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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



Orlando on a Roll

Why It's the No. 1 Meeting Destination
SPECIAL PULLOUT SECTION PAGE 27

Meetings at Sea
PAGE 16

Is Your Meeting Really Green?
PAGE 22

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TABLET VERSION**

George Aguel, President and CEO, Visit Orlando, and the Orlando Eye observation wheel, centerpiece of the new I-Drive 360 complex.

Networking
PAGE 52

Las Vegas
PAGE 58

New York/New Jersey
PAGE 68

Credit: Visit Orlando

AS WE REFLECT ON THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY of HURRICANE KATRINA,
WE WOULD SINCERELY LIKE TO SAY...



THANK YOU *America*



Thank you for bringing your meetings back to our city when our future seemed uncertain. When you chose New Orleans, you reaffirmed that others believed in us. With each meeting that returned, we got stronger. Every attendee that came to New Orleans was a vote of confidence in us and our recovery. You gave us the impetus to reopen our kitchens and fire up the burners, dust off the instruments and find the beat.

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New Orleans

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Executive board meetings and private dinners are a luxurious treat on Oceania Cruises. **PAGE 16**



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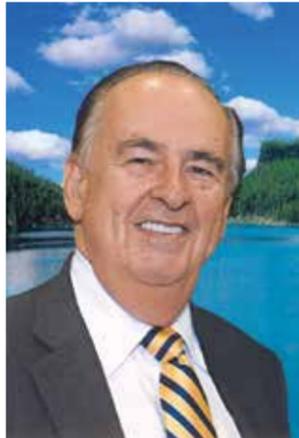
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Publisher's Message

Built for Meetings

Orlando, named the No. 1 meeting destination in the country for 2015 by Cvent, is truly built for meetings. Ranked No. 1 for many years as a family vacation destination due to the popularity of its theme parks and attractions, Visit Orlando, Orlando's top-notch convention and visitors bureau, has diligently marketed the destination to meeting planners. And, due to the leadership of Visit Orlando President and CEO George Aguel (on our cover this month), the vision is now a reality.



Premier convention destinations must boast an assortment of hotels, and Orlando provides that in spades with more than 450 hotels and 118,000 rooms from major luxury brands to budget options. Aguel reveals, "Among the things we use most to sell the destination to meeting planners is our diverse portfolio of hotels. We have hotels that meet every kind of need and every kind of budget."

Ideal weather, convenient airlift, exemplary hospitality and the steady evolution of the destination also help solidify Orlando's No. 1 ranking.

The vital role that Visit Orlando plays is primarily based on branding and marketing the destination, Aguel says. "We give planners an inside track to understanding the destination. Orlando is a very extensive community for planners to navigate, so we like to be the organization that helps them understand and navigate it. But when you get right down to it, what we really want to do is help planners find the right way to get their meeting done."

For enlightening comments from professional meeting planners who call Orlando their No. 1 meeting destination, see the special 24-page section "Orlando Meeting & Incentive Travel Guide" beginning on page 27.

But if you can't get to Orlando, this issue includes many other super ideas for your next meeting. As a matter of fact, many organizations rotate their meetings between these two No. 1 cities: Orlando and Las Vegas. For the most recent happenings and offerings in Las Vegas, see "The Mighty Las Vegas! Groups Return Year After Year to the No. 1 Trade Show City for Brand New Experiences Each Time" on page 58. "New York and New Jersey — A Wealth of Options and Unparalleled Choices for Meeting Planners" on page 68 offers more options and news you can use. Last, but not least, "Setting Sail — Discover the Whys and Wherefores of Meeting at Sea" on page 16 offers more alternatives for memorable meetings.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Harvey Grotsky

harvey.grotsky@themeetingmagazines.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Mitch D. Miller
mitch.miller@themeetingmagazines.com

MANAGING EDITORS
Susan W. Fell
susan.fell@themeetingmagazines.com

Susan S. Gregg
sue.gregg@themeetingmagazines.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Ron Bernthal
Karen Brost
John Buchanan
Sara Churchville
Maura Keller
Christine Loomis
Derek Reveron
Mark Rowh
Patrick Simms

PRESIDENT & CEO
Harvey Grotsky

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS
David A. Middlebrook
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES
2700 N. Military Trail, Suite 120
Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394
561-989-0600 Fax: 561-989-9509
advertising@themeetingmagazines.com

CT, DC, DE, MA, MD, ME
NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VA, VT, WV
Fox Associates
800-440-0231 • fox@themeetingmagazines.com

FLORIDA/CARIBBEAN/BAHAMAS
David Middlebrook
561-989-0600, ext. 109 • Fax: 561-989-9509
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

AL, GA, MS, NC, SC, TN
Fox Associates
800-440-0231 • fox@themeetingmagazines.com

IA, IL, IN, KS, KY, MI, MN, MO
ND, NE, OH, SD, WI
Fox Associates
800-440-0231 • fox@themeetingmagazines.com

AR, CO, LA, OK, TX
Fox Associates
800-440-0231 • fox@themeetingmagazines.com

AZ, CA, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY
Marshall Rubin
818-888-2407 • Fax: 818-888-4907
marshall.rubin@themeetingmagazines.com

ALASKA/CANADA/MEXICO/INTERNATIONAL
David Middlebrook
561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

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News & Notes

Meet Atlantic City Launches New Websites

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Meet AC, a tourism development agency designed to attract meetings and conventions



WOOD

to Atlantic City, has officially launched three new websites this year, and three more websites are expected to launch within the next six months. Meet AC's convention website, www.meetinac.com, features Atlantic City's convention calendar, comprehensive meeting planner tools such as guides, floor plans, specs and RFP forms, along with marketing materials such as a press kit, press releases, video podcasts and employee contact information. The Atlantic City Convention Center website has merged with Meet AC and soon exhibitors will

be able to make purchases directly through the website, when integrated with the Ungerboeck CRM system.

The Atlantic City Sports Commission website, www.atlanticcitysports.org, also launched. It boasts venue information, upcoming events and destination services. The Atlantic City Sports Commission was officially formed on January 13, 2015 as a 501 (c) (3) organization with the support of Meet AC and the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority to attract sporting events, conventions and competitions to Atlantic City.

Meet AC also launched a site for media to obtain photos with proper credit, www.photos.meetinac.com. The site provides high-resolution photos of Atlantic City, meeting venues within the city, event photos for the Atlantic City Sports Commission and conventions.

In the coming months, Meet AC

is set to launch a Group Motorcoach website, Atlantic City Film Commission website and a website that is geared toward market research. All of the current and future websites are compatible with mobile, easy to navigate and filled with robust information that educates meeting planners, show managers, exhibitors and attendees on what Atlantic City has to offer.

Meet AC President and CEO Jim Wood stated, "I am very pleased with the direction that Meet AC is going in. Meetings and conventions help support the overall tourism industry in Atlantic City, and it is crucial to have the most up-to-date information and technology in this industry. As the meetings segment increases, it means more jobs, more delegate spending in Atlantic City and overall more non-gaming growth as Atlantic City continues to diversify its tourism portfolio."

Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center Now Open

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Caesars Entertainment celebrated the grand opening of the \$126 million Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center with a ribbon-cutting, fireworks and customer event on September 17.

With the opening, Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center and Harrah's Resort Atlantic City now can claim to be the largest hotel-conference center complex from Baltimore to Boston. The Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center's 100,000 sf of meeting space along with the resort's 2,590 existing hotel rooms offer guests the unique experience of being able to sleep, eat and meet all under one roof. The versatile meeting space with two 50,000-sf ballrooms can be configured 200 different ways, making more than 60 smaller rooms to accommodate meetings of all sizes.

Due to the addition of the conference center, which overlooks the Atlantic Ocean and Marina District, there has been an increase of 90,000 advance room bookings for the upcoming 12 months at the resort. Among the confirmed meetings is Meeting Professionals International's 2016 World Education Congress, set for June 11-14. www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com



Caesars Entertainment executives and New Jersey dignitaries cut the ribbon at the grand opening of Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center. (L to r) Michael Massari, SVP of Caesars Entertainment National Meetings & Events; Don Guardian, mayor of Atlantic City; Steven Sweeney, New Jersey state senate president; Gary Loveman, chairman of the board of directors, Caesars Entertainment; Mark Frissora, president and CEO of Caesars Entertainment Corporation.

MGM National Harbor Reveals Resort and Guest Room Design

NATIONAL HARBOR, MD — Offering a taste of the striking interiors to come within the \$1.3 billion resort, MGM National Harbor recently unveiled the design of its luxurious guest rooms. The newest addition to the MGM Resorts International family, MGM National Harbor is located on the eastern shore of the Potomac River in Maryland. The resort, scheduled to open in the second half of 2016, sits a short distance from Washington, DC. The 400-sf guest rooms will feature light-colored woods and monochromatic earth tones. Floor-to-ceiling windows offer views of the city's landscape. Motion sensors in each room will automatically adjust temperature and lighting to save energy when guests are not present. Advanced technology in all rooms will remember guests' temperature and lighting settings when exiting the room and resume those settings upon their return. Wi-Fi and Bluetooth technology



A rendering of the exterior of the MGM National Harbor.

will be standard throughout all rooms. In addition to 234 standard guest rooms, MGM National Harbor will offer a premier selection of 74 suites ranging in size from 600 sf to 2,000 sf, up to the luxurious 3,600-sf Presidential Suite. The 308-room resort will feature

a casino; a world-class spa and salon; an entertainment theater with 3,000 transformable seats; 18,000 sf of high-end branded retail; 27,000 sf of meeting space; and restaurants from renowned local and national chefs. www.mgmnationalharbor.com

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Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino Opens

ORANJESTAD, ARUBA and MCLEAN, VA — The Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino is now open. Located less than 10 miles from the capital city of Oranjestad, the resort features glamorous architecture, unmatched beaches, enchanting gardens, an expansive pool complex, kids club, watersports and dive center, world-class spa, onsite casino and culinary options for all tastes.

The hotel offers 355 guest rooms including executive-floor rooms and suites, which are outfitted with flat-screen TVs, wireless Internet access, coffee maker and more. Rooms offer a tropical décor, views of the gardens,



Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino

pools or sea, and spacious balconies for outdoor relaxation. Executive-floor

guests enjoy special access to an executive lounge, private concierge service and rooms featuring custom artwork.

The property provides nearly 40,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space. Indoors, the hotel offers more than 15,000 sf of flexible function space including eight meeting rooms with total capacity for more than 900 guests; five private meeting rooms for smaller gatherings; a Grand Caribbean Ballroom accommodating more than 900 guests; and two business centers. Outdoors, approximately 24,000 sf of lush tropical landscape can accommodate up to 2,000 guests. www.hilton.com

Access Destination Services Named HPN Global Hospitality Partner of the Year

SAN DIEGO, CA — Access Destination Services has been named Hospitality Partner of the Year by HPN Global, one of the leading and largest site selection and venue finding companies in the world. The award was recently presented at the 2015 HPN Global Annual Conference in New Orleans. Access is the first DMC to receive this award.

HPN Global developed the award in 2010 in an effort to recognize suppliers who demonstrate true strategic partnership. Jil Dasher, vice president, meeting services, HPN Global, said, "The nomination process is purely peer-driven, and it was clear to us that we needed to add the DMC sector of our business to our awards category. Access has set the bar high as a strategic partner. They've become an integral partner for HPN by delivering outstanding, timely service time and time again."

Access New Orleans, Access' newest office, sponsored and produced a very successful "Club HPN" event at this year's HPN Global Annual Conference. Stacey Crivello, Access account director,

said, "HPN Global is so much more than a client to Access. We truly consider them a strategic partner in every sense, so to be recognized by them for that partnership is such an honor."

Over the past 12 months, Access has received numerous awards including making the "Inc. 5000 Fastest Growing Companies" list for the third consecutive year, winning the Shining Star award for CSR programming for the second consecutive year at Pharma

Forum and being named as one of the Top 25 DMCs.

Founded in 1969, Access Destination Services sets the standard for excellence in award-winning destination management services throughout North America and the world. Through global alliances with Pacific World and Amstar, Access serves more than 100 destinations throughout 30 countries. With global coverage and local expertise, Access meets client objectives and exceeds expectations for corporate, incentive and association groups. www.accessdmc.com

The Adolphus in Downtown Dallas Completes Renovation of Meeting Space

DALLAS, TX — The Adolphus, a Rockbridge Portfolio property located in downtown Dallas, completed a million-dollar overhaul to its 24,000 sf of meeting and event space.

