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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

2015 Meetings Outlook

The View From Industry Insiders
PAGE 20



Budgets

Travel costs

Group Demand

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California
PAGE 30

PAGE 9
Global Meeting & Incentive Travel Planner

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Contents

VOLUME 32 NO. 12

DECEMBER 2014

FEATURES

**9 Global Meeting & Incentive
Travel Planner**

20 2015 Meetings Outlook
The View From Industry Insiders

DESTINATION

30 California
The Golden State Ranks High on
Meeting Planner and Attendee Wish Lists
By John Buchanan

DEPARTMENTS

**4 Publisher's
Message**

6 News & Notes

7 Snapshots

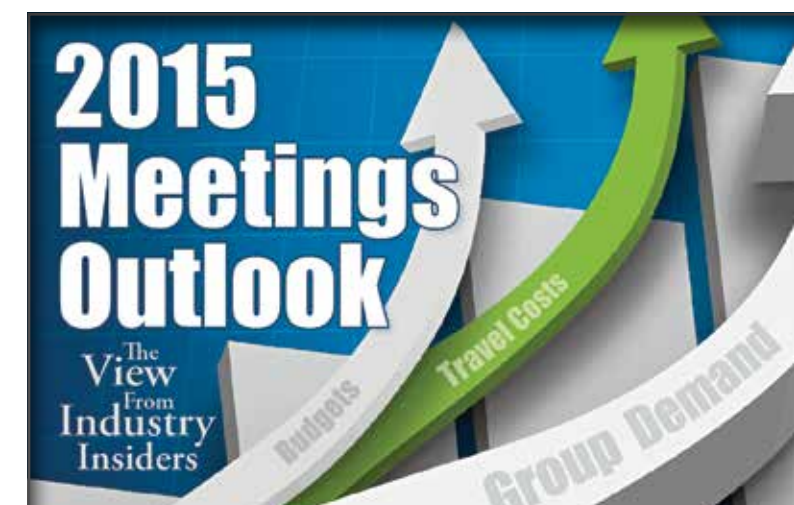
8 Perspective
Cruise M&I Full
Speed Ahead
By Christine Duffy

**34 People on
the Move**

**34 Reader
Services**



An informative, up-to-the-minute meeting planner's guide to the world of global meetings and incentives. **PAGE 9**



Industry leaders show us the way to 2015 and beyond. **PAGE 20**



The Monterey Meeting Connection Staff at a recent show at the Monterey Conference Center. **PAGE 30**

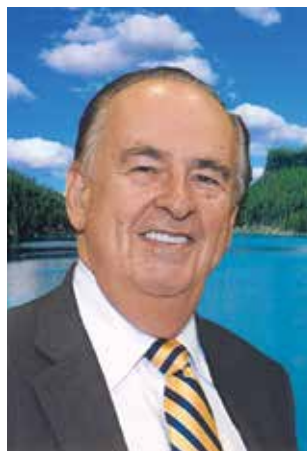
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Publisher's Message

2015: Meetings Are 'Back in Business'

We invited leading experts from various sectors of the travel, hospitality and meetings industries to share their views and predictions on how the meetings business will fare during the new year for our cover story this month. As most indicators continue to point to an improving economy, optimism prevails.

For example, Issa Jouaneh, vice president and general manager, American Express Meetings & Events, pronounced the meeting industry overall "very much 'back in business'" in their 2015 Global Meetings Forecast.



Not surprisingly, industry experts agree that 2015 is shaping up to be a very good year. Michael Massari observes that "face time is money" as companies discovered "they cannot replace the benefits of a face-to-face meeting."

Dave Marr, S.V.P., Brand Management, North America, Starwood Hotels & Resorts, notes the importance of continuing "to evolve our practices and develop more ways to host sustainable, socially conscious and responsible meetings." William D. Talbert, III, CDME, president and CEO, Greater

Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, agrees that CSR is trending upward as they have "received more requests than ever for volunteer projects from groups meeting in Miami."

David Peckinpaugh, president, Maritz Travel Company, notes the formation and rollout of the Meetings Mean Business Coalition is one of the most significant trends of the year. He encourages everyone to get involved because "the future of F2F events is now, and the time to proactively communicate the value that our industry drives on the local, regional, state, national and global level has never been more right." (See page 20 for all views.)

And on page 8, Cruise Lines International Association President and CEO Christine Duffy says, "At a time when more companies are expanding globally, so too is the cruise industry with more cruise lines catering to the global market and easily meeting the demands of multilingual and multinational planning and accommodation for incentive and meetings-incentive hybrid programs."

For more timely and interesting news of the world, turn to page 9 for our special Global Meeting & Incentive Travel Planner. Take a whirl around Dubai, Fiji, Ireland and New Zealand.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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News & Notes

Incentive Travel Outlook Is Bright for 2015 and Beyond

CHICAGO, IL — Results from the SITE Index Annual Analysis and Forecast for the Motivational Events Industry confirms that 2014 has been a very good year for the incentive travel market, and the outlook for 2015 is positive. The report was released by the SITE Foundation during the SITE Global Conference 2014 in Rotterdam, Netherlands. For the second consecutive year, there is continued optimism about the industry's future, and the overall use of motivational travel experiences continues to increase. An ever-improving economy appears to be the major reason for this confidence as well as bookings for future business.

Incentive travel continues to be on an upswing and is predicted to grow in 2015 and 2016. Fifty-two percent of respondents surveyed for the Index say the use of incentives will increase or substantially increase in the next six months — a 4 percent increase over last year, and 80 percent are similarly optimistic about the following 6 to 12 months — an 11 percent increase over last year.

Since 2010, the SITE Foundation has conducted the SITE Foundation Annual Analysis and Forecast for the Motivational Events Industry, which compiles and compares data mean-



SITE Young Leaders from around the globe join SITE President Paul Miller and SITE CEO Kevin Hinton at a recent conference.

ingful to the incentive travel and motivational events industry. The research examines both internal and external challenges to the sector and how these factors impact the stability and growth of the market. It addresses behaviors of both buyers and suppliers providing leading indicators for future trends.

To obtain a full copy of the Executive Summary of the SITE Index Annual Analysis and Forecast of the Motivational Events Industry, visit www.siteglobal.com.

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Snapshots



Credits: SITE

Orchestra of Emotions was the theme for the SITE Global Conference 2014, held in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, November 14–17. **3, 5** Attendees were promised that their senses would be stimulated. And they were. Attendees were “highly engaged; challenged to think anew; inspired to reflect; and provided with the opportunity to grow.” **2** SITE Board Member Pamela Shepherd, CEO, Distinctive Destinations and Madelyn Marusa, DCMF, V.P. industry sales and global relations, Allied PRA, rock out to the music of Mr. Holland (your personal Holland Host) and his band. **4** Netherlands-based Drums and Barrels opened the conference with a colorful teambuilding exercise full of dynamism and movement using Boomwhackers to produce infectious Latin and African rhythms. **1** SITE Global Conference 2015, which is set for October 23–26 at the Taj Palace Hotel, New Delhi, Delhi, India, will bring together hundreds of industry professionals from around the globe to experience India as an exciting canvas to create unparalleled incentive travel experiences.

Perspective

By Christine Duffy

Cruise M&I Full Speed Ahead

With a growing cruise industry (Cruise Lines International Association projects 21.7 million travelers will cruise in 2014) and exciting new ships and itineraries to the most interesting places in the world, it is no wonder that more businesses are realizing that meetings and incentives at sea are a viable option for corporate gatherings.

When I stepped into my role at CLIA, coming from Maritz Travel, I immediately saw the potential for the cruise industry and the M&I market to work more closely together and mutually grow their market segments. This is a big focus area for me, and I'm pleased that there is more recognition than ever before that a cruise ship is the perfect venue for business meetings and events — large and small.

Personalized Programs

I'm also excited to see that the cruise industry is actively cultivating the meetings and incentive market with new onboard amenities, conference facilities designed specifically for meetings and events, and new and advanced technological capabilities. The cruise ships of today — and tomorrow — have become dynamic facilities for companies to reward and enrich their meeting programs and incentive offerings. It's hard to imagine other locations or facilities that can offer such a superior experience — one that helps to build camaraderie among attendees as well as company loyalty.

