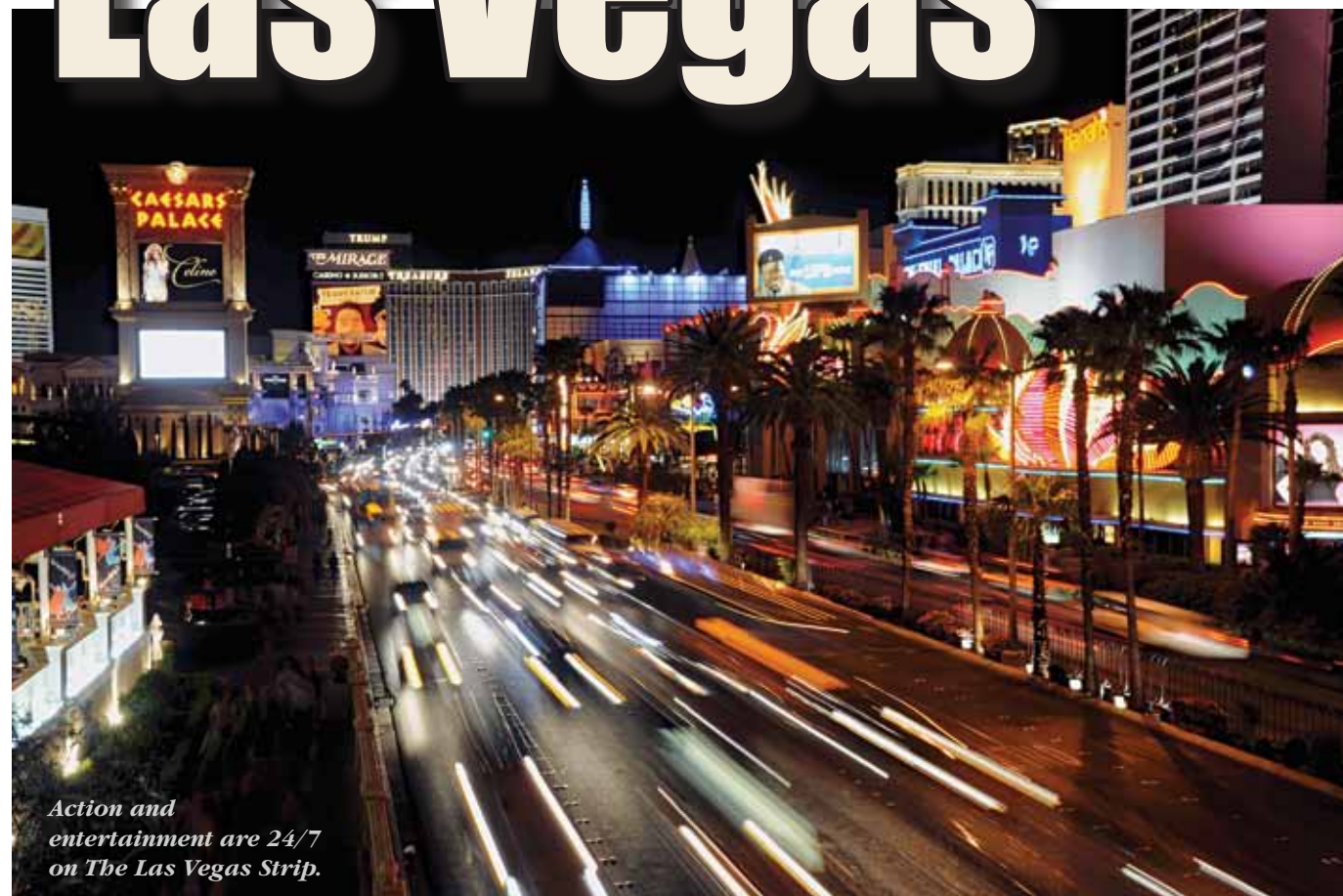
Florida has more top meeting destinations than some countries. That's why planners repeatedly turn to the Sunshine State to find the perfect destination match for meetings and incentives of all sizes. There is no doubt that Florida can host productive meetings that align perfectly with corporate goals, lead to satisfied attendees and produce excellent ROI time after time. **I&FMM**



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Las Vegas



Action and entertainment are 24/7 on The Las Vegas Strip.