With extensive enhancements to the Grand and Century Ballrooms, pre-function spaces, nearby restrooms, as well as the 24-hour business center, no details were spared revamping the property's event space, while protecting the legacy and charm of the hotel. Additional project elements included the installation of new carpet, wall coverings, leather chairs, updated window treatments, accent sconces, modern artwork, lighting and audio-video technology. www.hoteladolphus.com



1-3 Key business decision-makers from Australia and Singapore recently completed a one-of-a-kind familiarization trip to Sarawak, organized by the Sarawak Convention Bureau (SCB) as part of SCB's "7 Wonders of Borneo" campaign, which showcased Sarawak's many indigenous tribes, ancient rainforests, the State's colonial history and world-class convention facilities. **4** CMITE 2015 (The Caribbean Meeting & Incentive Travel Exchange) was held in the Dominican Republic. Attendees included (l to r) Eric Edmunds, business development manager, Questex Travel Group; Helen Schur Parris, CEO of Sunlinc; Simon Alperstein, director of sales and marketing, Hilton Worldwide; Marilyn McHugh, vice president of global events, Questex Travel Group; Petra Roach, director of the U.S. for Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc.; John McMahon, executive vice president, Questex Travel Group; and Greg Byrnes, business development director, Questex. CMITE 2016 will be held at the Hilton Barbados Resort. **5, 6** La Cita de las Americas was held in Boca Raton, Florida, in early September. More than 400 delegates who hailed mainly from the U.S., Brazil, Argentina and Mexico resulted in 2,330 appointments between international buyers and U.S. sellers. **7, 8** Attendees and PCMA President and CEO Deborah Sexton (turquoise jacket) gathered in Melbourne, Australia at the invitation-only PCMA 2015 Global Professionals Conference, which connects meeting planners who execute meetings in the Asia-Pacific region with suppliers.

Credits: 1-3, Sarawak Convention Bureau; 4 CMITE; 5,6 Thaddaeus McAdams/ExclusiveAccess.net; 7,8 PCMA

By Laura Stack

Quietly Toxic: How to Deal With Team Members Who Couldn't Care Less

"If you can't get rid of a toxic team member, isolate them."

—Dan Rockwell, American business blogger at Leadership Freak.

Gossips, saboteurs and unhappy loudmouths usually make themselves known quickly, so leadership can deal with them directly before things go too far. But the disengaged — those who don't care about their jobs — clog up the workflow process because they miss deadlines, miss work often, arrive late and refuse to pitch in during crunch periods. I call them Toxics.

Toxic team members can cause cracks in the foundation of the team work ethic. If not repaired,

the cracks can spread, until the whole structure teeters on the brink of collapse. After all, if Bob the Toxic doesn't care about his job, or Andrea the Toxic regularly takes two-hour lunches, why should anyone else try so hard or take their work seriously? You can try to just ignore their behavior and continue to do a great job and not let them rub off on you. But what if their poor performance impacts your work?

Leaders should catch and correct toxic behavior. But at least for a while, you may find yourself stuck with a "Quiet Toxic" you can't get rid of. Possibly your manager just doesn't notice the problem. Could be the Quiet Toxic is related to the owner, belongs to a powerful family or union, or the manager is a friend. Possibly, your team simply feels it should police itself before turning to higher authority for help. In such cases, team members can confront the toxic team member themselves.

Clearing the Air

Are you the only one who has a problem with The Toxic? Has anyone else mentioned frustration? Have several people called out The Toxic in a recent staff meeting? If not, it might be you. Could you change your attitude and see what happens?

But if you know you're not the only one, you can't be afraid to step up because you think you might anger The Toxic. Many people don't say anything, because they are worried about rocking the boat or causing

trouble. Believe me, the short-term pain of confrontation is worth the long-term peace and sanity.

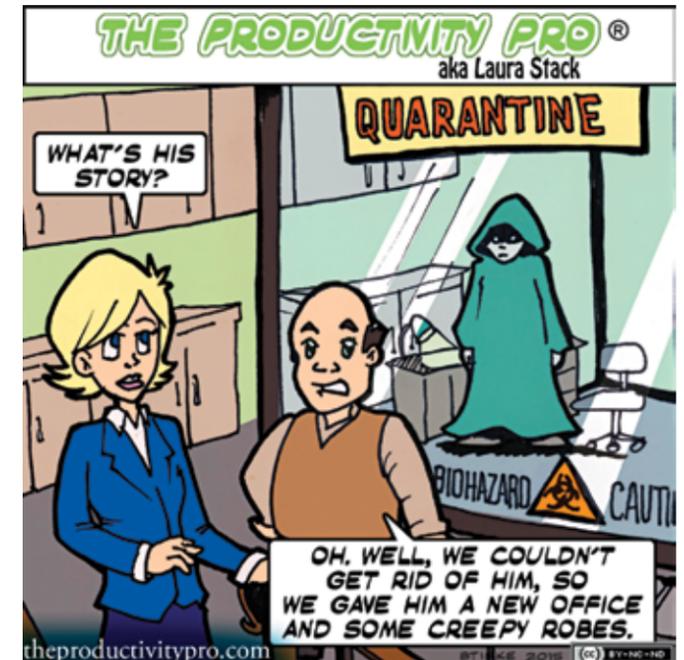
Take The Toxic to Lunch

Invite The Toxic to lunch and discuss the situation. Make it clear things have to change if you continue to work together, or you'll never get anything worthwhile accomplished. Meet in a public venue to limit the likelihood of them causing a scene, and keep your voice low and reasonable as you explain the problem. Ask why they feel dissatisfied, and offer to help if you can. The Toxic may not realize their disengagement has damaged the team. Once you bring it up, The Toxic may promise to shape up and engage with the rest of the team. On the other hand, you might be told in no uncertain terms to buzz off. Well, at least you tried.

The next level of escalation involves a meeting with other members of your team who are having problems with The Toxic — again, ideally offsite, just in case the person goes off on a rant. Think of it as an intervention, like family members might perform with an addict or someone with dangerous depression. If the entire team goes in determined to help, you may just pull off a miracle, and you may get agreement.

Final Options

If that doesn't work, volunteer to serve as a spokesman to your manager and/or HR and take it to the next level. What if you discover at this point The Toxic is untouchable? If that's the case, work around the person. Discuss ways to limit the damage with your other team members and take care of things yourselves. You can still get your work done — perhaps not as efficiently as before — but better than not. (Basically, you'll be like a lame horse in a thoroughbred race, doomed to straggle



in at the back of the pack, but hey, you'll finish.) Hopefully, The Toxic will get the point and notice he/she is being left out.

Ultimately, however, I believe it's always less painful and faster to lance a boil rather than let it fester, so to speak. You can simply refuse to work with The Toxic. Be aware that this last resort can backfire, depending on the toxic person's untouchability. But if The Toxic is so unbearably awful, leaving the team might prove beneficial to you.

Have you ever had a Toxic on your team and how did you handle it? If you have a workable secret without betraying confidences, we would love to hear it. Contact us at www.TheProductivityPro.com. C&IT

“Believe me, the short-term pain of confrontation is worth the long-term peace and sanity.”



Laura Stack

© 2015 Laura Stack. Laura Stack is America's Premier Expert in Productivity. For 22 years, her keynotes and seminars have helped leaders, teams and employees execute efficiently, improve output and build high-performance cultures. Laura is the president of The Productivity Pro Inc., a training company helping professionals achieve Maximum Results in Minimum Time. She's the author of six books from major publishers, most recently, *Execution IS the Strategy*. To invite Laura to speak at your next event, visit www.TheProductivityPro.com.

By Jeff Hurt

The Growing Complexity Gap: Are You Prepared to Face the Challenges?

As your conference grows, it faces increased complexity. According to a recent IBM study of 1,600+ CEOs, the biggest challenge their companies face is the complexity gap. Eight out of 10 of those CEOs expect their business environment to grow in complexity but less than half are prepared to face that change.

The growth of your meetings, events and conferences face similar complexity gaps. Forward-thinking meeting and conference professionals see gathering business intelligence about their target market as imperative. These professionals know that the big data they are collecting is far from complete and is often misleading.

flowing in, say authors Christian Madsbjerg and Mikkel B. Rasmussen in "An Anthropologist Walks into a Bar," an article published in the March 2014 issue of Harvard Business Review. Christian Madsbjerg and Mikkel B. Rasmussen are the coauthors of *The Moment of Clarity: Using the Human Sciences to Solve Your Toughest Business Problems* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2014), from which their article was developed.

Phenomenology: A Better Way To Collect Insights

Some meeting professionals are starting to look at the roots of their attendees' behaviors along with their purchasing decisions. These professionals are using the tools of the human sci-

“Reframing the conference challenge as a **phenomenon** is the first step in looking at your conference problems through the human sciences.”

Big Insights — Not Big Data

Many conference professionals are turning to big data to understand their conference and its customers better. They are getting better at collecting and comparing inputs and outputs. Yet no amount of quantitative data can tell you why a customer attended your event. Or why they skipped the general session. Or why they attended specific education sessions. Or why they are meeting with others in the hallways.

Without that insight, no conference professional can fully understand or close the complexity gap.

Too many conference planning teams have reduced attendees to a number and have lost the human element. Attendees are human. And they sometimes make irrational decisions that are even opaque to themselves.

- Most marketers [including conference professionals] cling to assumptions about their customers' behavior that have been shaped by their organizational culture, the biases of the firm's managers, and, increasingly, the vast but imperfect data stream

ences — anthropology, sociology, political science and philosophy — along with traditional linear data collection.

Looking at the conscious and subconscious motivations of your target market can give you insights on how to design and deliver better meeting experiences. These human science tools can be extremely powerful when addressing different contexts, new target markets or new generations of attendees.

At the core of these human science tools lies the practice of phenomenology: the study of how people experience life, say Madsbjerg and Rasmussen.

For example, traditional measurement of inputs and outputs can tell Starbucks how many cups of coffee its customers will drink in a day. Phenomenology reveals how those customers perceive the coffee experience.

Here are two examples from Madsberg and Rasumussen:

- Starbucks has famously leveraged its understanding of the phenomenology of coffee, profiting from customers' willingness to pay a premium for the often subtle and complex Starbucks



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“Too many conference planning teams have **reduced attendees to a number** and have **lost the human element.**”

experience — the hip baristas, the community of telecommuters, the crafted playlists — as distinct from the coffee itself.

- Consider how the Lego Group used phenomenology to understand its customers' deepest motivations. Eight years ago Lego had lost touch with its core customers and was bleeding cash; today it's one of the largest and most respected toy makers in the world, the result of a remarkable turnaround driven in part by its commitment to sensemaking.

tors? Why are our attendees not walking the show floor? Why don't they want to meet with our exhibitors?

Conference Problem: How can we create a premium conference with value-adds?

Phenomenon: What is a premium conference experience? And what are value-adds to that conference experience?

Reframing the conference challenge as a phenomenon is the first step in looking at your conference problems through the human sciences. Stay tuned (in a future column or at www.velvetchainsaw.com) for the next steps to continue using the human science tools when analyzing your conference challenges.

What are some other ways to reframe common conference challenges as phenomena? How would you describe a premium conference experience? Send your comments to Jeff Hurt at jhurt@velvetchainsaw.com.

This article first appeared on Velvet Chainsaw's Mid-course Corrections.

Reframing Conference Challenges as Phenomena

Reframing your conference challenges as phenomena requires shifting the thinking from inside out (how the conference organizer perceives the problem) to outside in (how the attendee perceives the problem.)

Consider these examples:

Conference Problem: How do we stop our exhibitor churn?

Phenomenon: How do our attendees experience our exhibi-



Jeff Hurt

is executive vice president, education and engagement, Velvet Chainsaw Consulting, and is based in Dallas, Texas. Velvet Chainsaw Consulting exclusively services companies and associations with their annual meetings, conferences, education and events. They also help technology, service and membership organizations establish and execute plans and processes that result in improved business results. Hurt has worked in the events/nonprofit arena for more than 20 years including Keep America Beautiful as a consultant/trainer/writer; Keep Texas Beautiful as education coordinator; professional development manager for Meeting Professionals International; professional development manager for Promotional Products Association

International; and director of education and events for the National Association of Dental Plans. Originally published by Jeff Hurt in "Velvet Chainsaw Midcourse Corrections." Contact Hurt at 214-886-3174 or jhurt@velvetchainsaw.com. www.velvetchainsaw.com



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SETTING SAIL

Discover the Whys and Wherefores of Meeting at Sea

By Maura Keller



(Above) Cruise specialist David Hartman helped orchestrate the CKO Kickboxing membership cruise aboard Royal Caribbean's Liberty of the Seas. (Right) Carnival Corporation will debut the fathom brand for "social impact travel" in April 2016 as travelers go to the Dominican Republic and work hands-on with local residents to improve communities in need.



Organizing a corporate retreat or offsite meeting? From the world's oceans to quaint fishing harbors to inland lakes to rolling rivers, there are plenty of uncharted waters and ports of call for groups to explore onboard cruise ships, sailing vessels, river longships and more. These vessels offer unique accommodations and amenities for your group to work some and play some. Adept at accommodating groups as small as 10 and as large as a few thousand, these full-service craft are a great way to make the next business meeting or event you plan, a truly memorable one.

Unique Venues

When you think about cruise lines, what comes to mind? Luxury travel,

certainly. Exotic ports of call, definitely. And the ships themselves: Huge, luxurious liners, with fine restaurants, pools, salons, fantastic nighttime entertainment, staff that attend to your every whim, allowing attendees to enjoy every event facet of their experience.

Recently Gregorio Palomino, CDMP, CEP, CMP, creative executive officer at CRE8AD8, partnered with a corporate planner at a Texas-based technology distributor to plan a meeting/incentive-based cruise for 2,400 attendees. In planning this meeting aboard Royal Caribbean's Allure of the Seas, Palomino needed to make it a two-part affair, with 1,200 attendees onboard one week, and the remaining 1,200 attendees attending the following week — each engaging in a five-day cruise to Nassau, two

private island stops and Cozumel. "This company wanted something different than the typical hotel or tourist destination," Palomino says. "They wanted to expand their options beyond the land."