What I've also seen is that when it comes to planning a meeting at sea, customization is a big factor, with cruise lines, including small luxury ships and river cruise companies, working closely with meeting and incentive planners to create highly personalized programs to meet their needs.

And, at a time when more companies are expanding globally, so too is the cruise industry with more cruise lines catering to the global market and easily meeting the demands of multilingual and multinational planning and accommodation for incentive and meetings-incentive hybrid programs.

All-inclusive Pricing

Key among the reasons why cruises stand out with corporate groups is the incomparable value they offer and the ability to create a meeting or event that is truly distinctive. A cruise is



Christine Duffy

is president and CEO of Cruise Lines International Association. She formerly served as president and CEO of Maritz Travel, one of the world's largest M&I travel management companies.
www.cruising.org

generally less expensive and more inclusive than a land-based program — an important factor in a recovering economy. One rate covers meals, onboard activities, taxes, gratuities and entertainment. This allows planners to have a firm grasp on their budgets, and makes planning a sea-based M&I program much easier and less time-consuming — especially for larger groups.

Depending on the line, planning group programs is a one-stop process with group sales departments, dedicated group planners and onboard meeting and incentive staff to handle all group needs. Options for cruises are extensive, with cruises available in every part of the world, of every length (from two days to two weeks or more), and in every price category.

Cruise Lines Offer More in 2015

This is an exciting time for the cruise industry with the debut of cruise ships that rival the imagination. More and more cruise lines are creating revolutionary experiences with new, state-of-the-art spaces, adrenaline-rushing onboard activities, elegantly appointed and newly designed staterooms, game-changing technology, groundbreaking venues, gourmet dining options and Broadway-style entertainment. River cruising, specialty cruising and luxury cruising are also growing in popularity for executive retreats and incentives. Most important is passenger satisfaction, which at 96 percent is the highest in the travel industry.

Cruising Commitment

The M&I market is so important to CLIA that we have established a Meetings, Events & Incentives (ME&I) Task Force made up of the major cruise line members focused on developing a strong relationship with the meetings and incentive industry. Some 24 MPI Chapters in the U.S. and Canada are aligned with CLIA cruise line members to help their planners have a better understanding of what the cruise industry can offer them. We are also assisting our cruise line members in being more active with other trade associations, such as PCMA and SITE, and in having a presence at incentive industry functions and trade shows such as EIBTM, IMEX and ITE.

When I first started at CLIA I saw that there were clearly many meeting planners and meeting professionals who had no idea what the cruise industry was all about. I believe we've changed that view with increased numbers of meeting and incentive events being held on cruise ships, and I'm confident that this trend will continue to grow. 2015 will be an exciting year for the cruise industry and a wonderful opportunity for the meetings industry to take advantage of the incomparable value and excitement that can only be experienced on a cruise. *C&IT*



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Dubai has established a strong international reputation as a vibrant and diverse destination with a quality hospitality offering, first-class infrastructure and a range of headline grabbing attractions. While the city is well known for luxury, it also offers great value for those traveling on a budget.

Easy Access

The emirate's infrastructure is such that doing business in, and from the city is easy. Transport is expedited by Dubai International Airport (DXB), one of the busiest in the world in terms of international traffic that is served by over 145 airlines flying to 260 destinations across six continents. In addition, Dubai's second international airport, Al Maktoum International at Dubai World Central (DWC), opened in October 2013 and is set to increase the emirate's global accessibility even further.

Within the city itself, transport options abound. These include the Gulf region's first-ever metro system, as well as well-priced taxis, water taxis, buses, chauffeured cars and the soon-to-be-launched tram network.

Accommodations

In terms of accommodations, there are currently more than 89,000 hotel rooms in stock ranging from seven-star luxury to pocket-friendly mid-ranged options. Estimates show that 15,000–25,000 hotel rooms will be added to the market by 2016, increasing the options available to international visitors.

For business events, Dubai's many hotels also offer a plethora of flexible facilities — whether that's simply a meeting room for 10 people or a convention for tens of thousands. And of course, this is all supported with the expansive facilities offered at the

Dubai World Trade Centre — the host for more than 50 percent of all exhibitions in the Middle East region.

Backed up by a professional service and a “can do” attitude, business event organizers appreciate the opportunities on offer in the city, which goes some way to explaining why Dubai has been named among the top three most vibrant cities in the world in the latest City Momentum Index released by the commercial real estate firm Jones Lang LaSalle in January 2014.

Endless Experiences

Dubai is one of the world's safest and fastest growing tourist destinations. For incentive delegates it offers an array of truly memorable experiences, with itineraries that can capture the essence of Arabia with desert safaris (*as shown above*), dune-bashing, falconry and camel-riding; while adrenaline junkies can go sky-diving over Palm Jumeirah, dive with sharks at the Dubai Aquarium or go skiing at the world's largest indoor snow park. VIP groups, on the other hand, can take a seaplane or helicopter ride over the city and indulge in afternoon tea at the Burj Al Arab.

The possibilities in Dubai are endless — where else can you wrap up your meetings and spend time at the beach, snow skiing or testing your limits in a 4x4 while dune bashing in the desert?

Dubai Business Events, the official convention bureau, offers a host of free services to professional congress organizers to make planning meetings a convenient experience. To access services related to business event development, destination expertise, convention planning, attendance building and onsite event servicing, visit dubaibusinessesevents.ae. **C&IT**

WHERE INFRASTRUCTURE MEETS INNOVATION

The regional commercial hub and gateway between East and West, Dubai is a city built on innovation and infused with opportunities. The city's diverse knowledge base and community of trained professionals makes Dubai the ideal location for association conferences, corporate meetings and incentive events. Direct access from over 260 destinations worldwide, an array of venues, over 89,000 hotel rooms in all categories and numerous exciting activities in and around Dubai, make this city the most remarkable destination for successful business events.



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With quality venues, spectacular weather and an abundance of things to do, Fiji is the ultimate destination for an organization's meeting or incentive program. From small island getaways to international-style mainland resorts, from thatched-roof bures (bungalows) on the beach set discreetly in the sand along miles of pristine beaches to deluxe hotel suites, Fiji has all your conference and incentive needs covered, no matter the budget or group size.

Accommodations

There are plenty of different options available to suit your meeting or event. Stay at one of Fiji's many majestic five-star resorts, enjoying the luxurious beauty of their surroundings while taking advantage of all the modern amenities your attendees may desire. Or charter a yacht for a four-day conference, stopping at some of Fiji's many unspoiled white-sand, palm-studded coral isles.

Getting to Fiji Is Easy

Nestled in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Fiji may seem far away, but getting there is easy. Fiji Airways, Fiji's national carrier, has regular flights from many international destinations (Auckland, Christchurch, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Vancouver and Hong Kong). In addition, Jetstar, Air New Zealand, Korean Air, Pacific Blue, Virgin Australia, Air Niugini, Air Vanuatu, Air Caledonie and Nauru Airlines also fly regularly to Fiji.

Nadi International Airport is the main gateway to the country for most travelers, and there are several domestic airports scattered throughout the islands.

A four-month visa is granted automati-

cally on arrival to visitors from most countries including the United States and Canada. Visitors needn't do anything other than have a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the end of the visit.

Time for R&R

When your team is done meeting for the day, you'll find so many things to do you won't know where to start. From snorkeling, white-water rafting and kayaking to bush walks, golf and cultural centres, Fiji has an endless offering of activities to keep your attendees engaged and entertained.

Relax around the pool, or picnic on a perfect white sand beach. Crank up the adrenaline with an action sport adventure out on the water or up in the hills. Get close to nature with jungle treks or visit one of Fiji's famous Nature Reserves. There is a huge variety of things to see and do in Fiji, which boasts year-round air and water temperatures of about 80 degrees.

When it comes to dining, restaurants are almost limitless and offer a range of multi-ethnic foods including cuisine from Fiji, India, China, Europe, Japan, Korea and the Americas. Many resorts have a relationship with a neighbouring village or two that will allow you to sample traditional Fijian fare during village tours, hikes or Meke nights, a Fijian dance festival accompanied by singing.

