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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND TRAVEL PLANNERS



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Along With New and Renewed Spaces
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Renovations at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place have kept it "on the short list" for Denise A. Diaz, Director, Communications, PepsiCo Warehouse Sales

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Credit: Greater Boston CVB

Attendees prefer walkable cities like Boston, which boasts several areas for a stroll along the waterfront. **PAGE 11**



Credit: Stephen VanHorn/www.Shutterstock.com

Because risk lurks around every corner, meeting pros need to stay abreast of all the latest trends and tips. **PAGE 24**



Credit: IMEX America

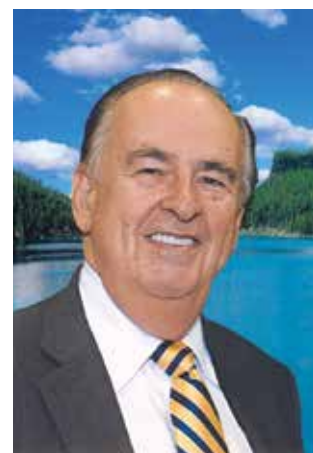
IMEX America, held in Las Vegas in October, provides numerous opportunities for networking. **PAGE 28**

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Publisher's Message

Great Customer Service

Exceptional customer service lives on. In addition to the fine customer service that premier hotel brands are known for, there's more to the story. In "Building Loyalty...Along with New and Renewed Spaces," our cover story on new and renovated hotels, we learn that hoteliers also practice great customer service when they invest in their properties to improve and transform them to meet guest expectations.



Successful hoteliers seriously listen to their customers — including savvy meeting planners — to ensure that renovations meet their needs. Notice, for example, the transformation of hotel lobbies into comfortable, welcoming spaces, which are outfitted with the latest tech tools and designed to enhance networking opportunities.

Denise A. Diaz, who graces our cover, is director of communications for Pepsico Warehouse Sales. A loyal customer of the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place, she was pleased that the Chicago hotel recently added a new 460-room tower and completely updated the existing 800-room tower. Her 600-participant program was held at the Hyatt last

year, and Diaz confirmed, "We're in RFP stage right now for July, and since the Hyatt has the capacity they will definitely be at the top of our short list."

Great customer service that is recognized and rewarded makes the hard work and sacrifice well worth it for the hotels and their capable staffs. Thus, we invite you to take the opportunity to reward your favorite hotels, resorts, conference centers and convention and visitors bureaus that have demonstrated their overall commitment to excellence. Be sure to cast your ballot in *Corporate & Incentive Travel* magazines' 30th Annual Awards of Excellence. Go to www.themeetingmagazines.com to cast your ballot by April 10th.

All of our 40,000+ subscribers are offered this opportunity to vote for those who have effectively hosted their meetings and incentive travel programs based on the criteria noted on the Awards page of our new, adaptive website, which is designed for optimal viewing no matter what device you use.

While you are there, check out all the latest industry news and features. For all three meetings magazines, we've organized our feature articles, destinations and perspective stories by category, so it's easier than ever to find exactly what you want — fast.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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Key Meeting Metrics and Higher Expectations For 2014 Reported by PCMA Meetings Market Survey

CHICAGO, IL — In March, PCMA *Convene* magazine published the results of its 23rd annual Meetings Market Survey. While the survey in recent years has included questions about other forces impacting the industry such as the use of social media and virtual events, it has cast a spotlight on the key metrics of the industry's health — attendance, budgets, exhibitors, revenues — consistently over the past two decades.

Of the 400-plus association, independent and corporate planners who completed the latest survey in late 2013, 44 percent experienced an increase in attendance at their 2013 flagship event and 41 percent expected their atten-

dance to grow in 2014. Thirty-three percent said they had more exhibitors at their main 2013 convention and nearly 30 percent expected exhibitor growth to continue this year. The average exhibition footprint, however, shrunk from 124,000 sf in 2012 to 108,000 sf in 2013.

While most survey respondents said leading meeting indicators were on the upswing, there were many who cited challenges negatively affecting particular sectors, including stricter guidelines for medical meetings and policies that cut into government-employee attendance — as well as rising hotel costs and airfares affecting all meetings.

www.pcma.org

Tropicana in Atlantic City Awaiting Approvals for Proposed Major Renovations

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Tropicana Entertainment Inc. recently announced a proposed series of significant renovation projects at Tropicana Casino & Resort Atlantic City. The multimillion-dollar capital improvements include major renovations to Tropicana AC's boardwalk façade, the addition of retail areas, a new fitness center on Brighton Avenue and guest room renovations. Commencement of the projects is contingent upon receipt of various state and local permits and approvals. If approved, construction is anticipated to begin in 2014 with an expected completion date by late 2015.

The proposal includes the complete renovation of the casino's boardwalk façade, which will boast a fully choreographed, high-energy interactive light and sound show via 20-foot-high light bollards and nine LED screens, which would run nightly at timed intervals. www.tropicana.net

Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego Transforms Meeting and Event Spaces

SAN DIEGO, CA — The Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego completed the first phase of its multimillion-dollar meeting space renovation project. The transformation includes a complete renovation of the first and fourth floor meeting spaces, including two ballrooms; significant upgrades to the wireless network, increasing from 40 Mbps to 450 Mbps, including the addition of wireless overlays to accommodate increased wireless device usage; additional hang-points for audio-video production creating more floor space for event use; comfortable "eight-hour banquet" chairs with flex backs and a webbed seat design; the addition of three meeting planner offices in close proximity to the meeting space; upgrades to the wayfinding system use; and more. The entire project is scheduled to be complete by 2015. www.manchestergand.hyatt.com

The Ritz-Carlton, Rancho Mirage Opens May 15

CHEVY CHASE, MD — One of Southern California's most scenic havens is the setting for The Ritz-Carlton, Rancho Mirage, which is set to open on May 15. Less than two hours from Los Angeles and San Diego — with direct flights from the East Coast — the luxury desert resort is enveloped by the Santa Rosa Mountain range, on a 650-foot bluff overlooking Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley.

The hotel features 244 resort rooms and suites, residences, a two-story luxury spa, more than 30,000 sf of indoor-outdoor meeting space and destination dining with sweeping valley views.

Resort amenities will offer cliffside swimming and serenity pools, and a destination spa unrivaled in the Palm Springs Valley. Guests also have access to golf and tennis experiences with exclusive arrangements at premier courses and clubs. The property is close to a wide array of cultural and recreational activities including more than 20 miles of hiking-biking trails, polo grounds, world-class shopping and more.

www.ritzcarlton.com/ranchomirage



Credits: 1., 2., Çiğdem Medya, 3., 4., ITB Berlin, 5., 6., 7., MPI

1 Attendees pose for a group photograph at the HSMIAI Digital Marketing Strategy Conference at Marriott Marquis Hotel on February 25, 2014 in New York City. **2** It's all smiles for these two gentlemen at the HSMIAI Digital Marketing Strategy Conference, held the day after the Adrian Awards Gala. The conference helped participants define and prioritize the issues, and provide the information needed to act. **3** Gathered at the ITB Berlin 2014 opening press conference (l to r) Dr. Christian Göke, CEO, Messe Berlin; Claudia Ruiz Massieu Salinas, secretary of tourism, Mexico; Jürgen Büchy, president of the German Tourism Industry Federation and Dr. Michael Frenzel, president of the Federal Association of the German Tourism Industry. About 22,000 participants took part in 200 lectures, discussions and workshops, over five percent more than in 2013, breaking attendance records for the popular show. **4** As the partner country of ITB Berlin 2014, Mexico organized the opening ceremony. **5** Delegates at the Meeting Professionals International (MPI) European Meetings & Events Conference (EMEC) held February 23–25 at the Haliç Congress Center in Istanbul, Turkey, enjoy a cup of tea and spectacular views of the Golden Horn sea inlet. **6** At the EMEC Closing General Session, MPI Chairman-Elect Kevin Kirby (l) and Pierre Fernandez, senior director of European Operations at MPI, hit the stage. **7** Participants gather at EMEC for networking and good cheer as they decided among more than 23 different education sessions and 16 campfire sessions.

By Mary MacGregor

9 Tips to Map Out a Successful Global Event

Hosting meetings and events with international participants has become the norm for many organizations. Making sure a gathering with multicultural participants is successful requires careful forethought, extensive planning and immense flexibility.

Due to the tremendous complexity of internationally attended events, always consider hiring an experienced global event planning agency to help you. Their firsthand knowledge and extensive network of government, transportation, hotel, facility and destination partners will be invaluable.

Whether you decide to plan your own event or work with an agency, here are nine critical factors to keep in mind to make your event successful.