One of the great advantages of hosting a meeting at sea is that ships mostly provide all-inclusive options for corporate events — everything you could want has been attended to, and nothing has been overlooked. These vessels also are equipped with some of the most advanced audio-visual equipment, which can be utilized for events and meetings onboard.

Palomino utilized the cruise ship's onboard meeting space for his large group.

"The cruise line is great at helping with the space needed, but if your group is larger than 100, you'll always want

your own planner to be with you as the cruise line may not provide a dedicated event manager throughout the cruise," Palomino says. Royal Caribbean's Allure of the Seas offered six usable meeting/breakout spaces, plus a restaurant, theater and general areas that could be privatized.

"Since the entire company was coming on board the first or second week, we had two chances to modify and execute the events," Palomino says. "Some of the space where it was more of a general session, we used the theater in waves and then broke out to the other meeting spaces for more specific topics on each person's role in the company."

According to Palomino, some of the unique attributes of hosting a meeting or event aboard a vessel is that all entertainment and dining is included, reducing the cost and need for additional entertainment options.

"The ship met needs on various levels," Palomino says. "We needed private dining, group dining, activities, meeting space, plenty of balcony cabins and suites, plus the ability to get us the same program in back-to-back weeks. The ship offered us many concessions such as 24/7 dining options and beverage packages. The ship also had enough activities for at least 1,500 at any given time, so no one was going to miss a thing."

There are hundreds of reasons to have a meeting at sea, but one of the biggest

is that you can focus on the meeting itself and not the transport, entertainment, meal options and other factors that detract from the purpose.

"The cost is comparable to doing something on land as it can cost anywhere from \$1,000–\$3,500 per person," Palomino says. "This ship was more accommodating for this size group. Each cruise line offers something different. There's no wrong choice, but every ship may or may not be the best fit for a group."

Ann Sedgwick, Carnival Cruise Line's divisional vice president of charter, corporate and incentive sales, agrees. Because so much is already included in a

"Going out to sail is a bonding experience similar to going on a road trip. When you're sharing a limited space with the same person for several hours, you're bound to learn a thing or two about them."



Jessica Greenwalt, CIO and Co-founder CrowdMed, San Francisco, CA

cruise, ease of planning and the tremendous value are among the many benefits of hosting corporate meetings and incentives onboard.

"Planners should remember that the largest costs of a meeting such as accommodations, meals, meeting rooms and AV equipment are already included in the price of a cruise," Sedgwick says. "In addition to having rooms, meals and activities readily available, being at sea makes the experience even more memorable for the participants."



CrowdMed attendees connected and appreciated the departure from an ordinary business meeting.

According to Andrea Giraldo, manager of special events at CruiseOne & Cruises Inc., inclusiveness of cruise line pricing, where meals and most entertainment is included in the booking price creates a

streamlined cost for attendees. "Additionally, built-in excursions and entertainment options create great opportunities for teambuilding and networking events, to add a more engaging aspect to any event onboard," Giraldo says.

Carnival works very closely with meeting planners in determining the specific event needs, and then they customize the event to make it productive and memorable.

"For example, we recently worked with a company that always had held an awards dinner. While this is a very common request, we suggested an awards reception ceremony followed by the gala dinner," Sedgwick says. "They loved it, and so did their attendees. It allowed for them to really upgrade the overall experience and make the recipients feel even more special than they already did."

Going Big, Going Small

While cruise ships are exceptional venues, some planners need smaller vessels to meet the needs of attendees. Jessica Greenwalt, CIO and co-founder of CrowdMed, a platform that solicits the wisdom of the public at large



The Top Sail Lounge on the MSC Yacht Club — a unique “ship within a ship” concept.

to solve difficult medical cases online, recently hosted a meeting aboard a 35-foot sailboat.

“We invited other health tech founders and tech experts with experience in building partnerships,” Greenwalt says. “Since we’re constantly working on partnerships, we wanted to learn from these folks. Rather than organizing one-on-one meetings with everyone, we thought it would be nice to bring everyone together and sail around the bay.”

Greenwalt says that by bringing everyone together at once — rather than arranging individual lunches, dinners

with the same person for several hours, you’re bound to learn a thing or two about them. Everyone who went on our sailing trip loved it. We made valuable connections and got a lot of great advice. Our guests appreciated our departure from an ordinary business meeting.”

David Hartman, meeting and incentive travel specialist at Key Largo, Florida-based Cruise Planners, frequently uses cruise ships for many of his corporate clients for conventions, incentives, regional events and client/member appreciation. Hartman recently worked with planners at CKO to orchestrate an

“Small to medium-size meeting groups are ideal for most cruise ships. Large groups require a balancing act between ships with available space and blocking the space for enough hours to satisfy the client.”

David Hartman, Travel Specialist
Cruise Planners, Key Largo, FL



and drinks — they were able to have discussions with a group and solve problems as a group.

“On a beautiful day, sailing is a relaxing experience that loosens everyone up and makes people feel comfortable to share deeper thoughts on a topic than they would have in another environment,” Greenwalt says. “Boat meetings tend to be longer than other meetings, which can be both a benefit and a drawback. Going out to sail is a bonding experience similar to going on a road trip. When you’re sharing a limited space

event for the company’s kickboxing membership cruise aboard Royal Caribbean’s Liberty of the Seas.

“The CKO cruise is a membership trip where local gym members, gym owners and parent company executives have a chance to spend time together and share their passion for kickboxing,” Hartman says. CKO Kickboxing is a franchise brand with more than 50 locations in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut areas.

For Hartman, when working with corporate planners who are interested

in cruise ships, the itinerary and type of ship are critical.

“The best and newest ships travel on seven-night cruises or longer, which is often too long for most corporate meeting clients,” Hartman says. “Shorter itineraries are available, but then sufficient meeting space is a concern and needs to be verified prior to booking.”

The size of the group also is a key factor. Cruise ships are not for all groups depending on the size and timing of meeting space required.

“Small to medium-size meeting groups are ideal for most cruise ships,” Hartman says. “Large groups require a balancing act between ships with available space and blocking the space for enough hours to satisfy the client. Most larger meeting spaces on cruise ships are also public venues, and meeting groups need to be flexible with their meeting time request and total hours.”

Karen Shackman, president of Shackman Associates in New York, says that in a company’s quest to find new and unusual venues to hold meetings and events, an ocean cruise or even a river journey aboard a vessel is definitely an out-of-the-box option.

“For meetings, groups are given their own specific areas, and generally the meeting and food and beverage component complement each other in terms of location,” Shackman says. “For events, a cruise provides a unique opportunity for guests to enjoy both the outside and the inside of the ship.

Different levels of the vessel can play to different themes for the event, and there is an opportunity for those who wish to enjoy what the destination has to offer.”

Shackman recently orchestrated a 10-boat flotilla on the Hudson River for a destination meeting group that ended up at the Statue of Liberty, where attendees were treated to an amazing fireworks show. They also organized a cruise from lower Manhattan to Liberty State Park, which included character performers reenacting life as immigrants coming to Ellis Island.

“There are several vessels in New York which we have used as creative alternatives for standard meetings, where there is also a higher networking requirement — so that the focus is not only on the meeting at hand, but an opportunity for guests to enjoy some highlights of the destination,” Shackman says. “In New York City, we generally propose a dinner or lunch cruise to every client. We believe it is important for clients to appreciate our city from all perspectives — and a perspective from the water is an important one for an appreciation of the scope and majesty of the city.”

For her clients, Shackman incorporates networking components into meetings at sea — so that the focus is not only on the meeting at hand, but also is an opportunity for guests to enjoy some highlights of the destination while getting to know other attendees.

Koncept Events partner, Hillary Smith, CMP, CSEP, says that hosting a meeting at sea forces a group to stay focused and stay together. Having no distractions and no escape can sometimes increase the interaction and networking value.

“The space challenges can also be used as an opportunity to shake up a stale,



Norwegian Cruise Line

predictable agenda and create more engaging and intimate meeting environments,” Smith says.

Anthony Ragucci, director of events for Entertainment Cruises, Boston division, hosts many national conferences on ships every year. These events are typically full-ship charters, and they enable the client to customize their cruise times, menu, bar and décor.

“With most full-ship charters, clients choose signature food station menus. When clients host private full-ship charter events, they also receive two forms

of live entertainment, several bars for guests to enjoy their favorite cocktail and of course, the best views of Boston,” Ragucci says. “We host numerous meetings every year and corporate meeting business is a primary focus of ours.”

Fly-Cruise Combo

Cruises are seen as first-class, all-inclusive journeys for corporate and incentive groups, and today’s fly-cruise itineraries make planning far simpler than in years past. In addition, many of today’s cruise companies are making significant strides in ensuring the travel aspect of cruising is streamlined and stress-free. They recognize the value of having your own sanctuary at sea with inclusive luxury amenities. One type of vessel attracting interest within the corporate meeting and incentive channel is the MSC Yacht Club — offering a unique “ship within a ship” concept. According to Beth Lindsley Elwood, manager of North America corporate and incentive sales at MSC Cruises, the MSC Yacht Club is an exclusive, private enclave of 69 butler-serviced suites located forward on the ship, on the upper most decks, which offer the best views.

“With key-card access only, guests enjoy VIP accommodations and service with 24-hour concierge service, a private restaurant, pool, pool bar/buffet area and lounge,” Lindsley Elwood says. “Beverages are included in all MSC Yacht Club areas. This is perfect for including a group of MSC Yacht Club suites or even chartering all 69 suites for complete exclusivity and privacy.”

Offering the wow factor is paramount for MSC Yacht Club and other cruise companies.

In fact, meeting the unique needs of corporate clients is the focus of Bruce Setloff, vice president of global charter sales and special projects at Crystal Cruises.

Recently Setloff worked with a corporation to help plan a combined meeting and reward incentive trip for the top



Celebrity Cruises

sales leaders from a European automaker. This well-known luxury automaker chartered the entire Crystal cruise ship just to have the exclusive rights to the programming and onboard operation of the vessel.

“I noticed a feeling onboard that the guests were really excited to know every facet of this company’s new model automobile and noted everyone could not wait to show up for all of the meetings held onboard,” Setloff says. “The guests walked around the ship with a great sense of being proud to work for a company that always went the extra mile for them and did not do the same old thing every year. This was really a great marriage of a company not only having the perfect meeting but also a perfect venue to host it.”

Unique Challenges

To best work with the cruise line in securing meeting and event space, an event planner should consider the attendees of their group, the scope of the meeting they are planning and identify the most suitable options for networking or excursion events.

Of course, hosting a meeting or event onboard a vessel offers its own set of challenges — the primary concern being the lack of sufficient Internet access. However, many cruise lines are addressing this issue. For example, Carnival Cruise Lines recently announced its new social media Internet packages are available on more than half of the line’s ships with fleetwide implementation scheduled by the first quarter of 2016.

From emails and texts to tweets and Instagram posts, travelers want to digitally share and stay connected while onboard. While the perception may be



Oceania Cruises

that a cruise does not offer a chance to be accessible, the Cruise Lines International Association reveals that cruise lines have introduced a host of Wi-Fi capabilities and offerings on cruise ships making it easier than ever before to stay connected at sea.

The size of the group and purpose of the trip are key elements in selecting the right kind of vessel for a meeting. If your group is looking for a party, there are many options. However, there also are yachts available for rent to smaller groups looking for a unique corporate retreat.

As Shackman explains, the idea of hosting a meeting or event on water also can vary because some yachts and boats can accommodate incentive travel or brainstorming groups, and others are ideal for breakout sessions for 10 or fewer executives. Also, if groups want to be on the water in colder weather, some vessels provide huge windows so anyone can get great views from the warm interior.

When organizing a vessel-based meeting or event, departure port and the duration are both important but for many groups, they also need to be creative in programming and space usage. “For example, there isn’t a hotel pool or grand lawn that can accommodate the welcome reception, so meal functions must be approached with a fresh eye and open mind,” Smith says.

And once onboard a cruise ship, event planners need to have everything for their event with them, as options for last-minute additions can be a challenge.

“This can be easily overcome with detailed planning leading up to the event and working with a travel professional and the cruise line staff to determine what a group will need onboard,” Giraldo says. “There are many aspects of cruise line events to determine what cruise line and what ship are right for a group to host their meeting onboard, from cruise itinerary and length of sailing, to entertainment onboard.”

On larger vessels or longer cruises, you also can create your own activities on the ship, with the help of the cruise director who has done numerous events and come up with creative ways to utilize the ship.

“Whether it’s a group of 50 or 5,000, we’ve done them all,” Palomino says. “Most ships have the ability to do special things for groups depending on the event management company you select. It’s all about relationships.”

New & Noteworthy

Planners seeking a more immersive and memorable experience in the Caribbean for their groups will be pleased to hear that Celebrity Cruises’ new “Evenings Around the World” shore excursions are designed to help groups experience



Regent Seven Seas Cruises

the Caribbean — instead of just seeing it. At least three dozen Caribbean cruises will have access to more than a dozen new nighttime activities and events such as bonfires, live music, boat parties, wine-tastings and more.