You won't find a better location to host your incentive program, meeting or event. Fiji is fun and vibrant, with world-class accommodations and conference facilities. The weather is superb, the people are friendly and the environment is like no other — a true paradise nestled in the idyllic South Pacific.

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Progressive, vibrant and energizing — Ireland offers a rich heritage, welcoming culture, easy access, top-class venues, facilities, technologies and accommodation options — key reasons why more and more businesses are choosing to host corporate meetings, conferences and incentive programs in Ireland.

An abundance of purpose-built meeting facilities — including the Convention Centre Dublin, which can accommodate up to 8,000 delegates, and Belfast Waterfront Conference and Exhibition Centre, (major expansion work set for completion in 2016) is testament to Ireland's highly developed infrastructure. In addition, unique meeting venues equipped with the latest technology are available throughout the island of Ireland.

When it comes to gala venues in Ireland, the choice is endless — museums, historic castles, universities, former prisons, stately country homes, cookery schools, breweries, distilleries, traditional farms and the iconic Titanic Belfast (pictured above).

Quality Accommodations

Ireland offers a wide range of quality accommodations — from ultra-modern boutique hotels to historic castle properties.

Whether it's a small board meeting or a large conference, such as the 12,000-delegate World Flower Show hosted by Dublin in June; the 10,000-competitor World Police and Fire Games in Belfast last year; or the 640-delegate World Youth Conference, held in Dublin in September, Ireland's emphasis on professionalism and hospitality ensures events run smoothly.

Ireland delivers on value with a low 9 percent VAT rate on accommodations, and

there is widespread availability of complimentary Wi-Fi.

Best for Business

Forbes magazine in 2014 declared "Ireland Is Best for Business." Home to more than 1,000 multinational companies, Ireland boasts eight out of 10 top global ICT companies, nine out of 10 global pharmaceutical companies and more than half of the world's leading financial services firms.

Recently launched, Ireland's Corporate Meeting Supports program offers a suite of financial and practical supports to attract corporate meetings and events to Ireland.

In recent years, Ireland has gained a reputation for excellence when it comes to food, fueled by artisan producers and innovative chefs with a focus on local produce.

When business is done, delegates can enjoy world-class golf as Ireland is home to one-third of the golf links courses in the world, sightseeing, spa facilities, fine dining, shopping and mingling with the friendly locals or exploring the Wild Atlantic Way — a spectacularly scenic 1,500-mile touring route along the western seaboard.

The combination of a business event combined with a parallel cultural encounter provides a unique, memorable experience and makes Ireland a perfect destination for corporate meetings and conferences.

Ireland is easy to get to with direct flights from cities across the United States, UK and Europe. With more than 190 routes into Ireland operated by 63 airlines, there are direct flights from more than 20 countries. Passengers departing from Dublin or Shannon airport to the U.S. pre-clear customs and immigration prior to boarding flights. **C&IT**



More and more global organizations and associations are making the decision to **Meet in Ireland**, where working hard and an easy-going nature go hand in hand. Where else can you find state-of-the-art conference facilities and cutting edge professionalism amongst a young and vibrant population?

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Reward and Motivate

Reward and motivate your top performers with an amazing New Zealand experience. With its towering mountains, enchanting forests and golden beaches, New Zealand's landscape is one of the most diverse and scenic anywhere in the world. It's also one of the most accessible. Groups can move easily from one experience to another in a short space of time.

Luxury Accommodations

At the end of the day, a wide range of luxury accommodations are available, from global five-star hotel brands to cliff-top lodges with world-class golf courses onsite. Many luxury options are specially set up to make an incentive trip to New Zealand memorable.

Amazing Experiences That Can't Be Beat

New Zealand tourism providers go out of their way to craft unique experiences tailored to groups' individual requirements:

- Get out on Auckland's Waitemata Harbour aboard a former Americas Cup yacht with ExploreNZ. Work together to learn the ropes before putting your newfound sailing knowledge to the test in

a match race against an opposing team.

- Scale New Zealand's tallest building, the Sky Tower, for a SkyWalk around its spectacular 630-foot-high outdoor walkway. With no handrails and nothing but air on either side of you, there's literally nothing to spoil the spectacular views of the sparkling harbor and city.
- Head to Waiheke Island for the Wild on Waiheke experience. Try archery, laser clay bird shooting and brilliant teambuilding challenges such as the Great Escape — an experience that is part "Amazing Race," part "Survivor Waiheke Island."
- Fly through the forest canopy in Queenstown at Ziptrek Ecotours. This unique experience can accommodate groups of all sizes, and involves zipping through the trees while harnessed to a zipwire or flying fox.
- Explore the backcountry around Queenstown on a Nomad Safaris off-road adventure. The company offers experiences like the Gold Rush — solve clues as your team navigates its Landrover through the scenic Wakatipu Basin.
- Journey to Moonlight Country near Queenstown for a great day out. The 800-acre property offers tailor-made teambuilding experiences including orienteering, sheepdog trials, clay target shooting and quad bike riding.

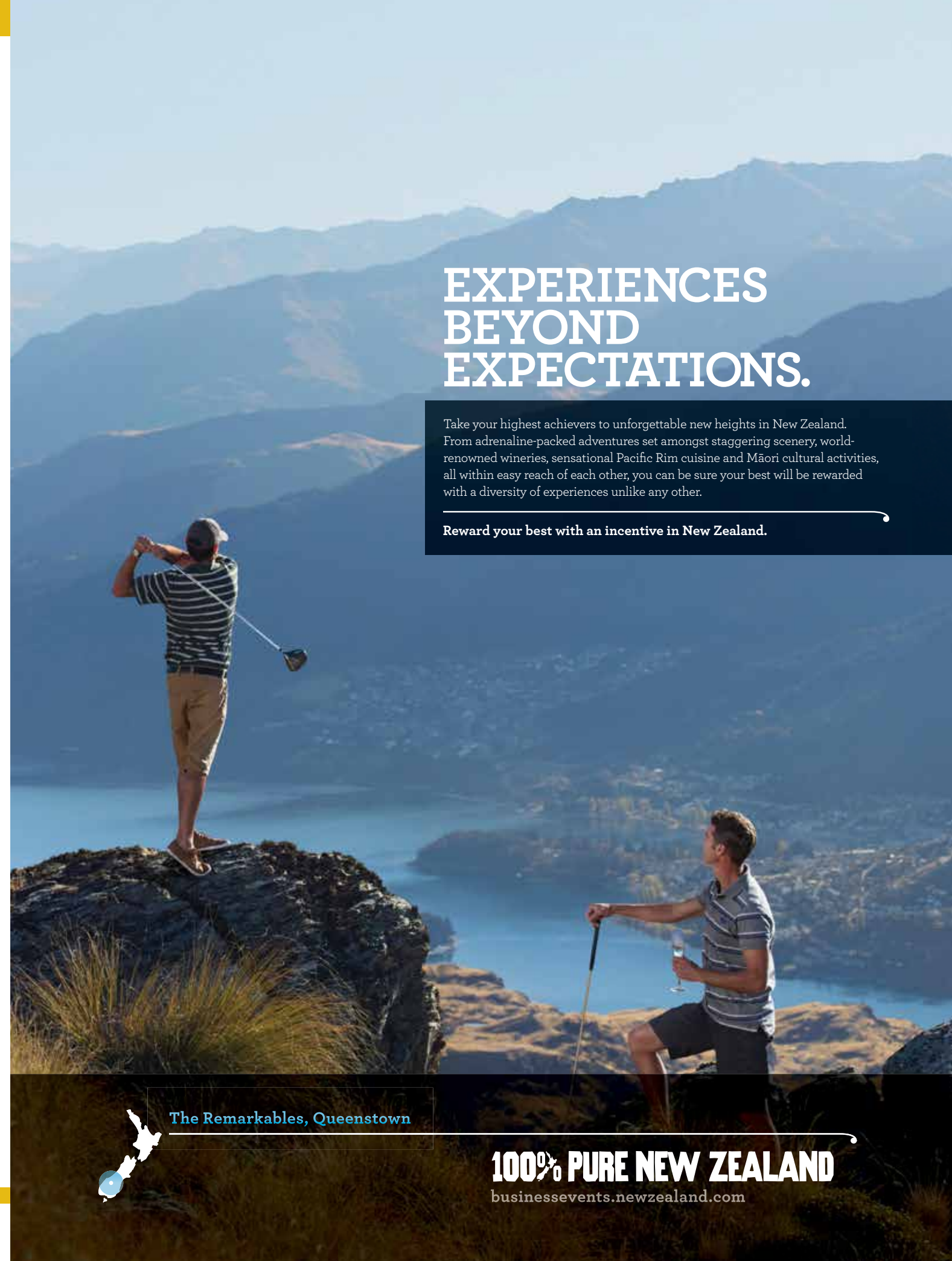
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CANCÚN PUERTO VALLARTA LOS CABOS COZUMEL CITY COLLECTION