1 Analyze Your Potential Attendees' Country of Passport Origin

It's important to know what passports your participants hold — not necessarily where they are currently living. This will determine what destinations can be considered and how long ahead you'll need to plan for visas. You don't want to select a destination that won't allow citizens of certain countries to enter.

2 Plan Farther Ahead Than You Normally Would for a Domestic Event

Providing letters of invitation and then obtaining passports, visas and other entry requirements can take months. With today's volatile political situations, governmental agencies often can be extremely slow and methodical in processing paperwork. Attendees should be working on gaining necessary documentation at least six to eight months before your event takes place.

3 Consider Your Event Site Carefully

While smaller countries, cities and out-of-the way resorts certainly can be appealing in terms of experience and cost, they may not be able to provide the support services you will need to serve your international guests. Make sure your destination can easily provide:

- **Convenient airline connections.** For events taking place over seven or fewer days, travelers will want to have as few connections as possible and reasonable layovers in connecting cities; should a flight be cancelled, you don't want your guests stranded for several days waiting for the next inbound or outbound flight.
- **Translation services.** You may need translators as airport greeters, at the hospitality desk, at the check-in desk, to accompany tours and offsite events, and to attend dinners and meetings. Larger cities will have more resources to draw upon.
- **Culturally appropriate menus and nearby restaurants.** For example, the Indian diet is very specific so you may need to hire an Indian chef if you have a large Indian guest list; South Americans prefer to dine later, so nearby restaurants that are open late will be desirable. Venues should have the expertise and flexibility to provide basic food needs for the variety of diets your guests may have.
- **Embassy or consulate support.** Should a guest run into any difficulties, illnesses or crisis back home, help from their country's embassy or consulate can be invaluable.
- **Acceptance of diversity.** Small out-of-the-way places can be very insular in any country, so be sure the location is generally welcoming to international guests with very different customs.
- **Smoking availability.** Most U.S. hotels restrict smoking or are smoke-free. Yet, because many international travelers smoke, you'll need to work with your venue to accommodate smokers in the U.S. as well as accommodate U.S. non-smokers when in other countries.
- **Access to services for foreign travelers.** This can include multilingual hotel staff, currency exchange availability onsite or nearby, international power and phone jacks in rooms, and foreign television stations and newspapers.

4 Study Calendars Before Picking the Event Dates

Bank holidays, national holidays and religious holidays can impact whether guests choose to attend and what ser-



vices will be available. For example, Muslim guests will not travel over Ramadan, and U.S. guests will want to be home over the Thanksgiving holiday. Most travelers like to do some shopping and touring so it's important that stores are open and local attractions aren't extremely busy with local tourists.

5 Set Expectations With Pre-Trip Communications

Develop webinars, videos, interactive Web platforms and print communications that carefully explain to the international travelers what the customs are of the event destination. Encourage travelers to immerse themselves in this new cultural experience. Guests may choose not to change their own habits to adapt to different customs, but they must at least be aware of them.

For example:

- **Time expectations.** In some cultures, a time is merely a suggestion not a mandate. If you will stick to a specific schedule, make that clear. If dinner is scheduled at 7:00 p.m., make sure guests know that the food will be served at that time. Or if a tour leaves at 8:00 a.m., the bus will not wait for late-comers. Likewise if the cultural norms are that an 8:00 p.m. dinner means you can show up as

late at 9:00 p.m., make that clear too. Also describe if the country uses 12-hour or 24-hour time notations.

- **Food expectations.** Describe what foods are normally served at that destination for breakfast, lunch, dinner and receptions. Provide lists of foods and how they are customarily prepared and eaten. If you will provide alternative menus, let the travelers know.
- **Clothing and dress expectations.** In addition to weather, guests must know what clothing is considered appropriate in hotel lobbies, at meetings, on tours, for parties, when entering religious or government sites, etc. Strolling in the hotel lobby in swimwear is fine in the Caribbean, but not acceptable in many other locales.
- **Gender mixing.** If attendees have gender restrictions at public events such as dinners or on buses, guests need to be aware if your event will offer separate accommodations or if they will need to accept a mixed group. They should also be aware if your staff is mixed gender.
- **Behavior expectations.** Educate attendees about how to properly greet others (formally or by first name), how to approach a handshake, how to distribute a business card, the significance of a head nod or a specific hand gesture, the appropriateness of maintaining eye contact, and other local customs that can create very

uncomfortable or insulting situations if participants are unaware.

- **Safety expectations.** Make sure attendees are well-versed in local scams that take advantage of tourists and what areas to avoid.

6 Be Aware of the Complexities of Global Shipping

Shipping items for global events can be extremely tedious. Duties, customs issues and a plethora of paperwork add complexity and time. While it may be fun to give every attendee a tote bag and T-shirt, getting those things into some countries can take months and be very expensive. They also can become easily “lost” and never arrive at all.

Even if you purchase participant gifts locally, make sure the items can be exported and then imported legally at the participant’s home destination. Make technology your partner when providing conference print materials: Whenever possible, give travelers the ability to download materials onto their laptops or tablets, or access the material digitally when they return home.

7 Staff Up

You will need more staff for an event that has international participants. Everything will take longer, and you will need to access services and make arrangements that attendees at a domestic event wouldn’t need or would handle themselves. Pre-event communications with participants will take longer as you work through time-zone issues. You

may have to hire translators or interpreters for phone conversations to gather important information or help handle travel arrangements.

Transportation to and from the airport will be more complex, especially if travelers have done their own ticketing or haven’t informed you about their arrival and departure plans. Hotel check-in may take longer if you need to help with translations.

8 Prepare All Travel Communications in English, the Destination Local Language and the Traveler’s Native Language

With English being widely spoken as an international business language, most travelers will speak some English or can hand their documents to someone who can interpret for them. If the travel materials are also in the destination local language, the travelers can ask a local for help, too.

9 Accept That Things Won’t Always Go Perfectly

Here’s where your sense of humor kicks in. You won’t be able to please all the people all the time, but you can still host a wonderful event. If you are gracious and welcoming, most people in most cultures will respond in kind.

The opportunity to bring together international travelers can be exhilarating, educational and enriching. Being well-prepared and having the ability to adapt will serve you well. Doing it yourself is possible, but working with an experienced global agency will likely save you time, stress and expense in the long run.

C&IT

“Attendees should be working on gaining **necessary documentation** at least six to eight months before your event takes place.”



Mary MacGregor

joined BI WORLDWIDE (BIW) in January of 2013 as corporate vice president – event solutions. She comes to BIW after serving as the leader of business development, events and marketing for other major third-party organizations. In her current role she is responsible for all operating areas of the BIW Event Solutions Group including purchasing, design, delivery, group air, individual incentive travel, onsite operations, technology, communications and merchandise. She leads a team of more than 175 industry professionals who deliver memorable experiences and measurable results for their customers. In 2011, Mary served as global president of Site (Society of Incentive & Travel Professionals). For more information, visit BIWorldwide.com or email info@biworldwide.com.

Site Selection

How to Do It Right

It's All About the Best Fit

By Gabi Logan

Meeting planners are entering a seller's market, causing site selection and RFPing to take up an increasing amount of their time. No longer fishing around for the best deals, planners must research carefully and zero in on a few choice venues before sending out RFPs.



Selecting a walkable city is high on the must-have list for many meeting planners nowadays. Walking saves transportation costs, is a more “green” option, and provides meaningful cultural experiences. New York City (above) is often No. 1 on many walkable cities lists.

“In the industry right now, we’re finding a competitive arena for hotel rooms and meeting space on the buying side,” says Krista Brennan, CMP, senior meeting planner for Tokyo, Japan-based Daiichi Sankyo Inc. “Hotels are being selective in who they place in their meeting space. It comes to discount; if they know with company A they’ll make 15 percent more on F&B or room rate, they’ll place company A rather than company B.

“When we go to purchase hotel rooms and meeting space, we find that we’re getting turned down a lot in the RFP process, so it’s a challenge, and sometimes the negotiation factor isn’t there. Just like any business economy, when supply is high, there’s a lower price and more options. In the last nine months, we’ve seen a marked change in RFPs being turned down,” says Brennan.

When asked what is the single most important factor, more and more planners answer that the city and property must align with the goals and objectives of the event and the company.

It’s About the Best Fit, Not the Best

Dream destinations, accommodations and meeting spaces that are guar-



Selecting a destination includes discovering districts like Sixth Street — the heart of Austin’s live entertainment scene, which boasts great food and live music options.

