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Incentives at Sea

New & Different and
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ISSN 1095-9726..... USPS 012-991

A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

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INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

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MAY/JUNE 2015

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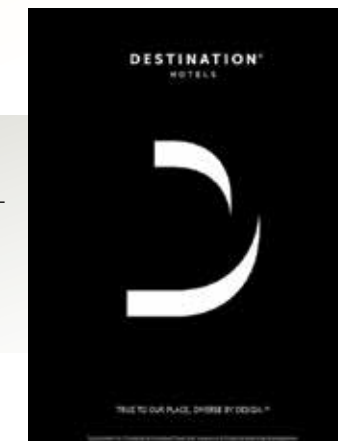
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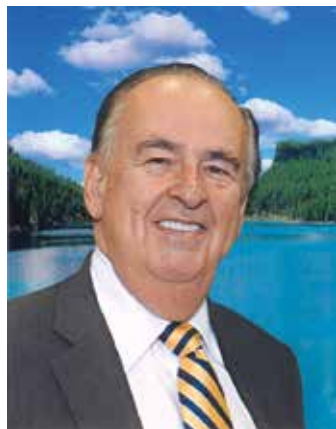
Insurance & Financial Meetings Management is published bi-monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 N. Military Trail, Ste. 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$10.00 U.S.A.; back copies \$12. Yearly subscription price is \$65.00 in the U.S.A.; \$135.00 in Canada. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Insurance & Financial Meetings Management, 2700 N. Military Trail, Ste. 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Insurance & Financial Meetings Management), and the publication disclaims any liability with respect to the use of reliance on any such information. The information contained in this publication is no way to be construed as a recommendation by I&FMM of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted by or binding upon any corporate/incentive travel planner or agent. Reproduction of any portion of this publication by any means is strictly forbidden. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited photographs or manuscripts. Subscriber: Send subscription inquiries and address changes to: Circulation Dept., Insurance & Financial Meetings Management, 2700 N. Military Trail, Ste. 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Give old and new addresses including zip codes. Enclose address label from most recent issue and allow five weeks for change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2015

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Publisher's Message

Cross One More Off the Bucket List

Professional meeting planners wear many, many hats. As you know well, you must plan meetings designed to engage and enlighten attendees, spend countless hours on site selection (page 54), research the myriad ways to thwart information security breaches (page 60) and stay on top of all technological advances including the latest social media tools (page 18) — just to name a few (that just happen to be featured in this issue).



One hat you get a kick out of wearing is when you help reward and motivate employees. Take Amy Ingalls who is delighted every-time an incentive qualifier gets to “cross ‘taking a cruise’ off their bucket list.”

In our cover story this month on page 10, “Incentives at Sea: New & Different and Bigger & Better Than Ever Before,” Ingalls, senior meeting and event planner at Transamerica Life & Protection in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, says she loves the response she gets from attendees who experience a cruise program for the first time. “One of my favorite parts of a cruise is

when attendees first step foot onboard the ship,” she says. “Their eyes are wide open, and ‘ooohs’ and ‘aaahs’ follow. Then this huge rush of energy comes over them, and they scurry around to discover every corner of the ship.”

Ingalls says her Transamerica sales representatives consider an incentive at sea a huge reward. “They love it. Stop and think about how many people in this world have ‘take a cruise’ on their bucket list. I have helped hundreds and hundreds cross that off their bucket list,” shares Ingalls.

Value also is a huge consideration when planning an event at sea. “Cruise programs are a great value, for not only my convention budget, but also for the attendees’ budgets,” relates Ingalls. “It is easy to understand what is and isn’t included. And I’ve had some attendees tell me that they have walked off the ship with a zero balance.”

Jo Kling, president of Miami-based Landry & Kling, Events at Sea, a leading provider of cruise program planning services, agrees. “And nothing else out there delivers better value than cruise programs,” she says. Superior value and exceptional attendee engagement are all very important factors for successful incentive programs, adds Kling, who submits, “What is more engaging than being on a cruise ship?”

Harvey Grotsky

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A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

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Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa Completes Meeting Space Expansion



Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa's new Coastal Ballroom.

DESTIN, FL — Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa — the largest full-service beachfront resort hotel on Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast — debuted the 7,500-sf Coastal Ballroom, which included expansion to prefunction space, restroom facilities and permanent registration areas. The additional space provides more than 23,000 sf of ballroom and event space on a single level, with approximately 10,000 sf of additional prefunction area to support three ballrooms. With nearly 40,000 sf of indoor meeting space and 20,000 sf of outdoor event space, the resort can now accommodate larger conferences and events.