2015 Meetings Outlook

The View From Industry Insiders

Budgets

Travel Costs

Group

Demand

Everything is looking up for the meetings industry in 2015, which is a mixed blessing for planners: Group demand is up, but so too are room rates and travel costs. That reliable old supply and demand thing.

“The meeting industry overall appears to be very much ‘back in business,’” said Issa Jouaneh, vice president and general manager, American Express Meetings & Events in the 2015 Global Meetings Forecast, which predicted that group hotel prices would rise by 4.6 percent, thanks in part to increasing group demand. A recently released PwC lodging forecast projects a 2015 U.S. occupancy of 64.9 percent, the highest since 1984. “Group demand improved significantly in the third quarter, leading to stronger-than-expected occupancy levels,” according to Scott Berman, PwC principal and U.S. hospitality and leisure practice leader. “Despite an evolving supply pipeline, industry demand trends are expected to remain robust, giving confidence to the operating community to drive room rates higher in 2015.”

Add to this rising airfares (5 percent), F&B catering costs (4 percent), audio-visual (3.1 percent) and meeting rooms (2.5 percent), as reported in MPI’s fall Meetings Outlook, which also noted, not surprisingly, that planners are challenged with shorter lead times.

To keep the meetings momentum going in the face of rising costs, American Express predicts an uptick in meeting budgets made possible by a more disciplined approach, with increased scrutiny, transparency and attention to compliance and strategic objectives. In addition, the Forecast noted “a continued push to stay close to home and host meetings where the largest number of attendees live.”

The cruise meetings segment is growing, too, says Christine Duffy, president and CEO of Cruise Lines International Association. See her column on page 8.

The incentive travel industry is also on the upswing. Look for an in-depth report in our January issue, including “6 Trends That Will Impact Incentive Travel in 2015 and Beyond” by Rhonda Brewer, SITE 2015 president and vice president, group business travel-sales, Maritz Travel Company

We asked other leading industry experts to put their fingers on the pulse of the meetings industry heading into 2015. Responses reflect a range of perspectives, from an industry-wide view to what’s happening and is predicted to happen in their own backyards. Their thoughts and opinions appear on the following pages.

THE OVERALL PERSPECTIVE

The Industry Is Getting Stronger

Karen Kotowski, CAE, CMP
CEO

Convention Industry Council

The meetings industry is strong and its outlook is positive, as we near the end of 2014 and head into 2015. Building upon the work of our members, industry partners and supporters, the Convention Industry Council (CIC) is poised to continue working towards its mission to promote a strong meetings, conventions and exhibitions industry by championing the economic and social value of the industry.

Continuing to emphasize the importance of face-to-face meetings and their impact on the U.S. economy, the CIC members released an updated Economic Significance of Meetings to the U.S. Economy study in early 2014. The results, representing the U.S. share of the total global market, showed that the economic output and job growth continue and that the industry is getting stronger. Other countries, including Mexico, Canada and Scotland, are following the methodology used in CIC's study in their own regions to lend data toward a global picture of this impact.

While the economy has continued to rebound, the market has seen a shift towards the sellers with increased demand for hotel rooms, meeting space and event services.

Technology is changing at an accelerating rate, creating both opportunities and challenges. One of those is hotel room block poaching, defined here as the threat from businesses that actively seek to re-

cruit or divert event attendees from official room blocks and into other hotel bookings which can be both legal and illegal, and has affected many aspects of the industry. CIC's Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX) has been working with industry stakeholders to create education, best practices and other resources to aid meeting professionals in managing room blocks. This information should be available in early 2015.

Looking ahead to 2015, we feel that there will be continued growth of the industry particularly in global markets outside of North America. While face-to-face meetings remain a critical component to moving businesses forward, the growth of virtual and hybrid meetings will continue to adapt, creating more opportunities for those who cannot travel due to limited time or money to participate in meetings. Mobile technology and social media platforms will continue to rank high among the growing resources for planners and suppliers to both conduct and market meetings more successfully.

CIC is also continuing its commitment to advocating for the industry through a stronger, unified voice, through the work of its Meetings Industry Advocacy Hub, created in partnership with Voices in Advocacy and the efforts of the Meetings Mean Business (MMB) Coalition (*see opposite*), of which CIC is a proud member. Leaders in the meetings industry should be among its strongest and most vocal supporters, but effective advocacy also needs the support of an engaged network of industry professionals committed to promoting the benefits of meetings to communities and commerce.

As we look ahead to 2015, CIC is encouraged by the strides the meeting and events industry has made in recent years and is excited about helping it grow stronger, and more vibrant than ever.



Face Time Is Money

Michael Massari
Vice President

Caesars Entertainment

Face time is money. Look back just a decade, and we can see an era where many meetings were booked by senior leaders without a true understanding of why the meeting was needed. Then when the recession hit, many of those meetings were canceled. They were canceled in part because the value of face-to-face wasn't truly understood by the senior leaders. Over time, the meetings program for those companies was added back because they began to really understand the value of face-to-face.

Senior leaders now know what needs to be communicated in meetings and exactly why these meetings are important. They've dissected different platforms including virtual meetings, teleconferences and WebExs, and discovered they cannot replace the benefits of a face-to-face meeting. In today's multitasking work world, it is important to create a more focused environment with fewer distractions.

The 24/7 work environment is leading the trend to do more with less time. Content is presented in shorter sessions, and more audience engagement tools are being used. It is important to be able to get the attendee to be "in the moment" and



Meetings Mean Business Update

Roger Dow
President and CEO
U.S. Travel Association

The meetings and events industry has come a long way since 2009. Once the focus of unfair attacks based on isolated incidents of abuse, the industry has now come together in an effort to change the conversation. This effort, the Meetings Mean Business (MMB) campaign, is comprised of leaders from all facets of the industry working to showcase the substantial value that meetings, conferences, conventions, incentive travel, trade shows and exhibitions have on businesses, the economy, local communities and individuals. The impact of the industry cannot be overstated — according to a recent PwC study, the meetings industry

www.imexamerica.com/events/special-event-bill-mcdermott

contributed more than \$280 billion to the national economy in 2012.

Additionally, an Oxford Economics report found that companies that invested more in business travel during the economic downturn grew the fastest. In fact, the report determined that every dollar invested in business travel realizes \$9.50 in new revenue and produces \$2.90 in profits. When it comes to the success of meetings and events, it's critically important that the industry remains united behind a singular voice. As the Meetings Mean Business campaign looks towards 2015, it will continue to enlist the support of business leaders and ensure the impact of in-person interactions is well understood by consumers, stakeholders and policymakers.



David Peckinpaugh
President
Maritz Travel Company

One of the most significant trends that has occurred in the meetings industry this past year has been the formation and rollout of the Meetings Mean Business Coalition. While the brand MMB has existed since 2009, the addition of the "C" (Coalition) is the key evolution of the brand. In January of 2014 at Convening Leaders, the launch of MMBC occurred with nearly all of the key industry organizations and leaders present and in support of the initiative. The goal is "One Industry, One Voice," and we are well on our way to accomplishing that goal.