“We’re sending out more RFPs because you know people are saying no,” Brennan explains. “It’s like when you’re having a cocktail party, and you send 50 invites to get 25 people. When you come back to a business owner, and they say, ‘Hey, where are we going?’ they don’t want to hear about the great places that turned you down. They want to hear, ‘Here’s four good places we’ve

stopped aiming solely at the Ivy Leagues and took the time to pick through the country’s liberal arts colleges for the best place for them personally to grow as people and students. In the current hotel booking climate, many planners are feeling a similar pull to look outside the major brands and find venues that make them, their staff and their attendees feel at home.

“It’s not just the space. It’s about relationships and the little things,” shares Diane Watanabe, CMP, senior meeting and events planner for CSP Business Media in Mesa, AZ. “I have had an advisory meeting at one Florida property for four to five years in a row, and the CSM was wonderfully attentive. The banquet managers said, ‘Whatever you want, we’ll go ahead and do it.’ They got me a cup of coffee every morning. They were always checking up on me. One time, our room was overlooking a courtyard and there was a leaf blower, and she immediately called and asked for it to stop. Someone went outside right away. It was off in barely a minute.”

When You Book Can Dictate Your Choice

The probability of finding the best fit with most of your must-haves depends more on when you’re able to book than

narrowed down out of the 20 we looked at.’ The ultimate goal is having the right fit, the right venue, the right hotel.”

In the 1990s, the higher education industry went through a sort of rebirth and ranking reshuffling as top students

ever before. While having top-notch properties book up in advance is nothing new, as Brennan mentioned, getting in anywhere has become difficult in many cases, especially when booking close in.

“We do try, whenever we can, when we get a green light on a budget, to book as far in advance as we can and lock down a contract, because that kind of procedure works best for everyone’s budget,” Brennan shares. “The venue knows they’re getting the business. They can check it off the list. Where we run into a snag is when we book closer in. That’s when they can ride the rails and get more money for the room.

“The leftovers might be a little higher priced and that’s why no one booked them earlier, but also, they know they have you,” she continues. “They can look at the sourcing system and see there’s no rooms for that block, and they can say that we’re the only one with space available and we’re really going to ride the high end of a pricing structure. When that happens, I try to book something else 12 months out and even out of the budget, but locking in multi-year contracts is also a priority right now. Especially for meetings that are cookie-cutter, where the agenda stays the same, two nights, three days. I actually just did three years and got a major deal from some big hotel chains.

“For general business meetings, we like to have at least six months notice,” she says. “Incentives are 12 months minimum, but that would be a rush. That’s the latest you can book. For small meetings, we sometimes get two weeks, but for a smaller meeting, it’s typically running three months and that’s because budgets are coming in and business owners are finding money and saying, ‘Yes, we can do it.’”

When you book close in, in today’s competitive market, with a very specific space request, you can end up with very few viable options. “For my upcoming Dallas meeting, I just sent out a bunch of RFPs and I got a nice cross-section back, but some of those I did decline fairly quickly because they just gave me a room that I thought wasn’t really big

enough,” Watanabe says. “For U-shaped seating for 30 people, they wanted to give me a room that was less than 1,000 sf. In theory they would fit, but I don’t want them to feel like they’re in a sardine can.

“A few people said, ‘For those dates, that’s all I’ve got,’ and a few said, ‘I can give you this room, but it might be a little too big,’” she explains. “I’m going to lean toward the largest rooms I can

in advance and sometimes I’m pushing the envelope and booking four to five months out. For example, I’m currently trying to book something for mid-May. It’s barely five months out, and I’m trying to get a meeting approved for June that will be four to five months out. The selling part is kind of out of my hands, and I do the best I can with what I’ve got.”

When planners have the ability to choose their destination — or at least

“I like my group to still have some feeling of intimacy. That also is key in terms of picking a city. I want to keep it homegrown, close and informal, and I have to pick a property that allows me to do that.”

LYNN RHOADS, Senior V.P. Corporate Events and Community Engagement Vantiv LLC, Cincinnati, OH



possibly get, knowing that even though I have a target number of attendees, it could grow, and I don’t want to have to turn people away. Now, 10 weeks out, what I’m working with is that the attendee size increased so I went back to the hotel, and she may not be able to give me the space that I need, and I may have to go back to one of the venues that I declined and see, 10 weeks out, if they still have space available. Luckily the contract hasn’t been signed yet, but I don’t know if they’re going to have the space, so I may have to find a new hotel.”

Who Chooses Your Destination?

While competition from other meetings is putting a strain on the site choices available to planners, internal politics also are increasingly narrowing the field.

“It’s been more difficult recently in a way, because the sales team is who really sells the meeting, and they don’t understand my logistical needs,” says Watanabe. “Sometimes I’m lucky enough to book seven to eight months

slot pre-selected destinations into the years that work best — the process becomes easier, not only in terms of budget, but scheduling.

Boston, for example, has been on many planners’ request lists this year, but the small city does not always have enough supply to meet meeting demand. When Lynn Rhoads, senior vice president, corporate events and community engagement at Cincinnati, OH-based Vantiv LLC, looks for a destination for her annual meeting with financial institution partners, she rotates the location around the country, but at her discretion, so she was able to get into Boston at a time when there was sufficient space for her group.

“I do try to rotate it,” she says. “In 2012, our meeting was on the West Coast in San Francisco, and in 2011 it was in New Orleans. I always try to pick a city we haven’t been to before and one that is easy for attendees to get in and out of. For 2013, I thought it was easy to do San Francisco’s sister city, which is Boston. We also acquired a company in



“But sometimes...they want to go off-property and experience Dallas. That meeting happens to have the budget where I can do the transportation, but oftentimes, the client will say, ‘We can go onsite but it has to be walkable.’”

DIANE WATANABE, CMP, Senior Meeting and Events Planner, CSP Business Media, Mesa, AZ

anteed to wow all of your attendees may still be out there, but the chance that they fit in your budget and are available on your dates is becoming increasingly less likely the more the industry recovers from the recession.

Lowell, a suburb of Boston, in late 2012. But I try to look at the time of year that I'm having the meeting, so it's the right time of year to visit that destination."

Walkable Cities Are Drawing Planners in Drove

One of the best ways to enchant attendees and keep costs down is to let them explore their destination — not constantly move them from bus to meeting room to bus to ballroom. If the destination is too large or too spread out, though, that becomes a challenge.

"I think it's important to be able to walk because we do have some free

walking distance, and that makes it a little bit easier," says Watanabe. "Some clients don't have a problem being in a banquet room for all meals, so sometimes we stay on-property if the restaurant has a private dining room, but sometimes, like the Dallas meeting, they want to go off-property and experience Dallas. That meeting happens to have the budget where I can do the transportation, but oftentimes, the client will say, 'We can go offsite but it has to be walkable.'"

While "walkable" has become an important buzzword when researching destinations, it's also code for a more

Some Things Never Change, But Change Is on the Horizon

Distance to the airport and ease of transfer, attractiveness of the destination and proximity of restaurants and attractions all remain top factors in site selection. "For me, the main factors are distance to the airport, whether or not they have meeting space large enough for the meeting — we usually end up doing U-shape, which is pretty space-intensive — rate and preferred dates," says Watanabe. "What I do is put together advisory meetings for our clients. Each client has different needs, and it all depends on what they're looking for.

"As far as site selection, it's pretty unique to the client," she continues. "Some of them have a bare-bones budget, so I have to do the best I can, short of serving them peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Others really want to have something that is a nice overall experience. My meetings run the gamut up to people who want to create a memorable experience and are willing to spend the money to create that."

Finding a venue that is not only a good fit for one meeting but a whole company seems like a tall order at a time when meeting space is harder to come by, but it's actually an advantage. As planners are increasingly prioritizing venues that best align with the goals of their company and meeting, they are discovering independent properties that offer a better match than big brands and building stronger relationships with hotels that deliver.

But while increased competition for rooms and meeting space is making site selection more difficult and time-consuming for planners for the time being, it's a hallmark of good things on the horizon.

"Basically, in the marketplace, I feel like our business is getting stronger," Brennan explains. "Meetings and events are back on track in the economy, and it's a healthy economy again. The thing about the competitive side of the business is that it's good when everybody is prospering. That outlook is very positive for planners in the business, as well as the hotels." **C&IT**



Boston consistently places in the top five of walkable city lists (No. 3 in 2014 by Walk Score) as it is easy for visitors to walk to restaurants, shops, parks and entertainment.

time in the afternoon," says Rhoads. Walkable cities with accessible downtowns (or pseudo downtowns, as you'll find in Las Vegas), make it easy for attendees with a free hour to actually see something in that stretch of time. No one wants their attendees to go home after an event and not know how the city was because they spent all their time at the hotel, and some cities make that more likely than others. Many planners are gravitating toward smaller or more compact urban areas today.