Photo courtesy of Las Vegas News Bureau

The Odds-On-Favorite for Meeting Success

By Karen Brost

Jennifer Miller, DMCP, general manager of Access Destination Services, has definitely seen that times have changed — in a good way. “I think back 10 years to where people would never do a meeting in Las Vegas and now everybody does things there,” she says. “Probably about 40 percent of the business that we do in Las Vegas is for the financial and insurance industry. Last year, it was higher than we’ve ever seen it. We’re excited about that. We’re Emerald Level sponsors with FICP (Financial and Insurance Conference Planners), so we’ve made a big investment in that market.”

Miller, who is based in San Diego, CA, describes some of the events her company has planned for insurance

and financial services clients. One concept is an internal block party. “It’s for the larger groups that don’t want to be in a ballroom and really want to get the flavor of Las Vegas, and maybe experience something outside of their hotels.” She explains that depending on the size of the group, they can buy out several restaurants and nightclubs within a hotel. “We’ve done this for groups from 500 to 4,000.”

Miller describes the concept’s appeal. “There’s a whole culinary world there. A lot of chefs have these amazing restaurants in Las Vegas. There are two venues that we think do this

very well — The Palms Hotel and the Hard Rock Hotel. You’re using space at their pool and three or four of their signature restaurants and maybe one of their nightclubs. It’s actually buying out different venues. Within one venue, you get different experiences. If you have a group of 500, you might have two of those, if you have 4,000 you might buy six or eight different venues depending on the cost and the price point.

“We’ve worked really closely with the hotels to develop this over the past two years. They bring in staff that really helps direct people to where they need to go. It’s very user-friendly. The guests can go from venue to venue. We get such great feedback.”



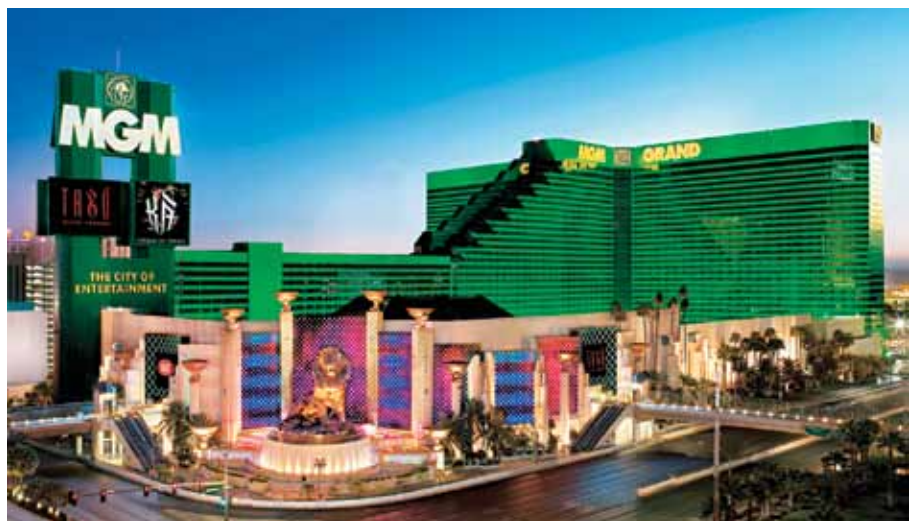
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Miller continues, "Another venue that we're really excited about is attached to the MGM (Grand) hotel, which is undergoing a major, major renovation right now. It's called Hakkasan. It's a multilevel venue that is being built on the outside of the MGM Grand to face The Strip. That is an awesome venue that's coming online, and we're really excited about that. It will give us a lot of opportunities. When people go to Las Vegas, they really want to experience The Strip and there's not a lot of outdoor space. There are really only three or four venues that have indoor and outdoor space that overlook The Strip." Hakkasan Las Vegas Restaurant and Nightclub will include approximately 75,000 sf of space over five levels. The nightclub debuts April 18 and the restaurant opens May 3.



MGM Grand soon will debut Hakkasan, a new venue overlooking The Strip.

of the resort's 3,570 Grand King and Queen guest rooms and 642 suites.