The award-winning Serenity by the sea Spa also completed a major overhaul. The spa was expanded by 3,000 sf, providing more space for guests. www.hiltonsandestinbeach.com

Joost de Meyer Is Honored With the 2015 SITE Master Motivator Award

FRANKFURT, GERMANY — Joost de Meyer, CIS, CITE, CMM, ACC, chairman and CEO, First Incentive Travel, Orlando, was honored with the 2015 SITE Master Motivator Award during the IMEX Academy Awards Gala Dinner, May 20, in Frankfurt, Germany. The Master Motivator Award is presented annually to a SITE member who upholds the highest standard of excellence in creating and executing successful incentive travel and motivational experiences and demonstrates a genuine enthusiasm for supporting and strengthening the global incentive travel community.

"It means a lot to me to be recognized as this year's SITE Master Motivator," said de Meyer. "As a member of the association for over 15 years, I am very passionate about the value SITE provides to the global incentive travel community." www.siteglobal.com



Honoree Joost de Meyer is flanked by Kevin Hinton (l) and Ray Bloom.

Marriott Marquis Miami Worldcenter to Open in 2018

MIAMI, FL — Doors at the 1,800-room Marriott Marquis Miami Worldcenter Hotel & Expo Center aren't scheduled to open for more than three years, but developers say there's plenty of work to fill the time between now and fall of 2018, according to the *Miami Herald*.

The property will include more than 600,000 sf dedicated to convention needs, including a 100,000-sf exhibition hall on the ground floor, a 65,000-sf main ballroom, a 1,500-seat theater and 390,000 sf of other meeting rooms and event space.

Grand Hyatt Playa del Carmen Resort Set to Open

CHICAGO, IL — The Grand Hyatt brand announced that it will add a new resort, Grand Hyatt Playa del Carmen Resort, to its world-class portfolio when the hotel opens in Mexico on the Riviera Maya along the Caribbean Sea on June 15, 2015.

The 314-room Sordo Madaleno-designed urban beach hotel will boast a unique fusion of sleek and contemporary design aesthetics blended with Mayan-inspired elements in the guest rooms, restaurants, bars, lounges and event spaces that pay tribute to local surroundings. Grand Hyatt Playa del Carmen Resort is located on the iconic Mamitas Beach, in the heart of Playa del Carmen, just steps from the city's famous 5th Avenue.

Previously announced as Hyatt Playa del Carmen, the property underwent an extraordinary transformation from an upscale resort to a luxury offering while under construction. www.hyatt.com



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Credits: 1-3 SITE Foundation; SITE Nite Europe; 4 & 5 Corey Domick, PCMA; 6 IMEX; 7 DMAI

SITE Nite Europe was held May 18 at the InterContinental Hotel Frankfurt, Germany. **1** Guests dress in traditional garb as the SITE Global Conference is set for Delhi, India, October 23-26, 2015. **2** (l to r) SITE Foundation President-elect Denise Dornfeld, president North America, Allied PRA; SITE Foundation President Kurt Paben, president, Channel & Employee Loyalty US, Aimia; SITE President Rhonda Brewer, V.P. Sales, Maritz Travel Company; SITE President-elect Rajeev Kohli, joint managing director, Creative Travel Pvt Ltd. **3** SITE guest with SITE Foundation Trustees (c) Michele Samoulides, Microsoft and (r) Aileen Zerbionia, Corporate Events, Informatica. **4** PCMA CEO Deborah Sexton and staff at the 12th Annual PCMA Education Foundation Partnership Summit, held at the JW Marriott Desert Springs Resort in Palm Desert, California. Pictured (l to r) are Jody Egel, Sexton, Erin Shamus, Cleary Williams and Jamie Mednansky. **5** Deborah Sexton flanked by Bob Lander (l), the president and CEO of the Austin CVB, and guest Chuck Heftman. **6** Chef Werner Mansshardt of the Sheraton Frankfurt Congress Hotel, Germany, guided a 25-person troop to prepare and serve lunch at a local homeless shelter as part of the IMEX Charity Cooking program. **7** President and CEO of Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI), Michael D. Gehrisch (l) joins Austin CVB chief Bob Lander and Paul Ouimet, E.V.P. InterVISTAS Consulting Group, at The 2015 DMAI CEO Summit held at the InterContinental The Clement Monterey in California.

Incentives at Sea

By Jo Kling



7 Surefire Ways to Make Your Next Meeting or Incentive Trip a Dud

Want to make sure your meeting or incentive travel program doesn't rise above the "Meh" category? Choose a venue that offers any — or a combination of — the elements listed below. Meet in a destination that includes all seven and you're guaranteed a bona fide dud of an event!