"It's always nice if I can be within downtown Dallas or downtown Chicago because there are enough options in

intangible sensation that sets your events apart. "I like my group to still have some feeling of intimacy," says Rhoads. "That also is key in terms of picking a city. I want to keep it home-grown, close and informal, and I have to pick a property that allows me to do that. I don't want to pick a convention center. That isn't the experience that I want, I want historic, intimate venues and where I can keep everything in one place."

New York City leads the 2014 Walk Score list of most walkable cities followed by San Francisco, Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia.

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New & Renovated Hotels



Pepsico held its national sales meeting at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place last year, and now, following a \$110 million renovation, the hotel is on Pepsico's short list for their July 2014 meeting with 600 participants. (Right) The hotel's newly redesigned Prairie Room.

Building Loyalty ...Along With New and Renewed Spaces

By Patrick Simms

Great customer service in the hospitality industry is not just the province of the staff, whether a friendly concierge or a resourceful convention services manager. Hoteliers themselves practice customer service, in a broad sense, when they invest in their properties to render them more appealing and functional for incoming guests.

Serving longtime clients in this way is also important: Their longevity does not necessarily mean they think the hotel is ideal in every respect, and they may well have in mind certain renovations or ex-

pansions that should be undertaken. If more years go by and the hotelier does not make the property investments those reliable clients are looking for, they might find another lodging option. Smart hoteliers will not take that risk.

First-Tier Refreshment

When a hotel in a first-tier city expands, planners take note. Lodging space is always at a premium in towns such as Chicago, so more rooms create more opportunities for groups. Last summer, the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place com-

pleted a \$110 million improvement project that made it Hyatt's fourth-largest hotel in the world with the addition of a new 460-guest room tower, along with a complete renovation of the existing 800-room tower.

Denise A. Diaz, director of communications for Pepsico, provides the perfect example of how renovation investment helps to create loyalty and repeat business, in her case, at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place.

"The reason the new tower is an advantage is because in the summer in Chicago



Credit: Hyatt Regency McCormick Place

"The reason the (Hyatt's) new tower is an advantage is because in the summer in Chicago there are so many citywides that I have a really hard time getting all my people in one place."



Credit: Cadence Inc.

Credit: Mike Kelly

Denise A. Diaz
Director, Communications
Pepsico Warehouse Sales
Chicago, IL

there are so many citywides that I have a really hard time getting all my people in one place," Diaz notes. She plans a national sales meeting every July for 600 participants coming in nationally. The program was held at the Hyatt last year, and "we're in RFP stage right now for July, and since the Hyatt has the capacity they will definitely be at the top of our short list," she says. The hotel houses 50,000 sf of function space, and the recent investment also redesigned the 4,000-sf Prairie Room and renovated the 25,000-sf Hyatt Conference Center. "A couple of years ago

I used the conference center for training, and I really liked that space," Diaz comments. "One of the things that's really important to me, even for a very simple meeting, is a high ceiling, and their conference center has that."

The Windy City is also home to the world's largest Hyatt, the 2,019-room Hyatt Regency Chicago, with 228,000 sf of function space, and five restaurants and lounges. Last April the hotel completed a \$168 million renovation that included all the guest rooms in both West and East Towers and featured plenty of

creative accents, such as black-and-white images of Chicago by local photographer Anthony Tahlier. The final phase of the project renovated the East Tower lobby, in addition to the hotel's meeting and event spaces, and added four new dining concepts: Stetsons Modern Steak+Sushi, American Craft Kitchen & Bar, Market Chicago and Big Bar. And in keeping with the creative emphasis, the hotel enlisted photographer and abstract artist Christopher Kennedy to produce unique Photo Luminism artwork for display in the Grand Ballroom lobby.



The upper pool deck and fire pits at Snow King Hotel in Jackson Hole, WY.

Loyal Customer

Ongoing upgrades are just as vital for customer loyalty even in more out of the way locales, such as Snow King Hotel at Snow King Resort, a Benchmark Resort in Jackson Hole, WY, which completed a \$17 million renovation of its 203 guest rooms in December. The funds also went toward improving the exterior, public space, spa and salon, and additions such as a new restaurant and activity center. The interiors of all function rooms now have new carpet, wall and window treatments, and artwork.

But it was the revitalized guest rooms that were most significant to Dublin, CA-based Contemporary Forums, a company that stages national continuing education conferences for health care professionals. Two or three of those meetings are held every summer at the Snow King, according to Pam Jenkins-Wallace, MS, NP, vice president, program development with Contemporary Forums. The relationship has lasted for more than 25 of the property's 36-year history, and a major reason is the family activity options at the resort and the Jackson Hole, WY, area. "It's big draw for families," says Jenkins-Wallace. "We work with the concierge at the Snow King to organize groups for whitewater rafting or horse-

back riding, or daytrips to Grand Teton National Park or Yellowstone."

Despite these attractions, many of Contemporary Forum's roughly 300 attendees had felt the resort's guest rooms were in need of a makeover, Jenkins-Wallace says. "They were very dated and the bathrooms in the guest rooms were difficult to manage. So when the resort finally went into the big renovation, we were tremendously relieved. We were there last July, and in June they had pretty much finished up everything that was essential to us. They delivered on what they promised, so everything was functioning when we were there. Our repeat guests were very impressed and very pleased; they felt it was good value for their money."

Guest rooms now feature new beds and soft goods, new furniture, carpet, wall décor and updated bathrooms. Flat-screen televisions, modern refrigerators and a state-of-the-art phone system also have been installed.

'Astounding' Transformation

Renovations are often dubbed "transformations" when they involve sweeping physical changes that create a very different experience for guests. According to Lesley Kinney, communications manager for Madison, MS-based Hood Packaging Corporation, attendees of the company's annual HR meeting are looking forward to such an experience at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Resort & Spa, which just completed a \$12.5 million transformation. The four-month project completely refurbished all 202 Spa Tower rooms, redesigned the indoor pool and recreated the main lobby experience so that



Pam Jenkins-Wallace, MS, NP
V.P. Program Development
Contemporary Forums
Dublin, CA

"When the resort finally went into the big renovation, we were tremendously relieved. ...They delivered on what they promised."

arriving guests enjoy a panoramic view of Florida's Emerald Coast. Sandcastles Restaurant and Lounge, Hadashi Sushi Bar and Serenity by the Sea Spa also were redesigned.

The Hood Packaging group of about 15 participants has been meeting at the Hilton Sandestin for the past five years. "We had our meeting last year just a few weeks after they completed their (\$5.5 million) renovation, and it was astounding," Kinney says. Finalized in February 2013, the project covered the resort's 32,000 sf of indoor meeting space, the AAA Four Diamond Seagar's Prime Steaks and Seafood, and the common space of the 400-room Emerald Tower.

"They had updated the carpet in the common areas in the conference areas, and one thing that stands out in my

The Coral Classroom at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Destin, FL.



Credit: Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa



Credit: Irvine Company Resort Properties

The 536-room Hotel Irvine Jamboree Center in Irvine, CA, is undergoing a complete makeover, which will be completed this year.

mind are the air plants they used, which are just very striking. And they tied the décor into the theme of the area, the ocean. The meeting rooms also seem more open and brighter, perhaps (due to) the combination of the new carpeting and the wall treatments."

Since then, Kinney has done a site visit to the resort in November. "One of the things my salesperson mentioned to me that I'm really excited about seeing (with the latest renovation) is the redesigned lobby area with a direct visual to the Gulf. They've really tied the whole theme of the area together."

No Reservations About Renovations

A strong relationship with a hotelier, built on many successful past programs, often means greater trust in a renovation project. Having experienced a property's professionalism and competence firsthand, a planner naturally feels more assured that the project will be completed on time, and that he or she will like the results. For example, Will Brown, director of marketing with Houston, TX-based energy company Kinder Morgan, has organized many meetings at the venerable Colorado Springs resort The Broadmoor in the past, and even though the last one was a few years ago and the hotel is currently doing extensive work on Broadmoor West, he had no "reservations" about booking the hotel, sans a site visit, for the company's upcoming customer meeting in September.

"I have nothing but confidence that (the results) will be just fine," he says. "The Broadmoor assured us they were go-

ing to be finished (in May), and I've seen other improvement projects completed in a timely fashion."

Kinder Morgan's 150 attendees will meet in the main building, but will stay in the West building, so this second and final phase of the hotel's \$100 million renovation and expansion is certainly of interest to them, Brown notes. The project will renovate and expand guest rooms by an additional 85 to 200 sf per room, and create an extra 31 guest rooms and

suites, bringing The Broadmoor's total guest room count to 775. A new Italian restaurant and health-inspired restaurant will also debut in Broadmoor West, as will a redesigned lobby with stained glass skylights, marble floors with custom stone insets, finely detailed millwork on the walls and ceilings, and other accents.