MGM Resorts International has partnered with Cisco Systems to create what they describe as "the

sponsible side to meetings that companies want and need to project, especially in a destination with the glitzy rep of a Las Vegas. Says Joshua Jones, DMCP, vice president of Hosts Las Vegas, "A lot of the events that we're doing now need to tie-in some sort of educational element, so even when we're doing your standard reception that we've done for a million years, now, it's 'How do we tie-in something educational?' It may be bringing in somebody who can speak on the future and what's happening in those industries.

"The other thing we're seeing is teambuilding or some sort of corporate social responsibility event," he adds. "It seems like a lot of those groups, I would say, almost all, have implemented some sort of...CSR event. They want to try to come in and make some sort of positive impact on the communities where they're meeting."

Aubrie Jones, DMCP, director of sales for Hosts Las Vegas, describes two local nonprofit organizations where groups can volunteer. One is the Three Square Food Bank. "They have a really amazing program called the backpack program. What they do is deliver food to children in regular grocery store bags on Friday because the food they get at school is the



"Probably about 40 percent of the business that we do in Las Vegas is for the financial and insurance industry. Last year, it was higher than we've ever seen it. We're excited about that."

Jennifer Miller, General Manager
Access DMC, San Diego, CA

The new project follows on the heels of the resort's recently completed \$160 million "Grand Renovation" project that included a remodel of all

highest-performing wireless LAN in the industry" to allow guests to enjoy quality Wi-Fi on multiple wireless devices. The rollout of the new service in low-rise public spaces was completed at the Bellagio, MGM Grand, Mandalay Bay and The Mirage late last year, and the Monte Carlo, New York-New York, Luxor and Excalibur will receive the new service this year. The rollout of the new service in guest rooms also has begun.

Meaningful Content

There's also a serious, re-

Hosts Las Vegas can arrange CSR activities such as "Operation Impact," where attendees play games for points and then purchase items, box them and send them to troops overseas. Here, servicemen receive a shipment of the supplies.



Photo courtesy of Hosts Las Vegas

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only food they get for the week, so it allows them to get substantial meals through the weekend. We've had groups go in and help.

"You would be blown away if you saw this," she continues. "I've never seen anything so organized in my life. It's like an assembly line. At the same time there are people packing the completed bags into crates. There's also a team of people that are breaking down boxes and refilling the stock for people that are coming in the following week.

"Another one we've done is St. Jude's," she adds. Not affiliated with St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, St. Jude's Ranch is a campus for abused, abandoned and neglected kids. "It's a really nice facility because it allows for larger groups.



"A lot of the events that we're doing now need to tie-in some sort of educational element. ...It may be bringing in somebody who can speak on the future and what's happening in those industries."

Joshua Jones, DMCP, Vice President
Hosts Las Vegas

days." Aubrie says that incorporating a CSR component into a program requires approximately three to four hours, including travel time. "As far as teambuilding," she continues, "it's more of a collaboration of people who have never met one another. For example, we have one called catapult construction. We divide them into teams, and as a team

the farthest. We're seeing a lot more interest with that."

Unique Venues and Incentives

Joshua noted that Las Vegas now has several interesting choices for groups in search of a museum type of venue for their events. "The **Smith Center for the Performing Arts** has been a big coup for us. It has given us an out-of-the-casino, more traditional style of a real high-end event." The Smith Center offers a choice of multiple venues, including a 2,050-seat theater, a dramatic Grand Lobby and some more intimate spaces.

Aubrie explains that another popular venue is located at the **Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health**. "Part of the donation for the rental fee goes to the Ruvo Brain Center. The venue is called **Keep Memory Alive Event Center**. It was designed by Frank Geary. It's an amazing architectural wonder. They built an entire, separate venue just to host fundraisers and events with a big portion of the proceeds going back to the center to help further the cause of brain diseases. It's wonderful. We always try to steer any clients we can in that direction because it's for such a good cause."