Carnival Corporation recently launched a new brand called fathom, defining a new travel category dubbed “social impact travel,” which will offer consumers authentic, meaningful, impactful travel experiences to work alongside locals as they tackle community needs. What sets fathom apart is the long-term, systematic partnership approach with its partner countries paired with the unique business model that allows for sustained impact and lasting development. Beginning in April 2016, fathom will embark on seven-day voyages from PortMiami aboard the MVAonia, a 710-passenger vessel redeployed from Carnival Corporation’s P&O Cruises (UK) for the start-up of the new operation.

Norwegian Cruise Line recently announced exciting and exotic new itineraries for the brand’s fall/winter 2016/2017 deployment, including cruises to Asia onboard Norwegian Star, with itineraries departing from Istanbul, Dubai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Sydney and Auckland — marking the line’s return to the Asia and Australia regions for the first time since 2001–2002 and first-ever visits to the Gulf and India.

Renowned for elite culinary enrichment programs, Oceania Cruises will continue to set the bar high in 2016, as it announces the upcoming launch of Culinary Creations Land Tours. The expanded collection of tours will be available beginning spring 2016 in parts of Europe and South America. The events will take place on select cruises aboard the Nautica, Marina, Riviera and Sirena.

Regent Seven Seas Cruises tailors every aspect of a corporate meeting or event, recognizing customization and flexibility is paramount. Customized charters about Regent Cruises including complete customization of your program and itinerary, unlimited branding opportunities, facilities to host team-building activities and events, and tailored shore excursions. **C&IT**



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Is Your Meeting Really Green?

Tech Companies Often Lead the Way in Eco-Responsible Practices

By Patrick Simms

Corporate planners looking for exemplars in the area of green meetings may find quite a few in the technology sector. Many high-tech companies are ahead of the curve on sustainability, and when one wants to take the initiative to the next level, why not take a few tips from meetings that go far beyond recycling and eschewing bottled water? Oftentimes, these very eco-conscious events are not merely

the brainchildren of individual meeting planners, but the products of companies whose core values include a respect for the environment.

One case in point is VMware, a cloud and visualization software company. Sustainability is “the way we do business,” states Eve Schmitt, senior manager of global sourcing for meetings and travel. “For instance, in 2007 we built our headquarters in Palo Alto, California,

from the ground up, and recycling, reclamation, composting, etc. (at the building) was a major focus with our original CEO. Our tagline at one time was ‘Saving Energy, Saving People, Saving the Planet.’” That kind of corporate culture certainly supports a planner who wants to create the greenest events possible. “My focus within the organization has always been (sustainability) in our temporary environment that we hold meetings

in, and it’s wonderful when you have that buy-in from the executive level.”

A Window on Your Brand

In the case of San Rafael, California-based Autodesk Inc., the company’s products have a connection to sustainability, lending even more support to the green meetings initiative. If the products themselves “promote” sustainability, then meetings and events, particularly customer-facing ones, should be a “window to your brand,” in the words of Laura Bell Way, senior manager, global customer events, field marketing, industry strategy and marketing. “Our software helps buildings be designed and managed in a way that is less taxing on the environment. So for us it’s an easy fit to drive for sustainability in our events.”

The high proportion of millennials in many high-tech firms, as well as the desire to attract young talent, also can drive a focus on sustainability. “I would say that younger employees coming into Oracle are to some degree quicker to recognize that we’re (adopting sustainable practices),” observes Paul Salinger, vice president, marketing at Redwood City, California-based Oracle. “And as Gen Y come into the industry, I think you’ll start to see more and more (efforts in sustainability) because it’s a value that

aligns with the way they’re going to need to see the world. It’s becoming a bigger issue for them around climate change, diminishing resources and so on.”

Supplier Alignment

Of course, green meetings are not exclusively driven by the host company and its values; supplier partners must align with those values as well. To that end, a major component of the effort to optimize sustainability is to bring business, as much as possible, to eco-minded cities, convention centers, hotels, caterers and so forth. For Schmitt, one of the initial questions to ask when considering a site is, “Does the destination have a good sustainability structure in place?” That not only includes aspects of the meeting facilities, such as garbage diversion rates, and energy and water efficiency, but the layout of the city. “Is it a walkable location where we’re not going to be using a lot of transportation?” Schmitt asks.

This is a factor that is often overlooked by planners interested in sustainability, notes Nancy Zavada, principal of Portland, Oregon-based MeetGreen. “Look at your meeting neighborhood: Are the meeting venue and accommodations close to each other? Are there restaurants and shops close by, so at-

Eve Schmitt
Senior Global Sourcing Manager
Meeting and Vendor Relations
VMware
San Francisco, CA



“Our tagline at one time was ‘Saving Energy, Saving People, Saving the Planet.’ My focus within the organization has always been (sustainability) in our temporary environment that we hold meetings in, and it’s wonderful when you have that buy-in from the executive level.”



tendees can walk or at least take mass transportation?” The more convenient it is to commute in these greener ways, the less tempted attendees will be to take cabs or rent cars.

When it comes to the sustainability of hotel partners, some aspects will be quite evident to the average guest, such as the presence of blue recycling bins in guest rooms, or cards in the bathrooms offering guests the opportunity to reuse their towels the next day without house-keeping washing the towels.

But then there are many “behind the scenes” sustainability efforts planners can inquire about, Schmitt notes. For example: “Is there an energy- and wa-

Oracle works in concert with MeetGreen and the Moscone Center to continually improve and track waste management strategies for its OpenWorld conference.

ter-efficient washing machine used by the housekeepers? What are the cleaning chemicals that the housekeepers are using? Is the hotel involved in Clean the World (an organization that recycles and donates soap and shampoo used by the hospitality industry)? Does the hotel use solar or wind energy? Are they doing everything they can do to make sure they're reducing the use of paper?"

Evaluating Hotels

Admittedly, trying to assess a hotel's green status in such depth can be "overwhelming when you look at all the criteria involved," Schmitt says. Thus, VMware deploys a short form at the RFP stage that includes questions about any credentials the property may have (e.g., LEED, Green Seal, state green lodging designations) that address numerous green features and practices. A very good sign is when a hotelier volunteers such information before a planner inquires, as that emphasizes their commitment to green meetings. "As a supplier, tell us even though we don't ask, and if it's your standard process, be proud of it," says Schmitt.

Another good sign is an onsite sustainability officer. The Hilton San Francisco Union Square, where VMware regularly hosts events, employs such an individual, and "we engage with her quite a bit at the very beginning."

There is also quite a bit of engagement with the catering department to optimize sustainability. It's not merely a

Laura Bell Way
Senior Manager, Global Customer Events
Field Marketing, Industry Strategy
and Marketing
Autodesk Inc.
San Rafael, CA



"Our software helps buildings be designed and managed in a way that is less taxing on the environment. So for us it's an easy fit to drive for sustainability in our events."

matter of using locally sourced, seasonal foods and avoiding bottled or canned beverages; many subtleties are involved. "We want nothing pre-poured," says Schmitt. "And glass should be inverted, not facing up. When glasses are facing up, they have to wash them again regardless of whether or not they're used, but if they are inverted, they don't have to rewash them."

And wherever possible, VMware

tries to ensure that excess food can be donated, for example by opting for pre-wrapped foods instead of items exposed on a buffet that must be discarded if not consumed. In the same vein, the company looks to donate any non-digital signage used to local schools for art projects.

The Hilton San Francisco Union Square not only supports VMware in these efforts, but also continually refines its own eco-conscious features. Last September, for example, the hotel installed Hydration Stations that provide access to high-quality water from the pristine snowmelt in Hetch Hetchy Reservoir in Yosemite National Park. Stations were installed in each of the three towers of the hotel as well as the health club, and water bottles were removed from all standard guest rooms. Each hydration station has a small counter in the upper right corner, indicating how many plastic bottles are eliminated from landfill.

Planner Guidance

While circumstances sometimes do not allow for a certain sustainable practice to be implemented, it's important that the planner at least make the effort by raising the issue with the supplier. For large corporations with many meeting planners, conveying that importance is an initiative unto itself. With assistance from MeetGreen, Autodesk is in the process of improving the sustainability of its small to mid-sized meetings, of which there are approximately 500 an-



In 2014 San Francisco's Moscone Center, which hosts Oracle's OpenWorld conference, achieved ASTM/APEX for Venues, Level 1 Certification. (Above) Moscone's rooftop solar system; and one of many three-stream (compost, recycling and landfill) diversion stations.



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nally, and it is essential that all planners know what practices they should try to implement.

“We offer our planners a very simple program of questions to ask when they’re planning an event, and we leave it in their hands so they’re able to realize some effective sustainability practices even for small events,” Bell Way explains. “Some of our key questions are:

- Were alternative transportation methods encouraged?
- Was recycling of event materials requested of the venue?
- Were individual plastic water bottles eliminated from this event?
- Were name badges and table tags collected and recycled?
- Was the caterer asked to design menus that included local, organic and sustainable choices?

“So we’re not asking, did you succeed in these things? But did you bring up the question, was the venue asked? Because that empowers the planner to embrace sustainability and raises awareness of the requirements.”

Paul Salinger
Vice President, Marketing
Oracle
Redwood City, CA

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Autodesk ran a “summer camp” with monthly sessions that covered such questions for audiences of 20–30 stakeholders, and the sessions were recorded and made accessible on the company’s global intranet site.

Tracking Results

Apart from companywide participation, another aspect of a mature green meetings program is the tracking and reporting of the results. Oracle developed that aspect through a partnership with MeetGreen, which began just after Oracle OpenWorld 2007. “Before we engaged with MeetGreen we were doing what I would consider the basics, the low-hanging fruit,” Salinger says. “We started looking at reducing paper and recycling to some degree, and worked with Moscone Center on waste management methodologies. We were also looking at ways we could do signage more sustainably with reusable materials.”

The partnership with MeetGreen not only expanded these practices, but also led to the establishment of key performance indicators. “We started to think about how we could make bigger impacts each year and improve our score against their MeetGreen calculator year over year, and really engage our supply chain.”

The advantage of measurement is that it allows quantitative answers to questions such as, “How green is your meeting?” and “How green do you want your meeting to be?” The MeetGreen Calculator scores events against 10 sectors of the supply chain, including destination selection, meeting venue, accommodations, transportation, AV, F&B, exhibition production, communications and marketing, onsite office and offsets. It also quantifies the success of specific practices related to air quality, waste management, water conservation, energy efficiency and environmental purchases.

“In 2007 we were at 34 on the scale of 100 on the calculator, but we quickly shot up into the 60–65 percent score,” Salinger says. “We’ve kind of plateaued at around 90 for the last couple of years, and we’re at the point when we really are looking with a fine-tooth comb for the areas where we can improve in order to get above 90.”

The performance data is reported to all stakeholders, including management and stockholders, and posted on the Oracle OpenWorld site and *Oracle.com*. “I generally try to disseminate it across the industry, so the Green Meetings Industry Council gets a copy, and they typically post it on their website,” Salinger notes. “We think there are two aspects to that: 1. We want to be as transparent as possible so that other people can learn from what we’re doing; and 2. We want to create a community of best practices here in San Francisco. As a big company, we can leverage those best practices across our supply chain and across the venues and hotels that we use, and that allows other people coming in behind us to take advantage of (the results).”

Standards and Certifications

The calculator reflects criteria from both the APEX/ASTM Environmentally Sustainable Meeting Standards and the ISO 20121 standards. “APEX is really just a checklist for your meetings, while ISO is focused more on how you measure and track sustainability and report

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(Top left) Compostable, biodegradable serveware at The Westin Peachtree Plaza, Atlanta. (Left) The honeybee installation at Shangri-La Hotel, Toronto, provides home harvested honey. (Above) The Hilton Chicago's rooftop garden.

Continued from page 26

to your stakeholders. They complement each other very well,” Zavada explains. “We’re seeing much more interest from meeting group clients in the ISO standards right now, while APEX/ASTM are being more readily adopted by facilities, convention centers and cities. There are 10 sectors, and a hotel would only have to comply with one or two of those sectors to get certification. If a meeting planner or an event is going to do it, they would have to comply with all of them, and the CIC is not certifying meeting planners in that yet. And it’s awfully rigorous for a planner to pull off. We have some clients that are incredibly green, more on the association side, yet they haven’t gotten to APEX/ASTM Level 1 yet.”

Part of the reason more suppliers are getting APEX/ASTM certification is that more meeting planners are integrating the standards into their RFP process. “If we know we’re looking at a venue that’s already certified against the APEX standards, it makes it that much easier for us,” Salinger says. “We went to Moscone Center and asked them to go through that certification process, and it’s starting to have kind of a snowball effect as you’re starting to see more and more venues now getting certified at least at Level 1.”

Similarly, Autodesk’s standard RFP

asks whether a hotel has completed the APEX/ASTM Level 1 survey and references the World Travel & Tourism Council’s Hotel Carbon Measurement Initiative, a methodology for measuring and communicating a hotel’s carbon



Nancy Zavada
Principal
MeetGreen
Portland, OR

“We’re seeing much more interest from meeting group clients in the ISO standards right now, while APEX/ASTM are being more readily adopted by facilities, convention centers and cities.”

emissions. “In many cases we may not get that information back from the hotels, but we feel that by referencing the standards and starting the conversation that we guide our procurement process toward hotels and venues that are more aware and plugged into the measurement standards,” Bell Way says. Hotels that show a sufficient degree of sustainable features and practices get designated as Autodesk Green within the company’s SMMP. “So when our planners are viewing the hotels in the system they’ll see that additional recognition and can make that choice.”