APCO Worldwide was hired by the coalition to create a

long-term sustainable campaign that defines the value of the face-to-face meetings industry. The focus has been on the personal connections that are created, the positive business outcomes that are driven and the stronger communities that are built via F2F events. An industry toolkit has been created along with a free app that brings all of the resources of the MMBC to everyone's fingertips. You can download the free app via the iTunes store and Google Play. Everyone can get involved via their industry organization or via grassroots efforts. The future of F2F events is now, and the time to proactively communicate the value that our industry drives on the local, regional, state, national and global level has never been more right.

enthusied to be there. The use of images will continue to be seen, and the use of shorter video will be on the rise. Attendees are seeking to be actively engaged versus being passive listeners. Facilitation of discussion and participation through room setups is being seen to encourage engagement. Creating special events, ones which the attendee couldn't do on their own, are being sought-after to create distinctive experiences. The experience is carried from start to end to help keep the event alive through the year. This helps the attendee to remember the event — and excited to come back next year. Local elements are tied into the event to create a sense of place for the attendee. Offerings of farm-to-table produce, regional cuisine and engagement in local volunteer opportunities and outside activities are seen.

The embracement of technology will continue to be seen in 2015 with more items being done digitally. Less printed material will be used, further pushing the industry forward into a paperless trend. Websites, apps and social media will continue to be used to push information out to attendees. These technological platforms offer the opportunity for rich analytic data to be compiled, which will help make business decisions to improve customer interaction.

2014 was a fantastic year. 2015 and 2016 are anticipated to be good years as well. In 2015, meetings will continue to play a pivotal role in increasing visibility for companies around the world.

THE HOTEL PERSPECTIVE

Record Demand

Mike Dominguez
Senior V.P. of Sales
MGM Resorts International

One of the greatest challenges today for the meeting professional is the lack of availability because of re-

cord demand and no significant new supply being added to the meetings market.

Date and pattern flexibility are part of the discussion for the first time in many years. Add to that pricing pressures that are being experienced from airfare to rapidly increasing food and beverage prices, and you have a very challenging and complex meetings environment.

Meeting Personalization Through Technology

Anne Hamilton
Vice President of Resort Sales & Services
Disney Destinations

Technology continues to expand the ability of businesses to interface and share information. While it will never replace face-to-face meetings, new tools it creates enhance the experience when people come together and bridge connections to those unable to participate in person. Social media, mobile technology and other tools have brought a new level of personalization to people's lives, and attendees demand the same from meetings and events. They don't want to just attend meetings; they want to be part of an experience.

In the year ahead, the industry will see continued growth in meeting personalization and the integration of mobile technology. We took a giant step in this direction at Walt Disney World with the recent launch of MyMagic+. It takes Disney guest service to a new level — more customized and more seamless. It's also reshaped the attendee experience, letting group members plan as individuals and design the Disney visit they want, personalizing everything from at-home planning to in-park experiences. Attendees also can change selections "on the go" through MyDisneyExperience — an online and mobile app resource. Like technology, MyMagic+ is an evolving innovation, and we're excited to see what the future holds.



CSR: a Requirement, Not Just a Preference

Dave Marr
S.V.P., Brand Management,
North America
Starwood Hotels & Resorts

As we begin to plan for 2015, a trend that is truly becoming a pillar in the meetings industry is the focus on sustainability and CSR. Client requests prove that programs addressing energy, water and greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals and the supply chain are no longer just a preference, but a requirement when selecting meeting locations.

At Starwood, we have seen an increase in demand for more transparency in our policies and what we as suppliers have in place to help clients achieve their CSR and sustainability goals. We've built Sustainable Meeting Practices (SMP), a globally aligned collection of initiatives that integrate environmental

and social concerns into the meeting process. Included is a Meeting Impact Report. This report is provided to our clients and calculates the carbon footprint of a meeting, tracks the sustainable practices incorporated during events, and provides the ability to offset a meeting's carbon footprint.

This report instills confidence in our customers that Starwood will deliver on elements promised to decrease negative environmental impact, such as sustainable food and beverage practices, reduction of paper waste, carbon neutrality, labor and human rights, and more. Customers are also eager to give back to the communities in which they are meeting. We've implemented efficient, yet very impactful, ways to do so through opportunities like the One Hygiene Kit project with Clean the World, where attendees build kits containing much-needed essentials that are then donated to local organizations.

As these initiatives grow in importance, it will be top-of-mind for us throughout 2015 to continue to evolve our practices and develop more ways to host sustainable, socially conscious and responsible meetings.

Focus on Small Meetings

Larry Luteran
Senior Vice President of Group Sales and
Industry Relations
Hilton Worldwide

Looking ahead to 2015, we expect to see strong growth in the meetings and events environment, continuing the momentum from 2014. As we look to raise greater awareness across industries on the importance and value of meetings, there are three major trends I would like to highlight: 1. an increased value being placed on face-to-face meetings; 2. a broadening view of attendees' experiences when planning events; and 3. a growing recognition of the importance of small meetings.

1. In the hyper-connected world we live in, business professionals, CEOs, meeting professionals and others are starting to place a much higher value on the power of human connection and the impact that meeting face-to-face brings to the table. In fact, a study conducted by IMEX Group in partnership with the Meetology Group found that on average, face-to-face meetings generate 30 percent more ideas than their virtual counterparts. In 2015, we anticipate seeing an even higher value placed on networking in-person and the strong impact it can have on reaching business objectives.

2. We've seen a shift toward considering the complete attendee experience when planning events and meetings. As an example, we know more and more travelers are looking to adopt or continue healthy habits while on the road. For Hilton, our Connect philosophy is rooted in the power of human in-

teraction and enriching people's lives. We recognize that planning is no longer about just delivering on a singular business objective — it's about considering every element of attendees' well-being. Professionals can no longer just focus on the logistics of an event, but instead, have to think holistically about the attendees to ensure they are getting the most out of the experience.

3. We also anticipate a growing recognition of the importance of many small meetings, something we are passionate about at Hilton. In an industry used to planning meetings at a mass scale, this trend requires us to shift our thinking and evolve what we are offering. In order to advance our relationships with customers, we need to clearly understand what meeting professionals need to be successful, no matter the scale of their event. For most small meetings this means maximizing efficiency and streamlining the customer experience.

At Hilton we are excited to see where 2015 takes us and look forward to continuing to provide meeting professionals with the best tools, resources and expertise in order to help them create unforgettable experiences. Regardless of what the future holds for the industry, we will continue to champion the power of meetings at the individual level, bringing to life the magic that happens when you meet face-to-face.



Hot-Button CSR Trend

David Peckinpaugh
President
Maritz Travel Company

A hot-button trend in CSR is the industry's growing awareness of human trafficking. For many years, the travel industry has been an unwitting participant in the human trafficking of men, women and children across the globe. The horrific \$32 billion industry has claimed nearly 21 million victims around the world — people are often mentally and physically abused, and can be forced into prostitution, unfair working conditions or other exploitive situations.

Globally, the travel industry is a key conduit for this practice, which has been dubbed "modern day slavery." Capitalizing on the Internet to sell victims, traffickers move across cities and countries via air and ground transportation, and they use hotels as venues to abuse victims. For every single one of us in the travel industry, it is OUR responsibility to increase awareness of and put an end to human trafficking. Our strong network of travelers, travel agencies, suppliers and employees is

in a unique position to be the eyes and ears needed to help victims. Many travel industry members, including the U.S. Travel Association, have already taken steps to do their part to put an end to human trafficking by partnering with organizations such as ECPAT — which is dedicated to seeking to end the commercial sexual exploitation of children through awareness, advocacy, policy and legislation.

In addition, many in the industry — including Maritz Travel Company — have become signers of The Code, an industry-driven, multi-stakeholder initiative with the mission to provide awareness, tools and support to the tourism industry in order to combat the sexual exploitation of children in contexts related to travel and tourism. If you haven't already, I encourage you and or your company to review and sign The Code. For more information you can go to www.ecpatusa.org.





THE CVB PERSPECTIVE

Expanding Role for DMOs

Michael Gehrisch
President and CEO
Destination Marketing Association
International

In 2015, I see the meetings industry continuing to maintain its position as a tool for economic development and social engagement, with official destination marketing organizations (DMOs) — also known as convention and visitor bureaus — serving an integral part of the meetings industry's growth.