New Openings and Renewed Spaces

Some major metropolises are replete with new hotel openings. New York City is a prime example, adding 74 hotels since 2006, according to NYC & Company. That averages to about 10 new properties per year, which can seem like a boon for planners looking for lodging space in the Big Apple. But it must be borne in mind that most of these newcomers are small boutique hotels with minimal meeting space, which will not be usable for many groups. Thus, it's the larger openings that tend to make it onto a planner's radar, such as the December debut of the 487-room **Hyatt Times Square New York**. Located on

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45th Street in the heart of the theater district, the property offers 8,000 sf of meeting space, including a 2,000-sf ballroom and 1,400-sf outdoor terrace event space overlooking the city. Attendees can revitalize in the 4,200-sf spa, and enjoy river-to-river views and indoor-outdoor fireplaces at a 54th-floor rooftop lounge set to open this spring. Guest rooms are spacious, averaging 364 sf.

“Summer in the City” will bring the opening of the **Park Hyatt New York** on West 57th Street, two blocks from

“We had our meeting last year just a few weeks after (Hilton Sandestin) completed their renovation, and it was astounding.”

Lesley Kinney
Communications Manager
Hood Packaging
Madison, MS

Central Park. All 210 guest rooms are at least 475 sf, and more than 8,000 sf of “residential style” function space will be available, including a ballroom, 1,050-sf outdoor terrace, three breakout rooms and a boardroom. A 20-meter indoor swimming pool will be located on the 20th floor.

In Southern California, **The Hotel Irvine Jamboree Center** in downtown Irvine is undergoing both a brand and building makeover. Formerly the Hyatt Regency Irvine, the 536-room hotel is now owned and operated by Irvine Company Resort Properties, which also owns and operates The Resort at Pelican Hill in Newport Beach, CA, and the Island Hotel Newport Beach. The Hotel Irvine Jamboree Center, which was recently accepted into the Associated Luxury Hotels International portfolio, is beginning a comprehensive “reinvestment” project scheduled for completion in 2014. The work will focus first on redesigning the 536 guest rooms, and the meeting and

event space; followed by the outdoor areas, first-floor restaurant and lounges. A spokesperson notes, “Each floor of the 14-story property will be targeted individually in phases, allowing day-to-day business to operate as usual. Each guest room will be outfitted with vibrant new color palettes and contemporary designs, and our social spaces will reflect the same chic style. We’re eager to welcome business, social and leisure guests to this new, stylish escape.” Hotel Irvine has 36,000 sf of meeting space, including a 14,700-sf ballroom.

Marriott seems to be running on all cylinders when it comes to new property development. This May, the company will make a very significant contribution to the East Coast meetings market with the debut of the 1,175-room **Marriott Marquis Washington, DC**, housing 105,000 sf of indoor-outdoor meeting space, five dining outlets and a state-of-the-art, bi-level health club. Attendees will be able to walk via underground concourse to the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, as well as to the National Mall and all the surrounding tourist attractions. Designed to be LEED Silver accredited, the hotel will feature a glass atrium lobby filled with natural light and an appropriately patriotic 56-foot sculpture, “The Birth of the American Flag,” by sculptor Rodney Carroll.

And in the spring of 2015, the **JW Marriott Austin** (currently under construction) will bring more than 1,000 guest rooms to the “Live Entertainment Capital of the World,” not to mention



The Grand Parlor at the new Downtown Grand Las Vegas Hotel & Casino.

“The Broadmoor assured us they were going to be finished (in May), and I’ve seen other improvement projects completed in a timely fashion.”

Will Brown
Director of Marketing
Kinder Morgan
Houston, TX

110,000 sf of banquet space and 35 meeting rooms.

As if these sizable developments aren’t enough, the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority in Chicago recently announced the selection of **Marriott** as operator of the 1,200-room headquarters hotel that is scheduled to open in late 2016 next door to McCormick Place. The new hotel will have the distinction of being the only Marriott Marquis in Metropolitan Chicago.

Another major opening complementing a convention center is the **Omni Nashville Hotel**, which opened its doors in September a few months after the debut of the adjacent Music City Center, which houses more than 1.2 million sf of function space. A LEED Silver Certification for New Construction, the 800-room hotel offers a formidable 80,000



The Grand Sierra Resort and Casino in Reno, NV, recently completed a \$25 million renovation.

sf of meeting space, as well as a physical connection to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, which presents intriguing special event options.

Next door to a very different kind of museum — the Mob Museum in Las Vegas — is the new **Downtown Grand Las Vegas Hotel & Casino**, which opened in November. The 634-room hotel offers stylish restaurants (including a San

Francisco-style steak house) and event spaces such as the “industrial chic” 3,000-sf Grand Parlor, which can accommodate up to 200 attendees. Open this spring is Picnic, the property’s signature rooftop venue, where groups of up to 1,500 can gather and enjoy a restaurant-bar, infinity pool, entertainment area and cabanas overlooking downtown Las Vegas.

Debuting this July at the **Grand**

Sierra Resort and Casino in Reno, NV, will be a new indoor pool and a new 25,000-sf reception area, which will accommodate up to 2,000 attendees. This on the heels of a recently completed \$25 million project that remodeled all 2,000 guest rooms and added a spa. The resort’s 200,000 sf of flexible meeting and convention space allows any size meeting — with up to 4,000 attendees.

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Rendering of a proposed new retail location that is part of a major \$35 million renovation plan at Tropicana Casino & Resort in Atlantic City.

An East Coast gaming destination has recently announced proposed major renovations: **Tropicana Casino & Resort** in Atlantic City, NJ, is awaiting approval on a \$35 million plan that would completely renovate the casino's boardwalk facade and feature a new, fully choreographed, interactive light and sound show via 20-foot high light bollards and nine LED screens. Also in the proposed plan, all 434 guest rooms in the North Tower would be renovated; three new retailers and a fitness club would be added; and the Fin's dining room expanded.

Tucson's **The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa**, a Southwestern desert gem with a Santa Catalina Mountain setting, is looking shiny and new following an 18-month, \$35 million, resort-wide renovation that was completed late last summer — the first since 1986. All 487 guest rooms underwent a top-to-bottom remodeling, which included the addition of 42-inch HDTVs, work desks with charging stations, expanded walk-in showers and more. The 60,000-sf conference space was updated as was the grand lobby, from which guests are treated to dramatic views of the mountains. The five pool areas were refreshed with new cabanas, fire pits with fountains and travertine

stonework. The greens and bunkers at La Paloma Country Club's Jack Nicklaus Signature golf courses also were refreshed and resurfaced. The club's tennis courts also received new surfaces. The resort is partnering with the Arizona Sonoran Desert Museum to create a Sonoran Desert Walkway, showcasing indigenous flora and fauna, set for completion in mid to late spring.

Golf-loving attendees have a new option in Central Florida with the re-



The Arizona Deck at The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa in Tucson, AZ. The hotel completed a major, resort-wide makeover.

cent opening of **Streamsong Resort's** 216-room main Lodge, which includes a 14,000-sf conference center, bringing the property's total meeting space to 24,600 sf, as well as 40,000 sf of distinctive outdoor venues. Streamsong is home

to two nationally ranked golf courses, Streamsong Red and Streamsong Blue, which are "the best new courses you can play" according to *Golf* magazine. Golfers pressed for time can take advantage of the "partial loop" option and play just six or 12 holes. Other venues of interest include a 7,000-sf grotto-style spa, lakeside pool and a stargazing terrace. Free-time options include guided bass fishing excursions, a sporting clay shooting range, trails for hiking and bird watching, tennis, and more.

Also of note in the Sunshine State is the new 444-room **Four Seasons Resort Orlando** at Walt Disney World Resort, opening this summer. Groups will have at their disposal not only the world's most famous theme park, but also 37,750 sf of function space (including a 14,000-sf ballroom), a Tom Fazio-designed championship golf course and a rooftop steak house.

Building Loyalty

Longtime group clients of a hotel, such as Contemporary Forum's patronage of the Snow King Hotel, enjoy many advantages: For example, the planner and attendees know they can count on quality service and amenities based on prior experience; negotiating leverage often can be obtained based on volume of business; planning time is reduced due to familiarity with the property and local area; and many attendees are often on a first-name basis with staff, who have become acquainted with their individual preferences.

At the same time, there can be that "same old, same old" feeling among attendees that planners want to avoid, and a renovation — particularly a "transformation" — effectively makes the experience more engaging for repeat participants.