Room for Improvement

Making the choice to “go green” with meetings and events is a key first step that generally leads to some positive results, but there always seems to be room to become greener. Even companies that hold exemplary green meetings continue to refine that sustainability, whether it’s Oracle moving into the 90s on the MeetGreen Calculator or Autodesk extending the green initiative into their small meetings. Schmitt characterizes the initiative as a “journey” over many years, one that is eased by partnering with the right suppliers.

Fortunately, the final destination need not be reached for the effort to bear fruit; much benefit to the environment is accrued along the way. **C&IT**



Credit: Hilton San Francisco Union Square

Last September the Hilton San Francisco Union Square installed Hydration Stations throughout the hotel and removed all water bottles from standard guest rooms.

Networking

“One thing we really tried to do this year was to get the interaction with both the VIPs and our vendors happening in different types of environments.”

Steve Borgquist, Executive Vice President, National Accounts
HPSI, Irvine, CA



Networking was the focus of HPSI's National Meeting & Tradeshow in Salt Lake City. In one activity, attendees selected three different hiking paths based on their level of proficiency, ending up at three different summits, respectively. Steve Borgquist, EVP national accounts (standing right, blue shirt no hat), says the hiking activity allowed the conversations to keep going and “corresponded with our theme, Race to the Summit.” EVP of sales Kirk Hess is pictured sitting in front, white hat.

Credit: Kirk Hess

By Patrick Simms

How Planners Design Events to Facilitate Connections

Training, strategizing, motivating, marketing. All of these are among the typical objectives of meetings and events. Networking among participants, on the other hand, often happens as a byproduct of the activities during the meeting. Attendees have opportunities to get to know each other at receptions, dinners, sessions, exhibit hours, city tours and so forth. But companies that truly appreciate the value of networking treat it as more than an afterthought, proactively fostering introductions and relationship building among attendees.

The value of networking is clear across different types of meetings: National sales meetings, for example, will often convene representatives who have not had much or any face-to-face interaction. Client-facing meetings clearly benefit from host company representatives and potential clients developing a rapport. And even peer-to-peer networking among external attendees can benefit the host company, insofar as attendees will realize the company has created the environment for those connections to be made.

“We definitely understand the value of peer-to-peer networking, and if we can be the host to those opportunities, it typically has a ‘halo effect’ for us,” notes Karen Zunkowski, director, glob-

al events at Landesk, a South Jordan, Utah-based software company. With this principle in mind, Landesk is proactive about facilitating networking at its user groups and other events. Indeed, one should not assume that networking

we come in contact with, to interact a little bit.”

Networking-Focused Meetings

A fine example of prioritizing networking in the design of a meeting comes from the HPSI's four-day National Meeting & Tradeshow, most recently held in August at The Grand America Hotel in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Irvine, California-based healthcare group purchasing organization welcomed about 500 attendees to the event, including exhibitors, customers and HPSI representatives.

Kathryn Jurgensen, CEO of Raleigh, North Carolina-based Premier Meetings & Recognition, planned the event, and in her experience, the overt emphasis on networking was uncommon. “Usually companies try to create networking but they act like they're not; it's kind of under the rug. But this year HPSI unabashedly made it all about networking.” The approach worked. “The thing that most of us noticed right away, during days one and two, is that making it all about networking turned out to be a really powerful strategy, because people were in great moods

Kathryn Jurgensen
CEO
Premier Meetings &
Recognition
Raleigh, NC



“Making it all about networking turned out to be a really powerful strategy, because people were in great moods and almost forgot that they were really working.”

will happen automatically in the context of a meeting. “It doesn't always come naturally” to them, she observes. “You do kind of have to encourage the typical IT manager, the core delegate that

Helping Attendees Build Their Network



Unlike more high-intensity outdoor activities, hiking allows one-on-one interactions. “As they went through the aspen groves it got prettier and prettier and the conversations kept going,” says Kirk Hess, HPSI executive vice president of sales.

and almost forgot that they were really working.

“It produced this almost perfect synthesis of camaraderie and business opportunities, so nobody felt odd about approaching somebody. I’ve gotten feedback from sponsors, VIPs and employees on the event, and I’ve never had this many compliments on a meeting.”

Part of the strategy was to limit both the number of vendors attending and the amount of training sessions for HPSI salespeople. As to the first, “we used to have about 120 vendors during the three-hour period (of the trade show), but the opportunities to spend good, quality time with our vendors significantly diminished,” explained Kirk Hess, executive vice president, sales with HPSI. “So we determined our top vendors and limited it to 60 for the morning trade show, 60 for the afternoon. That way our vendors got quality time with our sales folks, and they were able to really talk about the product offering as well as building that relationship. There were other networking opportunities for vendors who didn’t make the cutoff, such as webinars and conference calls.”

As to the training sessions, “in the past, our four days would have been filled with training,” says Hess, “not just

at the trade show but then at breakout sessions where they’re meeting with vendors and getting training. This year, we really trusted our folks: ‘We’re giving you a three-hour block of time now, please fill it and use the vendors that are onsite and the VIP customers to build

“We strategically made sure we put together our VIPs, vendor partners and ourselves with the right people, so the (golf) foursomes were all paired based on business needs.”

Kirk Hess
Executive Vice President, Sales
HPSI
Irvine, CA

those relationships.’ Fortunately, they really came through and did just that.”

But HPSI and Premier Meetings & Recognition did much more than simply allot more time for networking. “One thing we really tried to do this year was to get the interaction with both the VIPs

and our vendors happening in different types of environments,” notes Steve Borgquist, executive vice president, national accounts with HPSI.

Creating varied opportunities for networking is indeed one of the psychological keys to fostering it successfully. Whether or not a person becomes more outgoing among his or her fellow attendees can depend on the setting and situation. So, it makes sense to offer as many different networking environments as possible during the meeting.

Receptions and Cocktail Parties

Receptions and cocktail parties are typically the first that come to mind as networking vehicles. However, it often happens that only those who are naturally inclined to making new connections will do so, and the goal is to get everyone conversing with those outside their familiar circle of acquaintances. Host-company representatives can help to facilitate that by making introductions. Sales reps, for example, can introduce clients to each other, or even organize gatherings that are likely to lead to new connections. “Oftentimes sales reps will host their customers after our evening event and sometimes combine their customers because they know they have similar interests or challenges that they’re working on,” says Zunkowski.

One limitation to receptions and cocktail parties, she points out, is C-level executives who might not perceive much value in attending them. And these are just the individuals that many attendees will want to connect with. “Depending on who they are, they may go for a while for the food and drinks and then leave unless there’s something compelling to hold them there,” she explains.

“Typically there would need to be a specific activity they want to participate in to draw them to the event, or the opportunity to speak with people they wouldn’t normally have access to, whether it be industry experts or even their peers at perhaps some higher-profile companies. So an ordinary cocktail reception might not be enough of a pull (for top executives),” she says.

Dinner Seating

Banquets, dine-arounds and the like are another classic venue for networking, but here the interaction often will be limited by the seating arrangement. First, people tend to sit with those they know: “That’s been a problem with our sponsors in the past,” says Jurgensen. “All nine people from one sponsor company will sit together. We had to break them up.” Second, diners are usually limited in potential connections to those near them at the table. To some extent, this problem can be ameliorated by eschewing long banquet tables in favor of smaller round tables. “Sometimes customers are here, and your vendors and sponsors are at the far end of the table, and the opportunity to interact really doesn’t happen,” Hess notes. “So instead of having them at the long rectangular table, which is often the case in big restaurants, we’re there at the Grand America and in round tables with 12 (attendees per table), where everyone can talk and participate.”

Jurgensen further improved the interaction by creating a free-flowing dining experience where participants did not feel compelled to stay in their seats: “Usually we’ll have a dinner in the ballroom with a screen and slideshow, and we use the foyers for cocktails. This year I put tall cocktail tables in the ballroom with bars in the back. There was no structure, no awards given out and no slideshow. So instead of sitting at a table and only talking to people at their right and left, they kept moving around and

sat down when they wanted to. It brokered introductions.”

Unusual F&B Settings

As a seasoned planner, Jurgensen points out that “We all know we can sit at a table of 10, and there is not a lot of opening up.” An unusual dining experience, however, can serve as a conversation starter among attendees. To achieve that effect, a planner may need to think beyond the typical restaurant or ballroom environment.

For example, Teri Abram, president of Dallas, Texas-based EventLink International, once took a group of top brokers and leadership from a commercial real estate company to a ranch accessible to the JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa. “We had a good ol’ Southern barbecue where the executives rode up on horses to greet everyone,” Abram recalls. “We sat everyone in picnic-style tables and had a country-western band.” The express goal of the event was to get everyone relaxed, “talking to each other and laughing,” she says. And that includes attendees who would not be very extroverted in the typical dining situation.

Special Activities

Receptions and dinners are passive networking environments in that attendees need do no more than enjoy the F&B if they choose. Some guests, however, may be more apt to strike up con-



Karen Zunkowski
Director, Global Events
Landesk
South Jordan, UT

“We definitely understand the value of peer-to-peer networking, and if we can be the host to those opportunities, it typically has a ‘halo effect’ for us.”

versation where there is a mutual activity they can discuss. Activities of various sorts are thus popular as networking mediums, but care should be taken in selecting one that allows for conversation. Those that are very strenuous or otherwise immersive, while sometimes good for teambuilding, are not ideal for building rapport among a group.

“For some of my Hawaii programs, for example, they want everybody to snorkel,” says Jurgensen. “Well, you’re not talking to anybody when you’re snorkeling. When you’re parasailing, you’re not talking to anybody — and there’s a maximum exposure for embarrassment.”

In contrast, hiking usually does not



Software company Landesk’s conferences offer a variety of activities to facilitate quality networking.

challenge attendees enough where they become more focused on the activity than each other. At HPSI's National Meeting & Tradeshow, attendees could select from three different hiking paths surrounding the Grand America Hotel, based on their level of proficiency, and they would end up at three different summits, respectively.

"Even if they didn't make it to the summit, they got up to the Twin Lakes. And there were folks that were planning on just doing the walk around the lake that had no hills, but as they went through the aspen groves it got prettier and prettier and the conversations kept going," Hess relates.

"The activity also corresponded with our theme, Race to the Summit," Borgquist adds. "Every year, our purchasing consultants that build the most profitability and revenue in their territory receive a Summit Award."

Competition

Activities with an element of (good-natured) competition tend to get participants more emotionally involved. As such, they can be even better icebreakers than activities missing that element. Playing golf in foursomes is a classic example, and the HPSI meeting added that to its various networking opportunities. "Not all of our vendors went on the hike, because it may not have suited them," says Hess, "but it seems everyone in our industry likes to golf. We had about 145 participants." Borgquist notes, "We strategically made sure we put together our VIPs, vendor partners and ourselves with the right people, so the foursomes were all paired based on business needs."

There are, of course, many other competitive options besides golf, and group demographics should be the guiding factor in choosing among them. Abram's commercial real estate client's upcoming event at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis is instructive in this regard. The event will stress networking between the leaders of the client company and another real estate firm it is merging with. "The purpose is to integrate the

two teams and figure out how they are going to work together moving forward, and just to get them to have some camaraderie, since they were formerly competing," Abram explains. "Basically, 650 people are going to be hand-selected to attend this event with the goal of them getting to know one another."

It was desirable to include some competitive activities at the venue for guests, since "commercial real estate reps are typically very competitive." But at the same time, "they didn't want to force any participation for attendees that are so high-level," says Abram. "So we're set-



Teri Abram
President
EventLink International
Dallas, TX

"On 99 percent of our post-event surveys, attendees ask for more networking."

ting up somewhat of a competition, but not a forced competition. On the field, we'll have golf putting and then up on the concourse we'll have the speedway simulators, bocce ball and video games. Whether they do well or not, they'll get a point for participation and more points if they do better, and the points are going to keep scoring on the jumbotron. What we hope is that as they start seeing the scores building, they're going to want to start participating and meet their other team members."

A networking event that Abram arranged for a food distributor also included a competitive game presented in a casual way. "They wanted to have their initial networking event in a ballroom, so we created trading cards where each attendee's photo was on the card" along with information based on some fun questions asked of them during

registration. "For example, what's your favorite food or what's something embarrassing that happened to you? And during the event they were encouraged to go through and exchange cards, and then there was a competition as to how many cards you collected from other attendees," she relates. "For this group it worked perfectly; they were mingling and exchanging cards."