DMOs not only understand the economic value of direct spending from the events themselves, but also recognize meetings as a gateway for business exchange, development, innovation and investment. The next years ahead will see DMOs take on an even greater role in aligning destination promotion activities with economic development interests of their communities. DMOs will be assuming greater roles as destination marketers to help develop meetings segments that align with their destinations' targeted economic clusters.

This falls in line with other trends we are seeing: Meetings are becoming more targeted in content and regional in scope. The focus on ROI has broadened to include not only professional development and business advancement, but also quality of unique experiences and social good. With this in mind, meeting planners will find DMOs to be unique resources with which to garner support for their events — whether large or small — from local venues, city officials and the business community.

Growing Need for 'Big Data'

Jay Burress
President and CEO
Anaheim/Orange County
Visitor & Convention Bureau

As we head into 2015 planning and a major expansion at the Anaheim Convention Center, we've been keenly focused on what we could do to help ease the burden of the planners we work with and provide them with the exact services they are looking for when planning small or large events. After talking with several planners and reviewing the resources we have available to us as a bureau, we saw that there was a growing need for planners to have research and "big data" to help them build attendance at the meetings/events they plan. By disseminating the big data we collect on our local community and beyond, we can help drive attendance for small and large events. We see this as an opportunity to grow our role and provide a unique aspect and service to planners as a greater part in our ever-changing role as the DMO of the future.

Sustainability: Last month, in conjunction with the city of Anaheim, Anaheim Convention Center announced the 2.4 Megawatt Anaheim Solar Energy Plant, which sits on the rooftop of the Anaheim Convention Center. This recent announcement follows a number of initiatives that is part of the Anaheim Convention Center's Sustainability Program, which was established with Aramark Leisure Services in 2004. Over the years, we've implemented several sustainable programs including: purchasing a herd of free-range, grass-fed cattle; creating a convention center recycling area where plastic, cardboard, aluminum, glass, electronics and paper are separated and food waste is composted; and planting a 2,000-sf garden with an array of adaptive plants and herbs on top of the Arena Box Office roof. As an organization that has a growing footprint and presence in Anaheim, we've made a commitment to tirelessly search out alternatives to conducting our business that are sustainable and positively impact our local community.



Doing More Good

William D. Talbert, III, CDME
President and CEO
Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau

Corporate social responsibility is definitely trending upward among corporate and association planners. We have received more requests than ever for volunteer projects from groups meeting in Miami. One recent example comes to mind. In May 2014, Tourism Cares, a national organization, attracted more than 350 travel industry professionals to Miami to make a difference in our community by jump-starting the restoration of the Miami Marine Stadium.

Closed for more than 20 years post Hurricane Andrew, the facility was a lost treasure for residents and visitors. The Tourism Cares volunteers rolled up their sleeves and showed that doing something good for a community also translates into doing something positive for travel. Representing 29 states, four countries and 89 different companies, including Amadeus, Expedia, Norwegian Cruise Line, Tauck, Collette and many, many more, the volunteers planted 800 trees and 11,000 seagrass plants at the Historic Virginia Key Beach Park and cleared out truckloads of debris from the iconic Miami Marine Stadium. Their efforts have paved the way for renovations currently being planned.

Without doubt the companies and organizations that sponsored the hundreds of volunteers for the Miami Marine Stadium effort are an excellent example of the growing commitment to social responsibility. This example, along with others, have made us keenly aware that there is a renewed and growing trend to give back. The GMCVB's Convention Services team offers planners a wide array of volunteer opportunities for groups of all sizes and interests — a resource that is being tapped more and more.



Music City Predicts an Encore Performance

Butch Spyridon
President and CEO
Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp.

From Nashville's perspective, 2014 has been a record year for business on the books. In its second full year of operation, groups booking the Music City Center have exceeded our expectations, from the diversity and size of the groups to the time of the year people are booking. Both the Music City Center and Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center are performing exceptionally well with both repeat and new business.

Trends for Nashville are tied to the new Music City Center, new hotels and new restaurants. This growth has opened the door not only to new clients but also to expanded media coverage for the city. We are proud to report that our loyal repeat clients are on the rise attendance-wise, and new business we've never been able to recruit is now booking Nashville and beating their attendance projections. Barring outside influence, we see the next two years in Nashville as very strong.



Windy City Meetings Transformation

Don Welsh
President and CEO
Choose Chicago

Chicago is heading in the right direction and at an aggressive pace. Group room demand is growing in the right direction. New sales strategies, including the development of strategic partnerships with key intermediaries, has proven to be a smart investment for Choose Chicago.

Following a redeployment within our sales team, corporate and association bookings for Chicago increased by 12 percent since 2013. We have also seen a 37 percent increase In-the-Year-for-the-Year business from this market from 2013 to 2014.

Chicago's meetings industry is experiencing its greatest transformation yet. With more than 37,000 hotel rooms in the Central Business District, and an additional 2,500 rooms in less than three years, Chicago remains one of the fastest

growing domestic markets for new hotel development, reflecting the investment community's perception that Chicago will support that growth. The implementation of exhibitor rights at McCormick Place and tremendous support from labor have been critically important to this transformation.

The McCormick Place complex is about to undergo another transformation. We are reinvesting in what we have and planning for the future. Beginning in early 2015, construction will begin on the 10,000-seat Event Center and the 1,200-room Marriott Marquis, both of which are scheduled to open in 2017. This addition to the complex will allow for even greater flexibility, especially for groups who don't require the use of the larger meeting space at the convention center.



More VIP Involvement in Site Selection

George Aguel
President and CEO
Visit Orlando

A developing trend that we are seeing more of at Visit Orlando when it comes to the future of site selection, is the hosting of more of the group's leadership coming to experience the destination — in addition to the organization's meeting professional. We oftentimes find ourselves working with meeting sponsors, board members and even presidents and CEOs of companies and associations.

At Visit Orlando we have extraordinary relationships with our members that provide every kind of service, property and venue imaginable. So for incoming sites, Visit Orlando takes the lead and handles everything — from planning to execution in close coordination with our members — so the meeting professional and his or her leadership team have a seamless experience engaging with our destination. And since tourism is the No. 1 industry in Orlando, our community has hospitality in its DNA and understands how to help us go that extra mile for a client.



Phoenix Affordability Grows

Steve Moore
President and CEO
Visit Phoenix

Phoenix has always been a natural fit for corporate and incentive meetings because of our reliably sunny weather, extensive resort portfolio and unique teambuilding opportunities. But the value and flexibility Phoenix offers corporate meeting groups has never been greater. Among the top 10 airports in America, Sky Harbor consistently has the lowest round-trip airfare averages, so it's more affordable to fly here than it is to other incentive markets. And our resorts compete so much for incentive business — not just against other destinations but with each other — they stay on top of trends such as offering activities for families or weaving desert adventure options into itineraries.



Global Exhibitions Trends

David DuBois, CMP, CAE, FASAE, CTA
President & CEO

International Association of Exhibitions and Events

What does 2015 look like for the global exhibitions industry?

The International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) closely monitors the health and viability of the global exhibitions industry. We do this through the IAEE Future Trends Task Force who review and extrapolate data to bring viable trend analysis to the exhibitions and events industry.

We're seeing several trends in the coming year, but a few stand out. To begin, international attendee growth is up substantially, and we expect it to keep growing. Next, new technology such as wearables, as well as advanced smartphones are exploding, opening whole new avenues to reach pre- and post-show attendees, thus extending the life of a show. As a segue, mobile computing with ever-changing smartphone capabilities and the myriad of apps available, continues to grow creating a huge avenue for marketers to deliver information in a timely and relevant fashion, again, before, during and after a show. Finally, while the registration focus used to be about getting a specific job title or function to a show, the industry is evolving to further define attendee engagement. In 2015 we will see best practices emerge on how to define engagement pre- and post- show and what the best measurements of ROI will be.

Visit www.iaee.com for the IAEE Future Trends White Paper, which was released at Expo! Expo! IAEE's Annual Meeting and Exhibition, December 9-11 in Los Angeles.