Kellie Hanley, vice president of special events for AWG Destination Management Services adds, "We also have some new things in Las Vegas that are proving to be popular right now that focus on our history and Las Vegas days gone by," she continues. "One

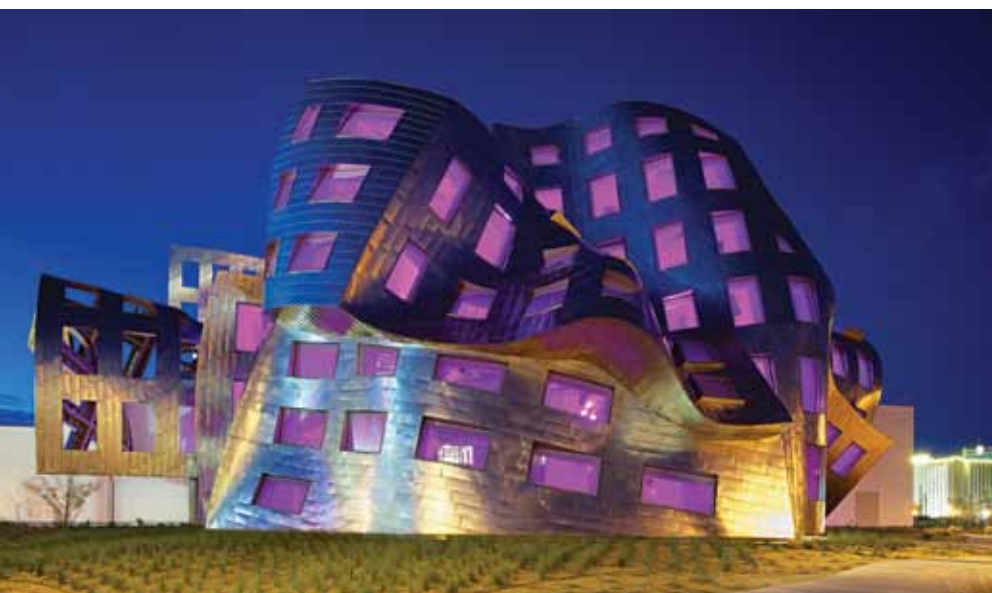


Photo by Matthew Carbone/Photographer LLC

Portions of proceeds from event rentals at the striking Frank Geary-designed Keep Memory Alive Event Center are donated to the Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health.

We split up (to do tasks like) cleaning the chapel. They have a store that people donate things to. People will go through the items and put them on hangers and price them. It's a really nice give-back situation. We're seeing a lot more of that being tied-in to programs these



Photo © RD/ Erik Kabitz/ Retna Digital

they put a marketing campaign together and they build this catapult. There's a competition at the end of the day to see whose catapult shoots



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of them is the **Mob Museum**, which is downtown. It's a great new venue. It's educational and entertaining at the same time. It's in our old post office, so it has a lot of historical value as a building and it has a lot of interactive memorabilia having to do with the mob era here in Las Vegas.

"We'll do mobster lookalikes for lots of photo opportunities, and we usually do a play on words with the foods and the cocktails to amp it up. I'm working with a client who is carrying the mob theme through the whole conference with characters coming in a couple of times to do a surprise 'raid' during one of the general sessions. It's funny how executives get into it. What guy doesn't want to be a boss? Everybody does."

"Sort of in conjunction with (the Mob Museum) is the **Neon Museum**," Hanley continues. "They've taken our old marquees like the Stardust, the Sands, the Silver Slipper, and they've put them into a museum atmosphere in an outdoor venue. We're able to use that during the day for city tours or at night for small gatherings like VIP dinners. It's a really great way to use that space. (At night) we bring in a lighting package to focus on the individual pieces, and it's really fun to have an educated docent around to answer any



Photos courtesy of Las Vegas Motor Speedway



Groups can test their off-road driving skills in modified trucks on a challenging dirt track at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

put their driving skills to the test in the Dodge Challenger SRT8 392, Ford Mustang Shelby GT500 and Chevrolet Camaro ZL1.

Hanley noted that insurance groups often can express concerns over safety with this type of incentive experience. "We take that very seriously as well," she explains, "and we work really hard to make sure the suggestions we make to any of our clients are safe and sound and are run by reputable, well-insured companies that have safety at the top of their list."

"We're happy to say to say that a lot of our customers...understand that we do that due diligence in advance so some things that might at first glance appear to be out of their realm of options, and if they take a second look at it, they realize they can really entertain their guests with something exciting without putting themselves in a negative situation. (For the off-road truck experience) there is a sigh of relief at the end, realizing that there was very little opportunity for any danger."