The crop of new properties that opened last year or will in the near future, given that they are all top-tier lodging products in key meeting destinations, will no doubt have their own longtime group clients in the future. **C&IT**



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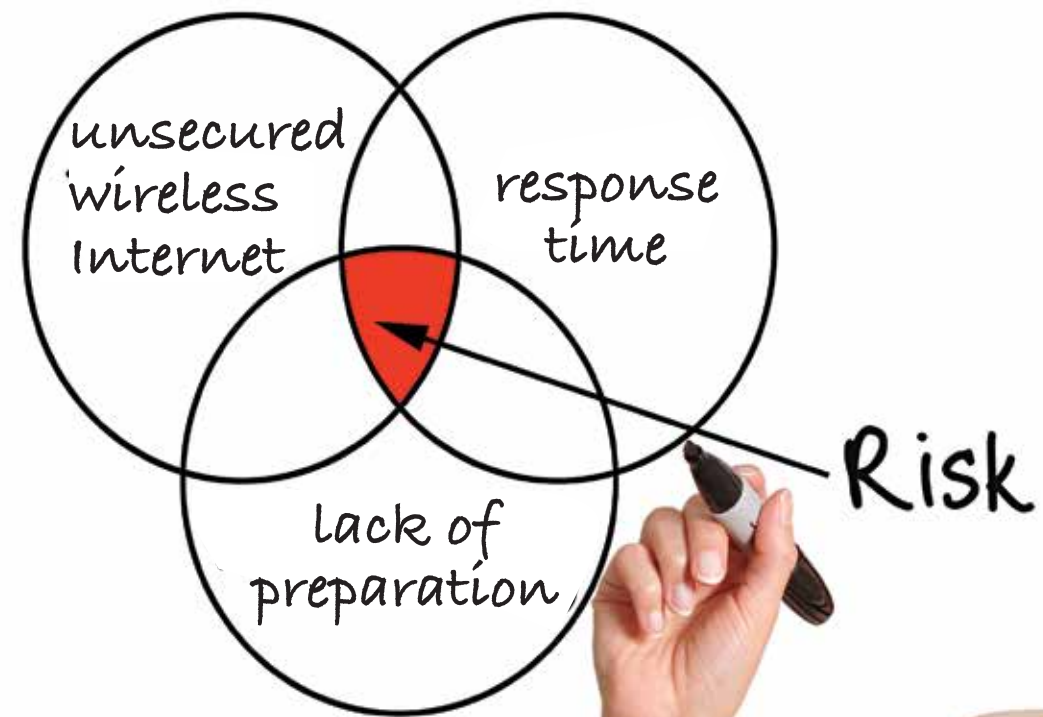
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Security Should be Job 1

How to Prepare for Threats Ranging From Cybertheft to Kidnapping

By John Buchanan



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Since 9/11, the general notion of meeting and event security has evolved from acute concerns about a terrorist attack to much more practical and likely threats, such as hackers stealing sensitive company information or an employee dying during the meeting.

However, even though the focus has shifted to more likely eventualities, the underlying concern remains the same — legal liability of some sort and a hefty related expense if anything goes wrong.

The bottom line: “Having meetings that are secure, both physically and electronically, is a topic that is the most important one there is today for many companies,” says Gregorio Palomino, CDMP, CEP, CWP, CRE8IVE executive officer of San Antonio, TX-based CRE8AD8 Event & Travel Management, which operates 19 offices around the world.

That said, however, Alan Brill, senior managing director at global security con-

sulting firm Krill in Secaucus, NJ, notes that in the meeting industry, not enough attention is paid to event security.

“The most significant risk is really a planner or executive at the company who simply doesn’t realize there is a risk,” he says. “For example, on the airplane on the way to the meeting, they can be reading about a hacking attack or a malware attack on a company. But when they get to the meeting destination, that awareness seems to leave their mind because they’re focused on the meeting itself. So they do things that if they thought about them, they’d realize they’re not such a hot idea.”

And that inattention to risk applies to both meeting planners and attendees, Brill says.

He says, for example, both planners and attendees often use an unsecured wireless Internet connection in the hotel or venue. “And they don’t see the sign

or the message that says, “This is not a secure network,” Brill says. “And that means someone can eavesdrop on what you’re doing. But that seems to not register with an awful lot of people.”

A related reality is that meeting planners and attendees do not often think of themselves as a potential target. “They say, ‘Who would target me? What do I have that’s worth targeting?’” Brill says. “And those people are forgetting how valuable and in demand intellectual property is these days. They also tend to forget that their financial information or information about their customers is online — and vulnerable to the kinds of malware attacks we’ve seen recently.”

The Big Threat — Onsite Activity

Despite obvious concerns in some quarters about external threats, the real threat, in a day-to-day practical sense,

comes from what could happen onsite during the meeting, says Eric Clay, complex director of security at Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort in Orlando.

“That is definitely a major concern now for every group that comes in,” Clay says. “And because of that, they want to know exactly how things are going to be handled in the case of any kind of emergency.”

Therefore, advance preparation is now a key consideration. “For large groups, we now have meetings months in advance to go over details of the meeting,” Clay says. “And we work very closely with the meeting planners and our security team to try to go over a very comprehensive plan of exactly how we would respond to each individual kind of situation. We work hard to make sure everyone is on the same page and in agreement about how things will be handled.”

A key current area of concern for

meeting planners and company executives is a hotel’s local emergency response capabilities. “For example,” Clay says, “they want to know what sort of medical facilities are in the area and what sort of medical care we can provide for our guests.”

The reason: that kind of emergency is the one most likely to happen during a meeting or event.

For example, an attendee has a heart attack or suffers a fall or some other kind of injury or infirmity onsite.

“And recently, we’ve seen that question asked so much that we’ve actually hired a couple of EMTs (emergency medical technicians) to work on-property,” Clay says. “That’s important now, because large groups generally want a dedicated EMT.”

Swan & Dolphin charges a fee to assign an EMT exclusively to a particular group.

“Additionally,” Clay says, “all of our security officers have received basic first aid training so that they can render aid until paramedics or an EMT is available.”

Another concern commonly cited by planners is the response time of the local fire department. “And that response time is very quick,” Clay says. “Generally, they can be on-property within about three minutes, because we’re very close to their facilities.”

Planners also ask about the proximity of local hospitals. “We now have a sheet that we provide to groups that shows the closest hospitals, trauma centers and pharmacies,” Clay says. “We also provide turn-by-turn directions on how to get there in an emergency and phone numbers so they can call ahead.”

Evacuation Plans

Another hot topic of current concern is emergency procedures in the event of

an onsite disaster, such as a fire, Clay says. "A few years back, we didn't get a lot of questions about that, but now people are really concerned about things like evacuation abilities and staging areas in case of some sort of disaster," Clay says. "People now ask about our ability to respond to a range of emergencies that could happen on-property."

Specifically, he says he gets a lot of requests for details of the resort's emergency evacuation plan.

One major concern that is relatively recent, but understandable given blaring media headlines over the last few years, is the possibility of an onsite active shooter.

"The possibility of there being an active shooter on-property is a hot topic right now," Clay says. "So we get asked how we would respond to that — what our exact procedures are."

Swan & Dolphin has a specific plan in place that is drilled quarterly, Clay says, noting that many other major meeting properties have similar plans in place now.

"We also work very closely with our local emergency response personnel, from the sheriff's office and the fire department, to regularly review the plan, including reviews of physical layouts of the property so that they are familiar with it," Clay says. "And that includes walking the property to see where the places are where something could happen."

Although concerns about things like a shooter or a fire prompt a lot of questions from planners these days, the more immediate concern — and the one that needs an equal amount of attention — is internal considerations within the meeting group.

Full Disclosure

"Trust is a big part of the process," Clay says. "That means the planner has to be prepared to sit down and go over with us everything they think could possibly happen at the meeting that could require some kind of emergency response."

For example, he says, "Does the group include attendees with a heart condition or someone who suffered a heart attack in the recent past? Do you have

any disgruntled former employees who have made any kind of threat against the company? Has the company received any external threats and if so, from where and from whom?"

When those kinds of questions are addressed, Clay says, "there is sometimes

Gregorio Palomino, CDMP, CEP, CWP
CRE8IVE Executive Officer
CRE8AD8 Event & Travel Management
San Antonio, TX



Credit: Mark Humphries

"You have to make sure you know who everyone is at your meeting and that they belong there. You need to verify identities and also understand exactly why people are at the meeting."

something we learn that could occur, whether that's a medical condition or some kind of threat. The point is that we need to know everything that the planner knows about the kinds of things they might encounter during the meeting."