'Green' Expectations Are Growing

Rossi Ralenkotter
President and CEO

Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

Sustainability efforts continue to be a key component in the meetings and conventions industry as planners and show organizers realize the environmental impact their events have on the local community. They've come to expect a certain level of environmental consciousness from their venues and assistance in implementing greener practices to reduce waste and energy.

In an effort to exceed those expectations in addition to our own desire to be environmentally active, the Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC) is committed to improving our role in sustainable operations, environmental impacts and energy conservation.

The LVCC is active in the Environmental Protection Agency's Waste Wise Program with a primary objective of diverting recyclable materials away from landfills. Through working in close collaboration with building partners, vendors and employees, we achieved a record recycle rate of 69 percent in 2013 by processing 5,518 tons of material — that's the equivalent of 19 Boeing 747s of waste from landfills.

Inside the exhibit halls of the LVCC, the process of converting to energy-efficient lighting that delivers up to 20 percent more light while using 42 percent less energy is nearly complete. In addition, low-flow faucets and toilets have been installed throughout the facility to reduce water usage, and desert landscaping has been maximized throughout the facility grounds.

To reduce fuel consumption, the LVCVA promotes the use of alternative energy with 90 percent of its vehicles powered by electric or propane. Visitors can take advantage of four free electric vehicle charging stations located in the LVCC

parking lot. The charging stations were made possible by a grant from the Consumer Electronics Association, the producers of International CES.

Sustainability is a guiding principal of the Las Vegas Global Business District (LVGBD), a \$2.3 billion project that will expand and reinvent the LVCC and its surrounding areas over the next decade. Solar, energy and water efficiency components all will be incorporated into the design and construction of LVGBD. Reducing waste, conserving water and saving energy is the right thing to do for our customers, our community and our environment. **C&IT**



California

The Golden State Ranks High on Meeting Planner and Attendee Wish Lists



The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel set up a spectacular outdoor event for MicroVention at the beautiful Salt Creek Beach.

As competition among destinations intensifies as the meeting industry continues to regain its health and vitality, California ranks high on the wish lists of many planners because of its broad appeal to attendees and Mediterranean-type climate — sunny days with little rain year-round. California offers an unusually long list of options from San Francisco, San Jose or the wine country of Napa and Sonoma counties or the central coast of Monterey County to Los Angeles, Anaheim and San Diego to the south.

“We always get good feedback when we hold a meeting in California,” says Carol Waring, marketing communications manager at Tustin, California-based global medical device company MicroVention, which holds about 10 meetings a year in the Golden State. “And a lot of that has to do with the weather and timing. A lot of the times we bring people to California, people from the East Coast or other parts of the country who are coming in from rain or snow. And they just enjoy coming to sunny Southern California. Simple as that.”

Waring, in concert with her meeting planning staff and Cathy Demyanovich, MicroVention’s senior director of corporate communications, work together as a team to make their vision come alive for their sales meetings, many of which have

been held at The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel, a 396-room beach resort located south of Los Angeles in Dana Point.

Her last meeting there was a week-long sales meeting last May for more than 100 attendees.

Why do her team and her attendees like The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel so much that they keep going back?

“Besides the beautiful location and the coastal views, the No. 1 reason would just be the quality of their service,” Waring says. “The hotel has a quality staff, a phenomenal group of people that always deliver quality service. They understand our high expectations and give us tremendous support. They fulfill every request we make, and they are consistent. It just comes down to the fact that they understand our needs.”

One of those needs — just the right amount and configuration of meeting space — is perfectly met by The Ritz-Carlton, Waring notes. The hotel has more than 26,000 sf of indoor conference and banquet space.

“Because of the type and amount of meeting space the hotel has, we can have our general sessions in a space that is appropriate, even if there are multiple meetings going on at the same time,” she says. “So depending on what kind of meeting we’re having, we can get the space we need to do the kinds of sessions that we do. For example, for some meetings, we might have ro-

By John Buchanan



“The thing that is really special about The Ritz-Carlton is that they make you feel special. When you walk into the lobby, they know your name and they really make sure that you feel welcome and that you understand that you’re important to them.”

Carol Waring, Marketing Communications Manager
MicroVention
Tustin, CA



“There were several important reasons that San Jose was right for this event. One important one was that their convention center was newly renovated. And it was almost as if it was perfectly designed for our conference.”

Lori Luna, Vice President of Events Operations
BlogHer
Belmont, CA

tating training sessions that require a particular configuration of space. And we can always find that at The Ritz-Carlton, no matter what else is going on in the hotel.”

MicroVention also does what it calls meet-and-greet networking sessions, themed dinner and recognition events as part of its major meetings. “We always have a number of things going on during our meetings,” Waring says. “It’s not just a matter of meeting sessions or training sessions. There’s also socializing and entertainment. And we always find what we need at The Ritz-Carlton.”

Of particular importance for a number of her meetings are recognition dinners that pay tribute to salespeople and support staff. “We do a nice formal dinner,” Waring says. “And at The Ritz-Carlton, we do those dinners in one of the ballrooms or the Pacific Promenade. And depending on the weather, we do some of our meet-and-greet events outdoors. And all of those are just great venues for the events.”

Although the amenities and level of service she gets at The Ritz-Carlton often help create highlights of individual meetings, “the real highlight of our meetings there is just that it’s such a beautiful location,” Waring says. “It’s also a great escape for our attendees, because the property is a little bit secluded. It’s just a nice place to be.”

For her higher end meetings, such as sales meetings, MicroVention offers activities such as golf, which is played at the nearby Monarch Beach Golf Links, designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr. and located on the same dramatic bluffs over the Pacific Ocean that give The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel its spectacular perch.

The Ritz-Carlton spa also is popular with MicroVention’s attendees. “It’s a really nice spa, and they offer some great treatments,” Waring says, who also praised the fitness center. “It’s nice,” she says, “to be looking out over the ocean while you’re on a treadmill or one of the other cardio machines.”

Despite the hotel’s luxury amenities, it is the service that keeps MicroVention coming back.

“The thing that is really special about The Ritz-Carlton is that they make you feel special, no matter who you are,” Waring says. “For example, when you walk into the lobby, they know your name, and they really make sure that you feel welcome and that you understand that you’re important to them. They make you feel like they know you and consider you important.”

Additionally, she says, the hotel is well-maintained and consistently kept up to date. And, as a planner, she feels she has

a trusted venue that always contributes to the success of her meetings. “The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel is just a class act,” Waring says.

San Jose

Although not as well-known a meeting destination as San Francisco, San Jose — the de facto capital of Silicon Valley — has emerged over the last few years as a go-to option, especially, not surprisingly, for technology companies.

BlogHer, whose customers are women in social media and especially female bloggers, chose San Jose for its three-day 10th anniversary meeting earlier this year for more than 3,000 attendees.

The company, now located in Belmont, California, and which has been acquired by SheKnows Media, wanted to return to its Silicon Valley roots for the important event, explains Lori Luna, vice president of events operations.

“There were several important reasons that San Jose was right for this event,” Luna says. “One important one was that their convention center was newly renovated. And it was almost as if it was perfectly designed for our conference. It just ideally met our needs for general session space and breakouts and our expo, which had more than 100 exhibitors and used about 35,000 sf of space.”

Another factor was the convenience of having three airports that attendees could fly into — San Jose, Oakland and San Francisco. “That meant that people had multiple options, depending on where they were coming from,” Luna says.

Especially important was the fact that San Jose offered a hub of four major flag hotels that were perfectly situated around the convention center. The headquarters hotel, The Fairmont San Jose, and the Hyatt Place San Jose/Downtown are just a block away, while the San Jose Marriott and Hilton San Jose are connected to the convention facility.

“That kind of infrastructure and convenience is pretty rare,” Luna says. “And for us, for a very important event, it was just perfect.”

Because the meeting celebrated BlogHer’s 10th anniversary, the company went all out to make it special.