Hanley continues, "As far as nighttime events, we have such amazing entertainment, and just about all of our groups want to take advantage of the shows at night," Hanley says. "The way that we have worked to create sort of a personalized spin on

Vegas Motor Speedway and drive a race car, and while that's still a popular option, a lot of our incentive guests have had that experience. So the way that they've taken that to the next level is that you actually get into modified trucks and do an off-road course that is quite exhilarating with a lot of peaks and valleys. You can either drive or ride. You can do it during the day or night. That's cur-

"The way that we have worked to create sort of a personalized spin on (shows at night) for our guests is to create an entertaining pre-show in a ballroom."

Kellie Hanley, Vice President of Special Events
AWG Destination Management Services, Las Vegas

of the guest questions and explain to them what the history is behind each of the marquees. It's great.

"There are also a couple of activities that we've just rolled out in the past couple of months that have proven to be popular," Hanley describes. "For years and years, everyone has wanted to go out to the **Las**

rently one of the most popular options for our guests because it's new and exciting for the guests that want that adrenaline rush."

The Las Vegas Motor Speedway debuted in March the American Muscle Car Challenge by Richard Petty Driving Experience, which is customized for corporate groups. Participants

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that for our guests is to create an entertaining pre-show in a ballroom.” She used “Love,” the Beatles-themed **Cirque du Soleil** show, as an example. “We spin off that with characters and fun colorful décor and some custom entertainment that sort of gets everybody ready for the evening ahead. We have Cirque characters in vibrant costumes. Sometimes they do set entertainment, but more often, it’s more of a walkaround meet-and-greet photo opportunity.”

Drawing Them In

Max Byrd, co-founder of the third-party planning firm The Global Advisory Council, brings groups to Las Vegas several times each year. In May, he planned an event at the Bellagio for 225–250 guests for a major credit reporting company. “It was probably the highest profile event they do,” he notes. “It was called the financial services conference.

“Their customers are the financial institutions,” he explains. “These guys get millions of invitations every single day. Everybody and their brother is after these same people to attend their conference. We always look for the edge. What’s going to make our event different? The curriculum, which is our responsibility, has to be timely. It has to be appropriate. It has to be attractive. The destination has to be attractive, too.”

He explained that the destination also has to be easily accessible. “These guys are very, very busy, so we look for places that are easy to get to. With the airlines cutting back capacity, cutting back on routes, reducing the number of people they can take to a certain area, it’s more vital now that the ease of access is good. People’s time is very, very valuable.

“If you look at the whole competitive side of getting people to come to your conference,” he continues, “if they have two on their desk they’re



“Let’s face it. None of these guys have to attend our conference. Bellagio in Las Vegas gives us an edge.”

Max Byrd, Co-founder
The Global Advisory Council
Palm Beach Gardens, FL

looking at, and if one is in a destination that may be nice, but it’s hard to get to, they look at the amount of time they’ll be out of the office. Las Vegas is one of the easiest places to get to, and once you’re there, it’s only a 15-minute ride to The Strip (from the airport).”

Stellar Service

He explained why the Bellagio was a good fit for this high-profile group. “The facilities are just stunning. The guest room product is excellent. It’s a great representation of who this customer is. They have exceptional restaurants, they have the casino, they have the spa, they have the “O” (Cirque du Soleil) show. There’s so much there within walking distance. Let’s face it. None of these guys have to attend our conference. Bellagio in Las Vegas gives us an edge.”

Ultimately, however, it all comes

everything possible, something’s going to happen. It could be a million things. It may be self-inflicted. It may be something we forgot. We have a very high level of trust in Bellagio that when something does happen, that they’re going to be our allies. They’re going to do whatever they can to fix it.”

Byrd also says that the staff at the Bellagio gives as much attention to a small meeting as a large one. “Even for a group of 50, that event is the most important event that person is going to do, and they get that. A lot of hotels turn their noses up at smaller groups, even a group of 250 or 300.”

Like many planners, Byrd just knows when a property is a good fit. “I feel at home at Bellagio. As soon as I walk in the door, I’m just relaxed.”