It's only with such complete disclosure and knowledge, Clay says, that a full spectrum of protections can be properly put in place.

Threats From Within

Palomino points out that in reality, the most likely threats to a group originate from within the attendee population, rather than from the outside.

Therefore, at a large meeting open to third-party attendees, every registrant must be fully vetted. "You have to make sure you know who everyone is at your meeting and that they belong there," Palomino says. "You need to verify identities and also understand exactly why people are at the meeting."

A related threat is a disgruntled employee who is planning to leave the company after the meeting — and who is planning to take very valuable information with them to inflate their market value. "And it's hard to know who those people are," Palomino says.

Best practices for onsite security under such circumstances "start at the curb," Palomino says. "You really need to make sure that the only people pulling up to the curb are people that belong at the meeting. And at that point, people who know who the attendees are must be checking badges to make sure everyone showing up is a legitimate attendee. And you have to have people identifying and challenging anyone suspicious before they ever get into the hotel or venue."

And because of the importance of doing that properly — outside the meeting rather than inside — "it's extremely important that you have the meeting or event planner out there as the first touch point," Palomino says. "You don't want to be using a personnel firm at \$10 or \$15 an hour to clear people into the meeting, because they don't know your people, and they don't know what to look for. You have to have people there that know each and every attendee and can identify them."

Once an attendee is inside the venue, identities need to be checked and confirmed again when they check in. "And there are a lot of meetings these days where that is not done properly," Palomino says. "They just pretty much have open doors and just about anyone can walk in if you're not careful. And the bigger the meeting, the more true that is."

Data Theft

The vulnerability of sensitive data or intellectual property to theft is a prima-

ry concern. And given all the headlines lately about data breaches at major U.S. companies, the concern is growing.

"If you're using wireless Internet technology at your meeting in a hotel — and virtually all meetings do that now — it's very important that the information you're sharing does not leave the room," Palomino says. "And maintaining optimal security today involves an expense. I wish I could say that meeting planners could just walk into a typical hotel and use their free Wi-Fi for their meeting. But it's not that way anymore. These days, security breaches happen all the time. So as a meeting planner, you have to be extremely mindful of that and be prepared."

And the most severe threat today is not from hackers, Palomino says. "It's from well-organized corporate espionage — criminal organizations," he says. "The reason is a hacker does not know what he's looking for. A criminal organization that does corporate espionage knows exactly what it's looking for, such as IP data on your new product or details of the business strategy you're presenting at the meeting. That's the kind of information that is really valuable."

The more sensitive — and therefore more valuable — the information being disseminated at the meeting, the greater the threat, Palomino says. That's because industrial espionage has become a very lucrative global enterprise. "So you have to be extremely careful today," Palomino says.

And no vulnerability is greater than that of unprotected wireless Internet service, Brill says.

Unfortunately, he adds, he does not think the average meeting planner or attendee understands the vulnerability of a public Wi-Fi network. "The reason is they just don't think in those terms," Brill says. "They're used to being connected at the office and at home and they're used to having Internet access 24/7. So when they go into a different environment, they're now vulnerable, but they never think about that."

And now that more and more major flag hotels are introducing free Wi-Fi

throughout the property as a selling tool, the threat is being further exacerbated.

The good news is that protection via the use of VPN (virtual private network) technology is also now readily available and inexpensive, Brill says. And all meeting planners should

Alan Brill
Senior Managing Director
Kroll
Secaucus, NJ



"In fact, you shouldn't store data on any kind of machine anymore. Keep it on some kind of external device, such as a thumb drive or other kind of secure memory chip."

implement VPN security as a standard practice for all meetings and events, Brill adds.

He also advises that if valuable intellectual property or other sensitive data is being discussed at the meeting, it should never be stored on a laptop or smartphone.

"In fact, you shouldn't store data on any kind of machine anymore," Brill says. "Keep it on some kind of external device, such as a thumb drive or other kind of secure memory chip."

State-of-the-art protection at the moment, Brill says, is a USB drive mini-computer that stores data and uses a laptop only as a monitor, with-

out transferring the data or storing it on the laptop.

The International Situation

To the extent that genuine external physical threats exist today, they are largely limited to overseas destinations, particularly in places such as Ukraine and Venezuela, where violent political upheavals could have created severe problems for a meeting group that happened by coincidence to be there when the trouble started.

"That's the issue that currently keeps me awake at night, because for an overseas meeting, when my attendees are landing, I'm sleeping," Palomino says, adding that international arrivals and departures are now the greatest concern. "And the way the world is going, I think international security is going to become more and more of a concern."

A specific and very real concern internationally is the kidnapping of executives for ransom, which companies have been known to pay and then keep the incident quiet.

Palomino cited the example of a CEO kidnapped overseas not long ago. And the company paid a ransom in the millions. "And nobody ever heard anything about it," Palomino says.

"The company kept it quiet. And that is not that uncommon anymore."

As a result of this type of threat, companies now often provide expensive around-the-clock bodyguard protection for top executives at international meetings, unless they want to roll the dice on an even more expensive problem, Palomino says.

In a broader sense, Clay says, companies today must address meeting security with end-to-end attention to the most specific details of the most realistic security concerns and ensure the ability to respond immediately to any eventuality.

"We call it concierge-level security, where we are prepared to deal with anything that could happen," Clay says. "And as a venue, we have to be constantly in contact with planners to let them know that we are prepared and that everything will go smoothly during their event, no matter what happens." **C&IT**

Networking

Making the Right Connections

Key Strategies and New Tools for Effective Networking Events

By Michael Bassett

It used to be that content was king. If you looked at meetings a decade ago, says Shuli Golovinski, founder and CEO of events software company Newtonstrand and an innovator in this space, “It was 95 percent content and five percent networking.” But that’s changed — attendees want more networking and less content (something they can always get online).

Meetings and events technology maven Corbin Ball, CSP, CMP, says that while networking has always had a role to play in events (“One good contact can pay for an entire trip,” he points out), the problem is that planners have never really had the right tools to facilitate it. “For years the key networking tool has been the name badge,” he says, adding that networking formats such as cocktail parties and receptions hadn’t changed much either.

What’s Wrong With Cocktail Parties?

The problem, says Golovinski, is that these conventional networking activities don’t work very well.

For example, a 15-minute networking break built into an all-day meeting program may work just fine for some individuals, particularly if they are extroverted. “So you may be a very open and easy-going guy who can start a conversation with anyone, but I’m kind of a



The show floor at last year's IMEX America offered countless opportunities for networking.



“In our discussions with our director of corporate responsibility, we kept hearing ourselves talk about how the quality and quantity of networking at these events was limited.”

Justin Murrill, Global Sustainability Manager
American Micro Devices
Sunnyvale, CA

Credit: AMD



AMD provided a unique networking opportunity in conjunction with the South by Southwest ECO Conference in Austin, TX. Attendees volunteered for local creek cleanup and tree planting activities. “It’s a much different experience that facilitates deeper conversations,” says AMD’s Murrill. “...It’s the kind of discussion that will more likely lead to a continued relationship after that initial interaction.”

shy guy,” Golovinski says. “I’m drinking a glass of wine, standing at the back of the room, waiting for someone to approach and start a discussion with me. So for people like me with that kind of personality, that 15 minutes is a waste of time — I’m not going to network with people during that break.”

Speed Networking

Another networking activity is “speed networking,” which is akin to speed dating and which Golovinski says is potentially a “huge waste of time.” He recalls a speed-networking event he attended for the events industry in London in which he spent five minutes with a woman who really didn’t have a clue about what Golovinski did or could provide.

“I asked her what she did, and she told me she ran a dry cleaning service,” Golovinski says. Rather taken aback, he asked her why she was attending a

function for the events industry and was told that many of her clients were from that industry so she considered herself to be an “events professional” who wanted to grow her business.

“So I told her — with all due respect — that this had been a total waste of my last five minutes,” he says. “I would prefer to spend 15 minutes with a planner instead of five minutes with the dry cleaning lady!”

In addition, Golovinski adds, from a numbers point of view, speed networking doesn’t make a lot of sense. If there are 50 people in the room and a planner wants all of them to meet each other in five-minute segments, that works out to about five hours of non-stop speaking. “So the question becomes that in a meeting or conference — some of which can be as big as 20,000 people — how do you identify the five or 10 people that you would like to meet throughout the event,” he says.

Corporate Responsibility as Networking

American Micro Devices (AMD), a multinational semiconductor company headquartered in Sunnyvale, CA, was the driving force behind the integration of a volunteer corporate responsibility event at a South by Southwest (SXSW) ECO Conference in Austin, TX.