Iconic female blogger Arianna Huffington, founder and CEO of The Huffington Post, was brought in to headline a general session. “We don’t do traditional keynote speeches,” Luna says. “We have interviewers who turn it into a dialogue.” For Huffington, the interviewer was superstar social media guru and former chief evangelist of Apple, Guy Kawasaki.

“And what I loved about Disney is that the stage is built in. All of the sound equipment and lighting and rigging are part of the ballroom space, so you don’t have to build all that from scratch. And again, that kind of permanent setup is extremely unusual.”

Monica Wihongi, Chief Communications Officer
Close to My Heart
Pleasant Grove, UT



Actress and activist Kerry Washington, who appeared at another general session and was interviewed by a popular female blogger, was another highlight of the meeting.

And at another general session, popular female comedian Tig Notaro, another star of social media, interviewed one of the founders of BlogHer.

Another major highlight of the meeting was a closing night outdoor dinner and dance party staged in a parking lot and sponsored by McDonald’s.

“Our closing night event was spectacular,” Luna says. “McDonald’s, which brought in a semi truck full of stuff, decked out a local parking lot to the point where you would never have known it was a parking lot if you had seen it. It was just amazing. McDonald’s also secured Rev Run from the legendary rap group Run DMC, and he was spinning records for about an hour or so for a four-hour dance party, which was just fantastic. People had a great time.”

Unlike many companies that have continued to reduce their meeting budgets since the recession, BlogHer management believes in making the investment to create memorable meetings that motivate their people to optimal job performances. And the San Jose celebration exemplified that.

“We like to say that we go all out for this meeting, as well as for our smaller ones,” Luna says. “And it has everything to do with our sponsors — like McDonald’s for the San Jose event — who partner with us to do our meetings. They are a huge element of our conferences and events. And we are very transparent about the fact that they subsidize the price of our registrations so that people can afford to attend. If we did not have such amazing relationships with our sponsors, I don’t think you’d see this ongoing investment that we make.”

In addition, Luna says, her history and relationship with San Jose also contributed to the success of her 10th anniversary meeting.

“I am very fortunate to have a very strong relationship with the San Jose convention center,” Luna says. “I am on their customer advisory board.”

Luna also worked closely with Team San Jose, the innovative entity that combines the resources and services of a CVB, convention center, hotel partners, and dining and entertainment providers under one roof.

“They have a different approach from most CVBs,” Luna says. “Their model of having everything coordinated by a single entity means that you get a higher level of service, because

you’re not going to the CVB for one thing and the convention center for another thing and the hotel for a third thing. And that makes things so much easier for me as a planner.”

‘Disney Magic’

Monica Wihongi, chief communications officer at Close to My Heart, a scrapbooking and paper sculpting company in Pleasant Grove, Utah, had never experienced a Disney meeting until she hosted a 2011 event at Disneyland Hotel at Disneyland Resort in Anaheim. The 973-room property has 136,000 sf of meeting space, including exhibit space.

After selecting Anaheim as the destination for the 2011 meeting, Wihongi selected Disneyland Hotel after it submitted a successful bid as part of the RFP process.

“But when we went back this year, it was specifically because of the Disneyland Hotel,” she says. “One of the main issues for us was the logistics of how well the space Disneyland Hotel has worked out for our event. For example, having everything close together with a big box convention facility was a huge plus for us.”

Another important factor was that Disney’s space is carpeted. “That is very unusual, and carpeting is usually a huge expense,” Wihongi says. “But with Disney, the carpeting is included with the space.”

Yet another key was the impact Disney’s renowned production and staging capabilities could have on the company’s general session. “Our general session is a huge factor at the meeting,” Wihongi says. “It’s where we unveil our next year’s product line, and we want to create excitement. And what I loved about Disney is that the stage is built in. All of the sound equipment and lighting and rigging are part of the ballroom space, so you don’t have to build all that from scratch. And again, that kind of permanent setup is extremely unusual.”

Disney’s extraordinary capabilities enhanced three major highlights of her meeting this year, Wihongi says. “The first was our general session. This was the first time we really made it into a production. We had Disney actors mixed in with corporate officers and managers, including our CEO. And to be able to bring that kind of talent together to unveil our new products was extremely entertaining and fun, and very memorable for our attendees. It brought the Disney magic, but it wasn’t what I would call “Disneyfied.” It was very much about Close to My Heart. It just had the production caliber of Disney.”

A second major highlight was a visit by 100 company representatives to World of Color, a water and light show at Disney California Adventure Park. “We did an exclusive private VIP viewing just for our top leaders,” Wihongi says. “We had Disney escorts and our own private section for viewing. And dessert. And it was a very special experience.”

The third major highlight was the company’s awards gala in Disneyland Hotel’s main ballroom.

“Our awards gala is very important, because that’s where we recognize our top salespeople, top recruiters, top teams,” Wihongi says. “At Disney, we had a dinner and then entertainment throughout the evening. The staging and lighting were just beautiful. It was an event that made everyone feel special, especially those getting recognition. They were made to feel like movie stars.”

In addition to the hotel itself, Wihongi has high praise for the production arm of Disney.

“That’s another one of the main reasons we continue to go back, because Disney represents an all-in-one package,” she says. “You don’t have to go through so many vendors. You have one contact person who deals with everything, from F&B to AV and sound. It’s a great collaboration, and you don’t have to deal with all the various elements of the meeting as separate things. And based on my experiences, I feel like the Disney people are extensions of my team.”

Another reason Wihongi says she and her team like

Disneyland Resort so much is “the Disney philosophy of how they treat their employees and the whole culture of the company. It’s very close to the culture of Close to My Heart. I’ve been with the company for 22 years and a lot of our staff also have amazing longevity. And I found the same kind of longevity and experience at Disney. People go there, and they stay. And you get a family feel. So the synergy between our staff and the Disney staff was also very important to us. And now we’ve continued to work with the same people through multiple meetings, so we have really gotten to know them very well — and they us. So you really do feel like you have a team. They get us.”

And based on her two experiences so far, the level of service at Disney is second to none — including the catering staff. “They have been phenomenal,” Wihongi says. “They are very caring and it isn’t just about serving people food. We had a number of special requests, such as from people who are diabetics or who have celiac disease. And they were very thoughtful in dealing with all of those special requests.”

The end result of her successes, Wihongi says, is that Close to My Heart just signed a new three-year deal that will take the company back to Disney in Anaheim and also to Orlando — after they return again next year to Disneyland Resort for an already previously scheduled meeting.

“Disney is just a perfect fit for us,” Wihongi says. “And you really do feel the Disney magic.”

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LauraLee Wren was named assistant director of sales for Kalahari Resorts and Conventions' new Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania, resort, which is scheduled to open in the summer of 2015. Wren formerly was executive director of sales and marketing at Split Rock Resort & Golf Club in Lake Harmony, Pennsylvania, in the Poconos.

La Posada de Santa Fe, New Mexico, has named **April Gallegos** as sales manager. Previously, she served as the opening manager for Antiqua Inn in Santa Fe.

The Wyndham Orlando Resort International Drive in Orlando, Florida, has named **Art Fasano** as director of sales and marketing. He was most recently director of sales and

marketing and director of group sales at the DoubleTree by Hilton at the Entrance to Universal Orlando Resort.

Carla Jean-Thomas Carroll was named national sales manager for The Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau. She formerly served as national sales manager for Kona Kai Resort & Marina in San Diego, California.

The Hilton Orlando has named **Dawn Walzak** as director of sales. Bringing more than 25 years of sales experience to her position, she most recently was directly involved in sales, marketing and revenue strategy with Tishman Hotel Corporation.

Omni Barton Creek Resort & Spa in Austin, Texas, has named **Carissa Smith** as director of sales and

marketing. She most recently served as director of sales and marketing for the Omni Austin Hotel Downtown in Austin, Texas.

Andrew "Andy" Rosuck was named vice president of sales and marketing at Hawks Cay Resort in Duck Key, Florida. He formerly served as regional vice president of sales and marketing at Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida.

Melanie J. Rice was named sales manager for The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, Louisiana, responsible for clients in the West Coast and technology markets. She most recently served as national convention center sales manager at the Memphis Cook Convention Center in Memphis, Tennessee. **C&IT**

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