Endless Array of Hotels

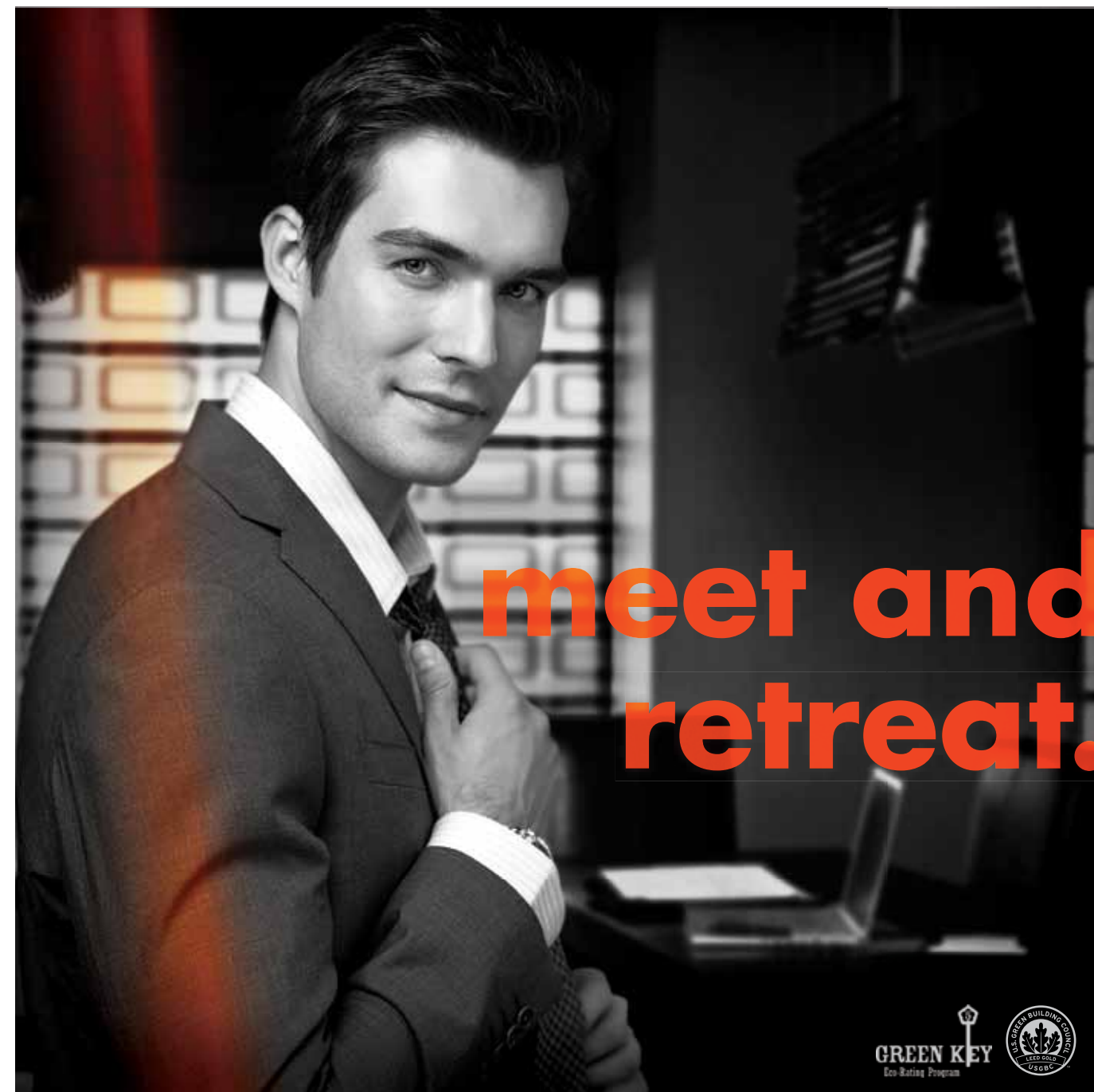
To be sure, Las Vegas has a diz-



Wynn’s aqua theater-in-the-round showcases “Le Reve – The Dream.”

Photo courtesy of Wynn Las Vegas

down to service. “We always talk about the importance of relationships,” Byrd explains. “Taking that one step further, it’s an issue of trust. I can’t overemphasize that. As much as we plan, as much as we anticipate, as much as we do our due diligence on making sure we’re doing



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zying array of hotels, restaurants, special event venues, entertainment and activities to choose from. Kellie Hanley listed a few of the high-end hotels that she finds are popular with incentive groups: Wynn, Encore, Aria Resort & Casino, and The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino. “Even the Four Seasons for the smaller groups. Those types of properties seem to appeal to them,” she says. But if you think the hotels and this city are just going to sit back and rest on their laurels, think again.