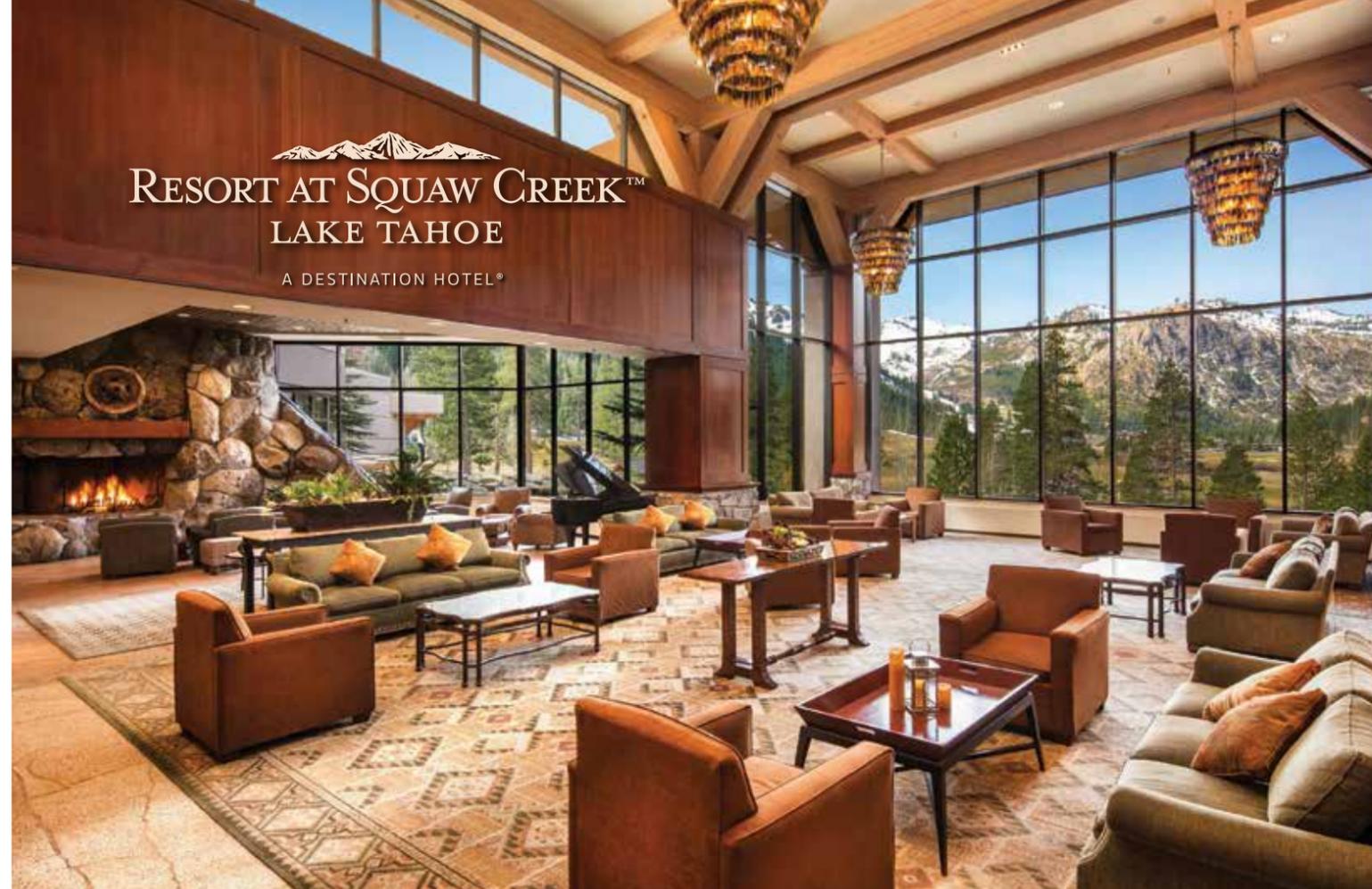
CSR and Networking

Arguably, nothing instills a feeling of closeness more than a common cause, and closeness begets conversation. "A philanthropic activity or effort that you're doing in conjunction with the conference has a tendency to draw people into conversations," Zunkowski observes. It could be, for example, providing the opportunity to put together food packs for a local food drive during registration. "We've also invited attendees pre or post to help volunteer to do simple IT tech installations at a local school, or to collect school supplies for local districts," she says.

Assessing the Success of Networking Events

Networking activity at a meeting is not easy to quantify. Deals closed with new clients in attendance do imply new connections, but the converse does not hold: Many new, valuable connections can be made that do not translate (in an obvious way) to sales for the host company, especially in the case of client-to-client connections or those among internal attendees.

"We also want to measure what we call the viable relationships," says Jurgensen. "We all go to meetings and meet people we never see again; we want to see who's staying in touch, who's referring. Are people getting new referrals back from the meeting?" To this end, post-event surveys can include questions about new connections made. But the overall value of networking to attendees is not in question: Abram notes a very telling response across the many surveys she has sent out: "On 99 percent of our post-event surveys, attendees ask for more networking." **C&IT**



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The Mighty Las Vegas!

Groups Return Year After Year to the No. 1 Trade Show City for Brand New Experiences Each Time

By Derek Reveron

The mighty Las Vegas meetings and events engine keeps humming along for a number of reasons: It offers a seemingly endless variety of luxurious mega resorts that are destinations unto themselves. Las Vegas continues to open new resorts while improving and expanding existing properties. Meanwhile, the city is adding several new non-resort attractions. As a result, Las Vegas offers what few other destinations in the world can — the opportunity for groups to return

year after year and have totally new experiences each time.

That's a big reason why, in 2014, Las Vegas was the No.1 trade show destination for the 21st consecutive year, according to the *Trade Show News Network's* "2014 TSNN Top 250 Trade Shows in the United States" list. Another banner performance is expected this year thanks partly to 12 new and rotating conventions and trade shows that will draw a combined 242,000 attendees in 2015.

This year is also shaping up as a strong one for corporate meetings, including those that repeatedly return to Las Vegas such as a Fortune 500 consumer products business that met in July 2015 at Aria Resort & Casino. The seven-day combination meeting and incentive included 2,400 salespeople, employees and customers.

First Meeting at Aria

It was the first time the group met at Aria following meet-

ings in previous years at other Las Vegas properties. "Las Vegas has a plethora of hotel options, but we narrowed it down to Aria and one other hotel," says the company's meeting planner. "We selected Aria because of its level of service and the Aria Convention Center."

The planner was impressed by the uniqueness of the Aria Convention Center, a three-story, 300,000-sf facility. "It's like no other," she says. "It's a beautiful, functioning space. The rooms are easy to get to. There is a patio where you can leave



without exiting through the casino. I've seen convention centers that look like a dark basement. At Aria, you don't feel like you are inside for the amount of hours you are."

The group held most of its events, including several awards dinners at the convention center, mostly in the same room, transforming it to fit each occasion. "We kicked off with a Sunday night awards dinner, using several production companies to transform the room with a moving tri-level stage and special decorations and lighting," says the planner. "Monday night we had an education dinner for 500 people. Tuesday night we had a sales dinner for the same 500 people. We also used some of the lounges, including Alibi Cocktail Lounge and Liquid Pool Lounge for receptions."

Aria's service, a deciding factor in choosing the resort, was top-notch even before the corporation selected the hotel. "During our site visit, the hotel salesperson and team we were assigned to stayed with us from the beginning through the end," says the planner. "The way they toured the property with us, the touches they provided and the way they cared about our questions made us feel like it wasn't the standard tour they give everybody."

Dedicated Concierge

During the meeting, the planner was impressed by a unique service that Aria provided — a concierge dedicated to working solely with the group full-time for the entire event. "That is unbelievable, and it really stood out," says the planner. "It surpasses anything we have ever experienced. This concierge ran the business center for me, made sure lunches were ready and offered to help by asking me questions like, 'I heard you mention reservations. Do you want me to look something up for you?'"

The concierge helped with the many reservations that the group made at Aria's restaurants. "Everyone ventured to at least one of the hotel's restaurants at some point," says the planner. "We used Javier's Restaurant, the fine-dining Mexican restaurant a lot. That was a hit because it's centrally located in the casino, has great food and service, and is perfect for people-watching. The Buffet at Aria was also popular with many people using pre-paid vouchers that we provided."

Feedback from attendees after the meeting showed that they were wowed by Aria. That's a big reason why the planner has been discussing possible dates with the property for 2016.

Overall value was another advantage. "Aria offered a great price point," says the planner. "On average, most Las Vegas properties we visited came in about the same. Because Aria is so new, smack dab in the middle of The Strip and a five-star property, we knew that for the total value we wanted to pick Aria."

Off The Strip

While some planners prefer resorts in the middle of The Strip, others seek properties away from the action. Cindy Kravitz, meeting planner for Moen, which is headquartered in North Olmsted, Ohio, held the company's Global Supplier Conference at the Green Valley Ranch Resort, Spa & Casino located off The Strip. The three-day meeting in May 2015 included about 200 of Moen's suppliers, employees and executives.

It was the fourth consecutive time that Moen has held the conference — which meets every other year — in Las Vegas. "We like Las Vegas because it's a big draw for suppliers coming from Asia and other countries," says Kravitz. "We get a higher attendance rate when meeting in Las Vegas. We also like it because the group can focus on the conference instead of the nightlife."

Green Valley Ranch Resort's conference center also was a plus. "We used three of the ballrooms, and the corridors were good for prefunction activities," says Kravitz. "All of our breakout rooms were around the corner from our major general session room, so we didn't have to worry about getting lost. The general session room and pool were close to the terrace, where we ate most of our meals."

Like a growing number of meeting planners, Kravitz used an app to help attendees get the most out of the meeting. "They used it to give feedback

during breakouts," she says. "We put our schedule and agenda on it so we no longer had to print all of those materials. It included speaker bios and attendee contact information to encourage networking. They started that networking before the meeting because we provided the app prior to their arrival."

The app contributed to an enjoyable experience for attendees, and that was evident in the post-meeting survey. "They liked the app, the venue, the food and service," says Kravitz. "Most people said they liked the fact that it's off The Strip and quieter. Several people said it was the best conference ever. There is a good possibility we will go back next year."

A Favorite Resort

Another corporation held its annual conference for sales agents at Caesars Palace for the last four years and is considering returning in 2016. "Every year I ask does everybody really want to go back to the same property," says the company's planner. "I ask in surveys if there is something we can do to change things up, but they always want to return because they have a fabulous time."

The planner cites one huge advantage of returning to Caesars Palace: The property's staff knows the group's needs. "They still have the same people we have worked with for three or four years,



The Omnia Nightclub at Caesars Palace.

Credit: Caesars Entertainment

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SOUTH POINT
Las Vegas

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND



Celine Dion triumphantly returns to Caesars Palace.

After a year off, **Celine Dion** returned to the Las Vegas stage August 27 with her new show "Celine at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace," which features her biggest hits directed by famed Grammy Awards producer Ken Ehrlich. One of the most highly recognized, widely respected and successful performers in pop music history, Celine has sold nearly 250 million records during her more than 30-year career.

Reba, Brooks & Dunn added more shows for their residency at Caesars Palace. The Country music powerhouses will take the stage for additional performances on December 1 December 8, with tickets on sale now. The superstar entertainers sell out crowds night after night since they debuted their show in June

The legendary **Diana Ross** returns to The Venetian Theatre for another residency in November. Last April, the renowned superstar sold out nine shows, wowed audiences and received rave reviews at The Venetian Theatre. Diana Ross once again returns for another nine shows, between November 4-21.

Legendary comedian and impersonator **Rich Little** will return to the Las Vegas Strip with the debut of his new autobiographical one-man show "Rich Little Live" at the world-famous Laugh Factory inside The New Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton. Featuring a compilation

from those working at the pool to those in the conference office," says the planner. "They know us by name. I don't have to go through lengthy explanations of our needs because they already know. It takes a lot of stress out of planning."

Meeting at the same property every year also provides good value. "I don't pay for meeting room space," says the planner. "We rent the same hospitality suite every year and get it at a tremendously discounted rate. This year we got some show tickets for free. Every year we return, they are willing to do more because they want the repeat business."

Another plus of meeting in Las Vegas is higher attendance. "We probably added a good 25 percent to attendance after we started meeting in Las Vegas," says the planner. "People tend to bring their spouses more and turn it into a vacation. They also tend to stay on afterwards and some people come up to a week early."

New and Noteworthy

Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino is redesigning more than 3,000 guest rooms and suites as part of the final phase of its resort-wide renovation. The rooms will feature modern furnishings, and new colors and designs. Plans call for the \$100 million remodeling to be completed by spring 2016. Mandalay Bay recently opened the 350,000-sf expansion of its convention center, bringing total space to 2 million sf. The second and final phase of the convention center's expansion will transition existing space into a 70,000-sf ballroom.

This year, the final phase of the multi-year renovation of **The Venetian and The Palazzo Congress Center and Sands Expo** was completed. Recent improvements at Sands Expo included a new \$6 million 12,000-sf kitchen designed to provide higher quality food for trade show attendees, support show growth, and increase energy efficiency by 35 percent. This is in addition to the recent total remodel and redesign of all lobbies and common spaces; construction of a 60-foot central atrium with a 30,000-sf, 3-D articulated ceiling; reconstruction of meeting rooms and business center; renovation of the building facade and porte cochere; and upgrades to the exhibition halls. Also, attendees will find upgrades to the technology and Wi-Fi infrastructure throughout the resort and convention center.