It was the first time this kind of event had been integrated into the ECO Conference and, according to AMD Global Sustainability Manager Justin Murrill, it was inspired by a certain sense of disappointment with experiences at similar events in the past.

“When we come back from a lot of these events we talk about what we learned and what we liked about these conferences,” says Murrill. “And in our discussions with our director of corporate responsibility, we kept hearing ourselves talk about how the quality and quantity of networking at these events

was limited. The other thing we are supposed to get excited about is the cause that we were there to support, but there was never any kind of action taken at the event. So we decided to do something about it.”

In organizing the corporate responsibility aspect of the event, AMD collaborated with other local businesses such as Dell and Whole Foods, as well as the City of Austin, Austin Community College and the University of Texas at Austin. It also partners with nonprofits such as Keep Austin Beautiful, the Waller Creek Conservancy, American YouthWorks and the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center.

In conjunction with the conference, AMD sponsored the cleanup of Waller Creek, inviting hundreds of volunteers to help clean up trash along the urban waterway. Starting on the University of Texas campus, volunteers worked their way down to Lady Bird Lake, picking up litter by foot and by kayak. The day-long project covered 25 blocks of creek through central Austin and included tree planting on the UT campus.

So not only did AMD maximize attendee involvement in an activity that complemented what the conference was all about (environmental action), it also created a model it hopes it can follow in other events. And it did so in a manner that provided a unique networking opportunities for its employees — one that differed from the traditional reception/cocktail party that doesn’t always work.

So what did this event achieve from a networking perspective, that more conventional methods didn’t?

“I think there is an intrinsic value associated with the activity,” says Murrill. “So it creates a deeper, more meaningful experience when it comes to building relationships. It’s a much different experience that facilitates deeper conversations and gets people beyond the typical ‘who do you work for and what do you do?’ interaction. It’s the kind of discussion that will more likely lead to a continued relationship after that initial interaction.”

In addition, the activity itself, by definition, required a degree of collabo-

ration and working with people, says Murrill. “You get three or four people together to try to figure out how to pull a waterlogged hammock out of a creek and other things like that that people can’t do themselves.” Making this group structure available within a prolonged time frame assures that everyone should interact with the other members of the group in a meaningful way.

The planners also held a reception after the event to provide the participants with a more typical networking experience.

It Takes a Village

Last July, networking expert Sarah Michel, CSP, vice president, professional connexity, Velvet Chainsaw Consulting,

“The question becomes that in a meeting or conference — some of which can be as big as 20,000 people — how do you identify the five or 10 people that you would like to meet throughout the event.”

Shuli Golovinski, CEO/Founder
Newtonstrand
Lakewood, NJ

Colorado Springs, CO, helped organize what is called “Sage City” for Sage Summit 2013, a huge annual gathering of customers and business partners of Sage, an accounting and business management software supplier for startup, small and mid-size businesses. It was held at the Gaylord National Resort and Conference Center in Washington, DC.

Instead of an opening general session with a keynote speaker, the summit features Sage City, a two-hour live conference networking event that allows people to meet and share what Michel refers to as “tacit knowledge” — the kind of actionable intelligence that people can use to solve their business problems.

The most important aspect of Sage City, says Michel, is that it’s designed to foster networking not only during the actual event, but before and after as well. Before the Sage Summit takes place attendees are contacted and intelligence is gathered about an attendee’s background, interests, passions, concerns, as well as answers to random questions such as “name five people you’d like to sit next to during dinner.” The idea, Michel says, is to give attendees the opportunity to connect with people who work in the same space and are like-minded, “before they even got to the event.”

At the actual conference, the two-hour live networking event worked like theater-in-the-round — in this case a ballroom that on its perimeter had a series of villages representing the kinds of different jobs the attendees performed, with Michel in the center acting as the lead facilitator. And at each village participants had the chance to talk about hot topics collected from the attendees during the registration process. The groups met for two 40-minute rotations giving the attendees the opportunity to network in different villages and talk about different concerns “that kept them up at night.”

“This got people connected from the get-go,” says Michel, “and those connections built up during the week.” And with the end of the conference came the creation of the “Sage City online community,” which gives the attendees the opportunity to continue the conversation that began back in Washington, DC.

This kind of emphasis on networking combined with education is critical, because that’s really what conference attendees are looking for, says Michel.

At the Sage Summit, slightly more than half of the attendees who were Sage customers were brand new to the event, she says. When she asked them as a group if they were at the meeting to network about half of them raised their hands. “But when I asked them how many were there to network, if the networking included education, almost everyone raised their hands,” Michel says.

So for many attendees the term networking still implies cocktail parties



Credit: Sage North America

“When you tell (attendees) ‘We’re going to make sure the networking you do is educational and we’re going to set it up for you to get some tacit knowledge,’ then that’s what they want.”

Sarah Michel, CSP
V.P. Professional Connexity
Velvet Chainsaw Consulting
Colorado Springs, CO

The 2013 Sage Summit’s two-hour live networking event worked like theater-in-the-round, with Michel in the center acting as the lead facilitator.

and discussions over bagel and coffee — activities many aren’t interested in, says Michel. “But when you reframe the question and tell them ‘we’re going to make sure the networking you do is educational and we’re going to set it up for you to get some tacit knowledge,’ then that’s what they want.”

What planners have to do is to create the space for that kind of networking to occur, Michel says. “Putting out bagels and coffee, saying we’re going to have a networking hour, and then hope that at least 50 percent of the room isn’t introverted and won’t know how to initiate a conversation, just isn’t going to work.”

Networking Tools

What does technology have to offer? Newtonstrand has developed a tool called Chance2meet, which, Golovinski says, empowers structured networking. Prior to the event, attendees can log on

to the event’s website where they can see the profiles of attendees (absent their personal and contact information) to get a sense of which ones are worth networking with.

It gives the attendees a chance to pre-schedule meetings — without the hassle of going through some ice-breaking process — so they can get right down to business and network for a prescribed period of time. “And if the chemistry is good, you can continue that discussion through and after the event,” Golovinski points out. “It’s a way for participants to take full advantage of a networking event.”

There’s been a “whole plethora” of social media tools that recently have been designed for meetings and events, says Ball. “Meetings were really the original social media, so they really go hand-in-hand with these new tools, many of which are free.”

One that he’s particularly excited about is a mobile networking application called Bizzabo. With Bizzabo a planner can create an instant social network for his or her attendees before an event takes place. The planner can incorporate event details such as logos, agendas, locations and social media links so that attendees can access meeting agendas, check out who’s attending the conference, message other attendees and schedule face-to-face meetings, and use social media links such as Twitter and LinkedIn.

Bizzabo also provides event analytics and polling features, which give planners some real data to work with while eliminating the need for feedback forms. “And it’s free, so the price is right,” says Ball. “It’s a good example of how mobile technology is changing networking.” Bizzabo also offers a tiered pricing schedule for larger events.

“We’re a gregarious animal — we’re always looking for ways to congregate and meet. It’s a biological imperative,” says Ball. “Now, we’re finally getting better tools to do it with.” **C&IT**



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ON THE MOVE



WONG

Alvin Wong was appointed director of sales and marketing for the Wailea Beach Marriott Resort & Spa on Maui and the Waikoloa Beach Marriott Resort & Spa on Hawaii Island. He was the director of sales and marketing for the Sheraton Princess Kaiulani Hotel in Waikiki.



GAHERTY

Jenni Gaherty has returned to her position as the director of sales and marketing at the JW Marriott Denver Cherry Creek, Denver, CO. She previously served as the director of sales and marketing for the hotel from its opening in 2003 through mid-2011, when she took a break to spend more time with her young children.

David Friedberg was named director of sales and marketing



FRIEDBERG



KEARNEY

for Bonaventure Resort & Spa, a Benchmark Resort in Fort Lauderdale, FL. He was most recently director of sales for The Kalahari Resort of Sandusky, OH.

The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa, Tucson, AZ, has named **Matt Brody** as director of sales and marketing. He was most recently with Marriott International as the director of sales and marketing at the JW



BRODY

Marriott Starr Pass Resort & Spa in Tucson.

Royal Palms Resort and Spa, Phoenix, AZ, has named **Mark Lindsey** as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing for Loews Ventana Canyon Resort in Tucson, AZ.

Wayne Kearney was appointed director of resort sales at The Omni Homestead Resort, Hot Springs, VA. He was director of group sales at the Pinehurst Resort, Pinehurst, NC.

The Anaheim Marriott, Anaheim, CA, has named **Erica Westmyer** as director of group sales. She was city-wide sales executive for Marriott International's Los Angeles/Anaheim market sales team. **C&IT**



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