For example, collectively, Wynn Resorts boasts 40 Forbes Stars in the Five Star category and 16 stars in the Four Star category, more than any other independent hotel company in the world. Wynn and Encore together offer 4,750 guest rooms, suites and villas in two luxury hotel towers; 186,000 sf of casino space; 32 F&B outlets featuring signature chefs; two award-winning spas; an on-site 18-hole golf course; 260,000 sf of meeting space; a Ferrari and Maserati dealership; approximately 94,000 sf of retail space as well as two showrooms; three nightclubs; and a beach club. Wynn’s signature show is “Le Reve – The Dream”, performed in a circular theater with a pool in the center.



Private dining options at M Resort Spa Casino include Marinelli's Italian restaurant.



Photos courtesy of MGM Resorts International



Aria Resort & Casino and the non-gaming Vdara Hotel & Spa are part of CityCenter. Aria's Sky Villas (inset) range from 2,000 to 7,000 sf.

Aria Resort & Casino’s exclusive Sky Suites, the luxurious hotel-within-a-hotel with views of Las Vegas, also has earned Forbes Five Star distinction for their 442 one-, two- and three-bedroom suites as well as the 16 Sky Villas, which are single and two-story retreats. The 4,004-room Aria, the centerpiece to the CityCenter multiuse complex, has 300,000 sf of high-tech meeting and convention space. Planners like the fact that the convention space is stacked on three levels, reducing the time it takes to walk from one meeting to another. Also in CityCenter is Vdara Hotel & Spa, the nongaming, smoke-free 1,495-suite luxury property, which offers 10,000 sf of ground-level meeting space plus a rooftop pool area for special events. Vdara specializes in groups ranging from 10 to 300 people.

The 390-room M Resort Spa Casino — which is available for buyouts by groups — has added two new meeting and event venues to the property in the recent past: the M Pavilion,

with 40-foot ceilings and 25,000 sf of function space; and LUX, a 16th-floor restaurant featuring a 7,200-sf event space with expansive views of The Strip. In total, M Resort offers 85,000 sf of meeting and event space.

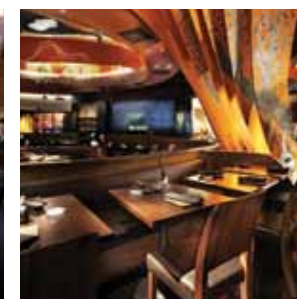
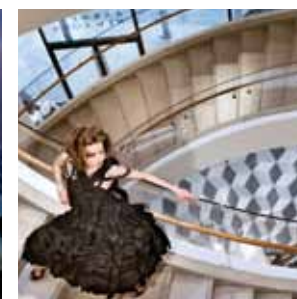
Comprising one of the largest LEED-certified meeting complexes in the world, the 4,000-suite Venetian Resort Hotel Casino — the largest AAA Five Diamond property in the U.S. — the 3,000-suite Palazzo and the adjacent Sands Expo and Convention Center offer a combined 2.25 million sf of function space, including the 85,000-sf Venetian Ballroom.

The 2,163-room South Point Hotel & Spa is located just off The Strip, offering a self-contained meetings and entertainment destination with 165,000 sf of exhibit, meeting and banquet space, as well as a 4,400-seat arena, 64-lane bowling center, 16-screen movie complex and Costa del Sur Spa, which recently completed a total makeover of its facilities and services. The hotel also offers shuttle service to The Strip.

Located a 20-minute shuttle ride from The Strip is the AAA Four Diamond Red Rock Casino Resort &



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Spa, which has 800 guest rooms, 94,000 sf of meeting space and a 72-lane bowling center. Sister property Green Valley Ranch Resort, Spa & Casino in Henderson, NV, about 10 miles from The Strip, is one of the first luxury boutique hotels built in the Las Vegas Valley, offering 79,000 sf of meetings space plus a poolside event space accommodating up to 4,500 attendees.