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THE STRIP RACING

ROADHOUSE



Credit: Las Vegas News Bureau

Reba, Brooks & Dunn added more shows as their residency at Caesars Palace continually sells out.

of impersonations, sketches and interactive video of the actors, musicians, politicians and personalities, Little has worked with throughout his more than 50 years in entertainment. "Rich Little Live" premiered in July 14.

Mother-daughter duo **The Judds** will reunite for "Girls Night Out," a nine-show residency at The Venetian Theatre inside The Venetian, October 7-24, 2015. Produced by AEG Live, "Girls Night Out" will mark the country duo's first concerts together in nearly five years. "Girls Night Out" will boast an all-new show created specifically for the Las Vegas audience featuring a set list handpicked by Wynonna and Naomi

Jeff Civillico will be a headliner inside the Flamingo Las Vegas's Bugsy's Cabaret. Civillico is a dynamic entertainer with a comedy show that blends physical humor, stunts and juggling with friendly audience interaction and insane amounts of energy. He was recently named the 2015 "Cultural Advocate/Entertainer of the Year" by Vegas Inc. and Greenspun Media Group, and his show also was voted "Best Family Attraction" by readers of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. — DR

Encore and the Encore Tower Suites at Wynn Las Vegas will complete a design refresh by this fall. The project includes additional amenities such as 55-inch 4K TVs, convenient USB ports, and outlets for mobile phones and tablets.

The Mob Museum introduced a new display that explores the alleged corruption of the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the world's governing organization for soccer. The display, entitled "The 'Beautiful Game' Turns Ugly," features photos, media clippings and cover stories about FIFA's alleged corruption. The exhibition comes after U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch charged FIFA officials with taking bribes and kickbacks.

Aria Resort & Casino recently introduced Sky Pool, an upscale pool offering personalized service, including complimentary refreshments, a private guest entrance and 125 single and 15 double chaise lounge chairs.

The Delano opened its new Delano Beach Club, a South Beach-inspired outdoor venue with a luxurious pool and 16 private cabanas. The entire venue is available for evening group rentals.

The New Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton introduced new Wi-Fi service that offers one of the fastest Internet services available in a Las Vegas property. The property also expanded its Trinidad Pavilion, increasing the resort's total convention and meeting space to 100,000 sf.

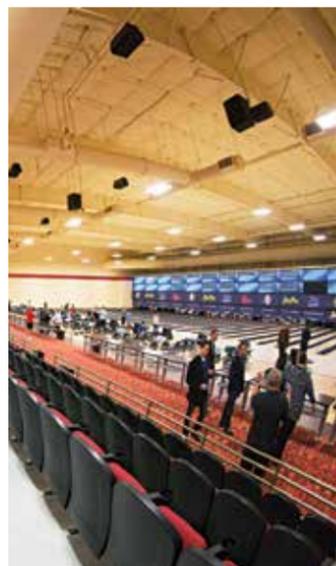
South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa opened a new 60-lane, state-of-the-art tournament bowling and event center. As part of a partnership between the United States Bowling Congress and the LVCVA, the venue will host 122 days of professional bowling tournaments through 2017.

The Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas introduced The Gallery, a loft-style meeting venue that offers 1,900 sf of space accommodating up to 200 guests for a reception and 80 people for a seated dinner.

The new **Lavo Casino Club** is a modern gaming experience fusing blackjack table games with Vegas-style VIP bottle service, mixology and Italian cuisine. The new concept will launch in partnership with The Palazzo Las Vegas in September. The

Lavo Casino Club will create a new type of nightlife and gaming experience where guests can enjoy a deejay and dancing, along with amenities not offered in typical nightclubs or on the casino floor, such as classic premium cocktails served directly to the gaming table from a butler's cart; an opportunity to order from Lavo's award-winning Italian menu; and featured sporting events, including college and NFL football games on the flat-screen TVs.

Red Rock Resort's Race and Sports Book announced new cutting-edge video dis-

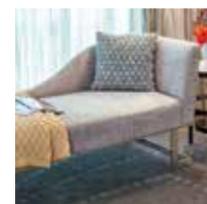


Credit: South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa

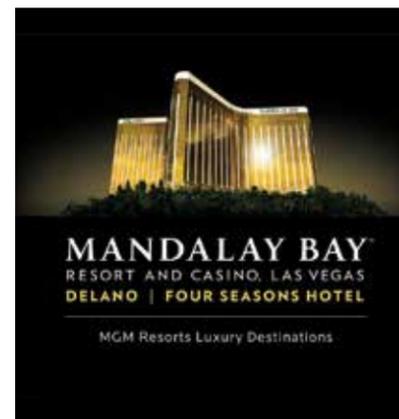


Credit: Wynn Las Vegas

Steve Wynn's ShowStoppers (above) is a new show at Wynn Las Vegas that features a cast of 66 singers, dancers and a full orchestra performing Broadway's hit numbers. (Right) South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa's new 60-lane, state-of-the-art tournament bowling and event center.



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plays — just in time for football season. The 2.5MM Nanoslim Engage LED displays are the largest of their kind ever installed in North America, and take the viewing experience to an unparalleled level with a sharpness and clarity that brings all the action on the screen to life. The new displays, measuring 17 feet tall by 31.5 feet wide each, which totals nearly 32 yards of wall-to-wall race and sports book action, replace projector screen technology. The screens showcase 4K video content for viewing in ultra high definition, which is the most sophisticated and best viewing technology currently available.

Big Projects

Genting Group recently broke ground on **Resorts World Las Vegas**, a new \$4 billion, Chinese-themed resort on the site of the former Stardust Hotel. The property will include three hotels with more than 3,500 rooms; more than 100,000 sf of gaming space; several retail outlets; and an outdoor amphitheater. Genting Group, which operates casino resorts worldwide, plans to open Resorts World in 2018.

Caesars Entertainment has completed its Linq Complex with the opening of **The Linq Hotel & Casino** after renovating all 2,253 guest rooms and adding two loft-style penthouses and 25 poolside guest rooms. The Linq Hotel also added an automated valet retrieval system, an automated check-in process and a new lobby bar. The Linq complex also includes the Linq Promenade and High Roller observation wheel.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority plans to build the **Las Vegas Global Business District**. Once completed, the district will host the largest exhibition and meeting space in North America and is within a short distance of more than 150,000 guest rooms and just minutes from the world-famous Las Vegas Strip. The project will add 100,000 sf of general session space and 100,000 sf of meeting space to the Las Vegas Convention Center.

MGM Resorts International plans to build a 5,000-seat theater at **Monte Carlo Resort and Casino**. The new theater will anchor the burgeoning entertainment district on the west Las Vegas Strip and feature special appearances by top music performers. The theater will be adjacent to the new **Las Vegas Arena** that MGM and AEG are developing on Las Vegas Boulevard. The Arena is expected to open in April 2016, while the theater opening is planned for the end of 2016.

Speedvegas was recently given approval to transform 100 acres of South Las Vegas Boulevard into the destination's newest, adrenaline-inducing supercar experience. The Speedvegas experience will feature a welcome center, event center and su-

percar course. Located just 10 minutes from the world-famous "Welcome to Las Vegas" sign, Speedvegas is scheduled to open in January 2016.

Dining News

Las Vegas keeps them coming back to sample new dining options such as the following:

Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino recently opened **Edge Steakhouse**, a fine-dining restaurant with a new twist on the traditional steak house concept. Award-winning chef Nick Lees and his staff blend traditional American steak house dishes with creative entrees, specialty appetizers and innovative side dishes.

Aria will debut its own version of New York City's critically acclaimed **Carbone** restaurant, a finalist for the 2014 James Beard Award for "Best New Restaurant." The Italian-American restaurant serves classic dishes from the mid-20th century such as Fra Diavolo and Chicken Scarpariello.

Red Rock Resort will introduce **Salute**, an authentic Italian-inspired restaurant that will feature traditional Italian dishes. Internationally known chef Luciano Sautto, a native of Naples, Italy, will offer cuisine passed down through Italian generations and focus on freshness.

Delano Las Vegas will introduce **Rivea**, a restaurant featuring casually elegant but simple Mediterranean cuisine

from the French Riviera and Italian Riviera. A 50-seat dining room with floor-to-ceiling windows will offer views of The Strip.

Therapy Las Vegas recently opened in the **Fremont East Entertainment District** of downtown Las Vegas. Therapy combines the best elements of downtown dining and imbibing into one destination complete with an American gastrophile menu by executive chef Daniel Ontiveros and a full bar program with more than 40 craft beers and signature drinks.

Anchor Bar, the iconic Buffalo, New York, institution opened its first West Coast outpost in the Grand Canal Shoppes at **The Venetian**. Inventors of The Original Buffalo Wing, Anchor Bar boasts creating the prized recipe that started a nationwide sensation. Anchor Bar Las Vegas will serve the classic wings in mild, medium, hot, spicy hot barbecue along with the signature celery sticks and blue cheese dressing.

Although Las Vegas is the gaming capital of the United States, it is as close to a sure thing as planners can get when it comes to meetings and incentives. Planners are perpetually pleased with increased attendance and post-meeting surveys of groups meeting in Las Vegas. That is very unlikely to change, and that is why groups keep coming back year after year.

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A rendering of the Las Vegas Global Business District.

Credit: Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority



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Destination



Briggs Inc., a DMC Network Company, staged this gala reception/dinner for 800 guests at the iconic Rockefeller Center in New York City.

New York and

Credit: Briggs Inc., a DMC Network Company

A Wealth of Options for Meeting Planners

By Mark Rowh

NYC-based Briggs Inc., a DMC Networking Company, one of the most respected and established destination management companies in NYC. "There's always something to do."

Not only is this huge metropolitan area constantly evolving, but its sheer size and complexity means every visit is different.

"The variety is fabulous for entertaining every guest," says Linda F. Kasper, client services manager for Pennsylvania-based furniture and design firm Knoll Inc. and the company's primary corporate meeting planner. "There is a wealth of information and professionals in the area to assist with any special need for events."

Last year, Kasper coordinated a meeting for more than 600 company executives at the Sheraton New York Times Square Hotel. With nearly 60,000 sf of meeting space and 1,800 guest

Options, options, options. In terms of sheer volume alone, it may be impossible to top the many meeting options available in the New York City-New Jersey area. New York City welcomed 6.1 million meeting and convention delegates in 2014, up from 5.9 million the year before, according to Britt Hijkoop, manager, tourism PR for NYC & Company. With all the glamour that is New York, the city has nearly unlimited appeal.

On a different yet still exciting scale, Atlantic City offers its own unique character. Despite its small year-round population, it stands as a big-time meeting destination. Long known as the gaming capital of the Northeast and one of the country's premier resort and entertainment destinations, Atlantic City offers a wealth of options for meeting planners. In fact, meeting pros themselves find it an attractive location for their events, as evidenced by the recent decision by Meeting Professionals International (MPI) to hold its 2016 World Education Congress in Atlantic City. The June event will take place at the brand new Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center.

Certainly New York City and nearby New Jersey give meeting planners much with which to work.

"New York City is the media and entertainment capital of the world," says Anthony Napoli, CMP, DMCP, president and CEO of

rooms, the newly renovated hotel easily accommodated her group's needs. The conference included large plenary sessions as well as breakout sessions over a three-day period.

She says that along with other advantages, the hotel was flexible in letting the group adapt space to match the company's product specialties.

"They allowed us to completely brand the meeting floor," she says. "We re-carpeted, re-wallpapered and pulled all their furniture and only used our own. It was quite a theatrical event and everyone came away inspired."

The prime location was a definite plus.

"The day of arrival included many cultural and historical tours around the city, most within a few blocks of the hotel," Kasper says. "This also was a huge hit. Many people tried to book as many tours as they could fit in an afternoon. We had walking tours, as well as tours of every kind of cultural institution."

Having a New York location is a great advantage, says Carol A. Marotta, executive assistant at global performance management company Nielsen, who also serves as the chief meeting planner for their NYC office. She recently coordinated a meeting in the downtown area for 45 of the company's top global regional leaders.

"The downtown area is fast becoming the new place to stay because of its many new attractions, restaurants and hotels," she



Karen Shackman, President
Shackman Associates New York

"We are very fortunate that NYC still continues to be a huge draw for both international and domestic incentive clients. It has the allure that motivates guests to achieve their targets."

says. "It worked out perfectly for us." The proximity of major attractions helped make the event a major success. Marotta was able to arrange Wall Street tours between morning and afternoon sessions, as well as an afternoon session in Battery Park, affording views of the Statue of Liberty and the Freedom Tower. "My team is still talking about it," she says.

In many ways, New York is unique when it comes to American destinations.

"We are very fortunate that New York City still continues to be a huge draw for both international and domestic incentive clients," says Karen Shackman, president of Shackman Associates New York. "It has the allure that motivates guests to achieve their targets, knowing that the city has something for everybody."



Credit: Meet AC

The world-famous Boardwalk in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

The fact that the city boasts more than 90,000 hotel rooms obviously sets it apart.

“From the meeting planner’s perspective, the city offers a great variety of hotel product, with an ever-expanding inventory,” Shackman says. She notes that while the city is perceived by many to be on the expensive side, if there is flexibility on the part of the planner and the end-user, there are definite off-peak seasons where it is possible to obtain good value for money. In addition, the abundance of corporate entities located in or around New York may be an added value to some planners.

“The city continues to expand from an accommodation and amenities perspective, offering new hotels, boutique or otherwise, in areas which were previous unavailable,” Shackman says. “In fact, for incentives and meetings that include New York in their rotation, there is always something new to offer.” In addition, she says the now accessible Meatpacking District, Lower East Side and Financial District are very welcoming. And there are very viable options for meeting and entertaining guests in Brooklyn and, to some degree, in Queens.

For a recent meeting of employees in the food services industry, Shackman says her clients selected the Trump Soho as the base for the 140 guests. The property features 10 meeting rooms and 11,485 sf of event space, and has 391 guest rooms. Attendees were an international group whose agenda included product knowledge enhancement. The location was selected as a new area for guests with the right amenities as well as proximity to several food purchasing outlets located in New Jersey and Brooklyn.

“The hotel also offered perfect size meeting rooms,” Shackman says. “And the dramatic penthouse view was the perfect backdrop for a welcome reception. It was a perfect fit for these guests from both a comfort and a service level.”

Beth Lockwood, managing director of Details NYC in Brooklyn, also points to the city’s diversity.

“New York is a perfect city for a meeting,” she says. “It’s home to countless hotels from large chains to independent properties and an endless array of venues, restaurants and activities. The sky is the limit in New York City for all attendees and visitors.”

Lockwood points to the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, situated at the center of Manhattan’s West Side, as a “one-of-a-kind, iconic facility.” It offers 840,000 sf of flexible exhibition space on four levels stretching across six city blocks, with a seven-acre green roof that serves as a wildlife habitat and absorbs up to 6.8 million gallons of storm water each year. High-speed wireless Internet access serving up to 70,000 users at one time throughout the building is a big plus. Event facilities include 102 meeting rooms, with more than 75 having been recently renovated, which feature adjustable walls for convenient reconfiguration.

A feature the city may lack compared to some cities is an abun-

dance of huge ballrooms appropriate for very large groups. But smaller groups have exciting choices.

“A lot of boutique hotels have been opening in New York City,” Napoli says. “They can be great for smaller groups.”

Cost is another possible limitation. But planners may have more options than initially believed.

“One thing meeting planners always assume is that New York is expensive,” Napoli says. “But you can find less expensive options.” He points to the fact that the city has more than 5,000 restaurants as an example. “There are a lot of good quality restaurants with reasonable prices,” he says. “You can always work within a budget and still get good service.”

With hotels, a smart move can be to ask when their off-season is, according to Napoli.

“Rates can be radically different in their off-season from peak times,” he says. “If you want to move to an off-season time, you can save a lot of money.”

NYC Meeting Venues

The Jacob K. Javits Convention Center is one of the country’s largest event venues, with more than 800,000 sf of exhibit space. Along with floor-to-ceiling acoustical dividing walls and more than 100 function rooms for seminars and hospitality areas, the facility offers 65,000 sf of dedicated registration space. Onsite kitchens can provide 10,000 meals simultaneously. The riverfront location is just minutes from Midtown.

Located in the city’s business media center, the Hilton New York Midtown offers more than 150,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space. Its four ballrooms include New York’s largest grand ballroom, featuring a stage with hydraulic lifts and a column-free design. Meeting facilities accommodate small and medium-sized groups including a video conference room and an executive boardroom.

A trend worth noting is the hotel’s growing use of locally sourced, house-made dishes. All of the executive chef’s top vendors are hands-on farmers practicing sustainable techniques daily.

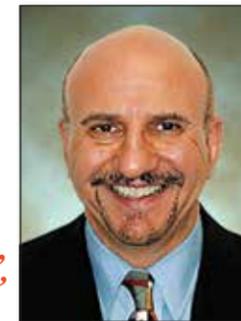
With 55,000 sf of meeting space and the cachet of a Park Avenue address, the Grand Hyatt New York offers 55,000 sf of meeting space. Ballrooms include the Empire State Ballroom for larger events and the Manhattan Ballroom for up to 500 guests. A newly renovated conference level has 15 modern meeting rooms and state-of-the-art boardrooms. Upgraded as part of a recent \$65 million renovation, the hotel’s 14th floor now features 22 executive boardrooms for smaller meetings.

With a prime location in Times Square and the Theater District, the New York Marriott Marquis offers more than 100,000 sf of meeting space and more than 50 event spaces, along with more than 1,900 guest rooms. A recent \$150 million renovation included new high-speed elevators, a state-of-the-art fitness



Details NYC arranged this memorable incentive dinner at 230 Fifth, New York’s largest outdoor rooftop garden, where attendees enjoyed a spectacular view of the Empire State Building.

“One thing meeting planners always assume is that New York is expensive. But you can find less expensive options. ...If you want to move to an off-season time, you can save a lot of money.”



Anthony Napoli, CMP, DMCP
President and CEO, Briggs Inc., New York, NY

center, and six restaurants and lounges. Event space is offered on six different levels.

It may not be possible to top the name recognition of this classic hotel — The Waldorf Astoria New York — but it also offers more than reputation. Along with 300-plus suites and more than 1,100 guest rooms, the Waldorf-Astoria has 60,000 sf of meeting space. The historic two-tiered Grand Ballroom accommodates up to 1,500 guests.

New and Noteworthy in NYC

Perhaps most attractive to meeting planners is the host of changes bringing new features that would appeal to meeting participants.

With the magnitude of such changes, some are calling this incredibly vibrant metropolis the “new” New York City. A new Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course, **Trump Golf Links at Ferry Point**, opened in the Bronx earlier this year, and the new Whitney Museum of American Art adds to an already incredibly rich cultural scene.

This summer, NYC & Company expanded its **Delegate Discount Pass** program. Available to meeting and convention attendees as well as meeting planners, event staff and exhibitors, the pass offers discounts at more than 60 restaurants. It also can be used at some 50 tours, attractions, retailers and cultural organizations throughout New York’s five boroughs, an increase of more than 40 over the previous version. To date more than 425,000 delegates from approximately 50 conventions and trade shows have received the pass, which is good until the end of the year.

One of the most anticipated venue openings of the year is **One World Observatory**. Now open to the public, the observatory sits at the top of the tallest building in the Western hemisphere. From its perch on the 100th, 101st and 102nd floors of One World Trade Center, visitors enjoy great views of the city, the New York skyline and surrounding waters. “The observatory turns uniquely imagined events and meetings into a beautiful reality,” Lockwood says.

Receiving great fanfare is the sprawling **Hudson Yards** project being completed over a multiyear period. It is said to be not only the largest development in New York City since Rockefeller Center, but also the biggest private real estate development in U.S. history. Project planners anticipate that once completed, more than 24 million people will visit the site every year. Lockwood

reports that ultimately, Hudson Yards will cover more than 17 million sf of commercial and residential space. Along with shops, restaurants, a public school and more than 5,000 residences, it will include 14 acres of public open space and an Equinox-branded luxury hotel with approximately 200 rooms.

Also of interest are greatly welcomed airport upgrades. In early August, **John F. Kennedy International Airport** launched a system to track the location of travelers’ phones in order to measure wait times at security checkpoints, customs areas and other areas. Other improvements at JFK include runway upgrades along with expansions by Delta Airlines bringing more gates and additional terminal space.

And at **La Guardia Airport**, long the object of widespread criticism, a huge improvement project announced this year will virtually remake the airport by 2021.

Atlantic City

Approximately one-third of the United States population lives within driving distance of Atlantic City, and the Northeast captures \$16 billion of the nation’s meetings and conventions, yet Atlantic City currently only captures one percent of that business.

Caesars Entertainment Senior Vice President of National Meetings and Events Michael Massari wants companies to stay in the area and come to Atlantic City for their events. “There are so many Fortune 500 companies in the area that do large product launches and have national sales meetings and are forced to go to Dallas or Orlando or Las Vegas. These are all fine destinations but we want to see them be able to stay here at home in the fine state of New Jersey,” he said in a statement.

A major new meeting facility, which just opened in August, will prove crucial in ensuring a successful future for Atlantic City, say city officials, and promises to make the city more attractive to meeting planners: The new Harrah’s Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center is the largest convention center-hotel complex from Baltimore to Boston. The new facility, which will host MPI’s 2016 World Education Conference, offers two 50,000-sf ballrooms that can be divided into 29 individual sections and offers



The 600,000-sf Atlantic City Convention Center is the largest conference center in New Jersey.

“New York is a perfect city for a meeting. It’s home to countless hotels from large chains to independent properties and an endless array of venues, restaurants and activities.”



Beth Lockwood, Managing Director
Details NYC, Brooklyn, NY

state-of-the-art, technologically advanced meeting space that can be utilized by up to 5,000 attendees. In addition, Harrah’s Atlantic City, the tallest hotel in the region, offers more than 2,500 hotel rooms that will be directly accessible from the meeting space, making it the perfect year-round destination where attendees can eat, sleep and meet all in one location.

AC Meeting Hotels

Including Harrah’s, Atlantic City offers some of the most attractive hotels anywhere. It has a combined room inventory of 15,630 rooms including eight major casino hotels and multiple non-gaming hotels, reports Jessica Merrill, communications manager for Meet AC.



Credit: Tom Briglia, PhotoGraphics

The new Harrah’s Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center.

Resorts Casino Hotel, the first hotel casino to open in Atlantic City, recently opened its new multifaceted conference center. “Resorts Casino Hotel is dedicated to ensuring that our leisure and business travelers are always offered the best that Atlantic City has to offer,” stated Morris Bailey, owner of Resorts, in a news release. “We are committed to continuing to reinvest in the property and to offer the finest in meeting space, lodging, gaming, dining and entertainment.”

Now group meeting attendees at Resorts can wirelessly connect laptops and personal media devices simultaneously, while sharing screens with each other and even with colleagues in remote locations. Convenient touch-panel controls and built-in wireless microphones offer ease for presenters as well.

Other highlights of the new technology include full 1080P

resolution on all screens, and up to four devices can share the screen in QUAD view. Resorts installed higher resolution capabilities in anticipation of future needs, high-capacity Wi-Fi, electrical and Telecom connectivity hidden in the floors, and architectural LED lighting on dimmers with programmable pre-sets. Twelve breakout rooms keep productivity high with built-in 80-inch or 90-inch LED monitors, drop-down screens and cinema-quality projection. Two theaters offer seating for 300 or 1,350 with state-of-the-art sound and light technology.

In addition to the 12 new meeting rooms, the showpiece of Resorts’ conference center is the Atlantic Ballroom with a multi-use pre-function area, with natural lighting. Four sets of operable walls divide the main conference hall into five potential spaces and allow groups to have an adaptable floor plan for a variety of uses. The new conference center brings the total offerings at Resorts to 24 meeting and function rooms with more than 64,000 sf of usable space, most featuring natural light and ocean views.

Bally’s Atlantic City, with more than 1,200 guest rooms, has 33 meeting rooms and 80,000 sf of meeting space. Facilities include nine park and garden rooms with space from 700 to 1,000 sf and three ballrooms, including a 12,000-sf ballroom overlooking the boardwalk. An executive boardroom and 450-seat theater also are available.

Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa offers 24 meeting rooms with capacities ranging from 10 to 3,500 people. Options include a 12,000-sf meeting facility, three 4,500-sf meeting rooms, four 1,250-sf rooms and two 550-sf boardrooms.

Along with 1,100-plus guest rooms, Caesar’s Atlantic City has 28,000 sf of meeting space and 12 meeting rooms. Event facilities include the 17,135-sf Palladium Ballroom and 10 individual meeting rooms. And the renovated Circus Maximus Theater seats more than 1,500 people for special events.

New & Noteworthy in AC

The Playground, formerly known as The Pier Shops at Caesars, is a 464,000-sf self-contained entertainment venue resting over the Atlantic Ocean. It includes eight live entertainment clubs and restaurants, high-end retail establishments, bowling alley, swimming pool and a sports bar.

Gardner’s Basin, located in the marina district, is undergoing an expansion and redevelopment project designed to provide additional restaurants, shops and entertainment venues. Plans also include reconstruction of The Boardwalk from Revel to Gardner’s Basin.

A 200-foot-high observation wheel is coming soon to the iconic **Steel Pier**. The \$14 million project will offer riders views of both the ocean and the Atlantic City skyline from inside climate-controlled gondolas.

Borgata Festival Park, the city’s newest outdoor entertainment venue features a 4,000-person capacity concert space adjacent to the hotel casino. It includes a main stage, bar, Ping-Pong tables and amenities including beer trucks, fire pits and tables. **C&IT**

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The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel has named **Austin Bagwell** as group sales account director for the New England market. She previously was part of group sales teams at Aria Resort & Casino and The Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas. **Alan Enns** was named group sales account director for the Washington, DC, Virginia and Maryland association markets.

He was director of sales at the former Peabody Orlando.

Cory Baum was appointed director of sales and marketing for Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront. He joined the property having most recently served in the same role at Hyatt Regency Columbus in Columbus, Ohio. **Yajaira D. Torres** was named sales man-

ager. She was director of sales at Hyatt Place Manati, Puerto Rico.

Turnberry Isle Miami has appointed **Joseph M. DeMille Sr.** as director of sales and marketing. With more than 30 years of experience in the hospitality industry, he formerly served as regional director of sales and marketing for Dolce Atlanta-Peachtree. **C&IT**

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