What's New and Upcoming

The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* recently reported that a group of gaming industry analysts and brokers are predicting that more than \$1.5 billion is going to be invested in the Las Vegas gaming real estate market in the next two years. Included in this figure is the \$500 million being spent to convert the former Sahara into the **SLS Las Vegas** and another \$750 million being invested to transform the Imperial Palace into **The Quad Resort & Casino**.

But probably the biggest news to break recently is the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority's (LVCVA) plan to develop a \$2.5 billion **Las Vegas Global Business District**, which will encompass major renovations of the Las Vegas Convention Center, creation of a World Trade Center facility and the development of a centralized transportation hub. The major project will be completed in three phases over several years.



The Palazzo, The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino and the Sands Expo offer a combined 2.25 million sf of function space.

The LVCVA has confidence in a growing meetings and convention demand to justify the massive new development: Las Vegas hosted 21,615 meetings, trade shows or conventions in 2012, up 13.6 percent from the 2011 total of 19,029. The 2012 total is the highest number of meetings and conventions held in Las Vegas since 2008.

And the beat goes on...

The Genting Group has announced plans to develop **Resorts World Las Vegas** on the 87-acre site of Boyd Gaming's abandoned **Echelon** project. The first phase of the project will build 3,500 guest rooms, 175,000 sf of gaming space and several luxury dining and retail amenities. The resort also will have convention space.

Bellagio recently completed the \$40 million remodel of all 928

guest rooms and suites in its Spa Tower, marking the conclusion of the hotel's redesign of all 3,387 Resort Rooms. Additionally, the resort introduced three new 2,500-sf executive parlor suites, which feature a billiards lounge and separate high-tech home theater living area.

The world's first **Nobu Hotel Restaurant and Lounge Caesars Palace Las Vegas** welcomed its first official guests on February 4, 2013. The boutique hotel features 181 guest rooms including 18 suites, which range from a 1,000-sf one-bedroom to a 3,500-sf five-

bedroom configuration and are available as premium accommodations or a stunning venue to host a special event. The 12,775-sf, 327-seat Nobu Restaurant and Lounge is the world's largest Nobu Restaurant.

The New Tropicana Las Vegas completed a \$200 million renovation including guest rooms, casino and conference center; and the 1,045-seat Tropicana Theater reopened in February after a complete makeover.

Meeting attendees who are adrenaline junkies will soon have a new thrill. Fremont Street Experience is slated to introduce **SlotZilla**, the world's first powered-launch zipline attraction, later this year. The two-level ride will feature four upper ziplines and four lower ziplines.

Deal Me In

Byrd summed up the reason why Las Vegas has such broad appeal. "There's something there for everybody. No matter what market you're in, in terms of what type of property that you're looking for, Vegas has it all. If you need something inexpensive, they have inexpensive. If you need the five-star type of hotel, they have those, too. That's what makes it really appealing. Seriously, it's hard to screw up a meeting in Las Vegas." **I&FMM**



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South Point Hotel & Spa boasts 165,000 sf of meeting, exhibit and banquet space.



LANE



BALL



WARNER



WILCOTT



BARNES

Scott Lane was named director of sales at Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center and Grand Hyatt Denver. He formerly served as director of sales at Hyatt Regency San Antonio and Grand Hyatt San Antonio.

Melia Hotels International has named **Caroline Ball** and **Ron Warner** as directors of group sales. Ball, who is responsible for the Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and Washington, DC, areas, was director of world-

wide sales for Hyatt Hotels in the Washington, DC, and Southeast U.S. markets. Warner, who is responsible for Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin, was director of operations for Maxvantage.

La Costa Resort and Spa, Carlsbad, CA, has named **Ryan Buzzard** as Northeast sales manager. He most recently served as associate director of sales at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco Airport.

The Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas has named **Randolph Wilcott** as director of sales and marketing. Prior to this appointment, he served as director of sales and marketing at the Mandarin Oriental's Elbow Beach Bermuda resort.

The Singapore Tourism Board has named **Tara Barnes** as MICE manager, based in New York City. She previously was with Horst Schulze's West Paces Hotel Group.

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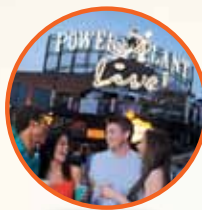
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