- Boring, predictable meals — a limited menu featuring rubber chicken or overcooked fish.
- Uninspired entertainment — not that we have anything against one-man bands or karaoke machines.
- One-size-fits-all daily activities — there are TVs in their rooms, right?
- No fitness options — unless you count long walks from their rooms to the conference center.
- No cross-generational appeal — just focus on one age demographic. Hey, you can't please everyone!
- Same old, same old experience — "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"
- Many out-of-pocket expenses for organizer and attendees — unless you find a property that includes a free continental breakfast buffet.

Just Say NO to Humdrum Events!

7 Ingredients to Ensure Event Inspiration and Motivation

Seriously, you don't want to plan an uninspiring meeting or incentive program that fails to motivate, right? Have no fear, intrepid meeting pros, there are plenty of venues on-board cruise ships that guarantee your event will be nothing short of extraordinary!

- 1. Plenty of culinary options.** No shortage of menu choices and lots of healthy options! Cruise ships include a variety of dining venues, from elegant dining rooms to casual waterfront restaurants — with snacks available round-the-clock. Meals are complimentary in the main restaurant and casual cafés, and most ships offer optional specialty dining for a nominal upcharge.
- 2. Top-notch entertainment.** From Broadway shows and big-name entertainers to daring aerialists and



The Constellation Theater in the new Regent Seven Seas Explorer, which debuts in 2016 when she sails into Miami.

interactive dinner shows, there's never a shortage of first-class evening entertainment. Prefer a comedy club or sophisticated jazz lounge? Ships have those, too — and you don't have to plan it, source it or pay for it!

- 3. Variety of activities and enrichment choices.** When meetings are over, there are plenty of activities and spaces where attendees can unwind or connect. Sports decks, movie theaters, world-renowned spas and wellness centers, culinary institutes and digital workshops...just to name a few.
- 4. Fitness options that are also fun.** Multistory sports decks, ropes courses, state-of-the-art fitness centers, high-tech indoor cycling studios, Zumba classes and many choices of active excursions ashore...staying healthy has never been this fun!
- 5. Motivational appeal for all generations.** Cruise ships have multigenerational appeal and offer pampering spas, golf simulators, sports decks, multiple choices of dining and entertainment venues, adults-only serenity areas and kids programming for various age groups.
- 6. Unique experiences.** Meet in a variety of creative, comfortable ship venues including conference centers, lounges and theaters — inspiring spaces spark creative thinking! Your group will find unique experiences both

onboard the ship and ashore in destinations best seen by ocean or river vessels (e.g. Alaska, the Greek Isles, Vienna and Budapest).

7. More program inclusions.

Looking for an all-inclusive venue? How does this sound? Visit multiple places in one trip with complimentary meals and snacks, evening entertainment, sport and fitness centers, daily activities and classes, meeting space and use of audio-visual equipment. Luxury cruise lines also include wine and spirits, all veranda suite accommodations, gratuities, butler service and free Wi-Fi in selected suites. Some programs even include shore excursions!

I&FMM



Oceania Cruises' all-inclusive programs include some shore excursions, such as this culinary tour.

Jo Kling, president of Miami-based Landry & Kling Events at Sea, fell in love with cruising on a trans-Atlantic crossing of a student ship during a college break, and has been cruising ever since. She and Joyce Landry founded the business in 1982. Their vision then and now is to make it easier for meeting professionals to use cruise ships to deliver exceptional travel experiences. The company's only focus is cruise events, and all services neces-

sary to yield phenomenal results and value. Their track record with full-ship charters is unparalleled. www.shipcharters.com, www.landrykling.com



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Incentives at Sea

New & Different and Bigger & Better Than Ever Before

By John Buchanan

Guests on the all-suite, all-balcony Seven Seas Mariner in Alaska watch frolicking Orca whales. The Regent Seven Seas Cruises ship was fully refurbished in 2014.

Credit: Regent Seven Seas Cruises

With incentive travel programs flourishing again and planners always on the lookout for something new, different and special, cruise ships are increasingly becoming a go-to option. By offering a wide range of ship sizes, itineraries and onboard amenities, there is literally a ship that is right for every budget and attendee demographic. And with many budgets remaining tight, incentives at sea also offer tremendous value.

"The big thing that appeals to me as a planner is that cruise programs are easy to do," says Barb Orvis, senior meeting and event planner at Voya Financial in Minneapolis. "They are also basically all-inclusive. So that means I get good value. And that's obviously important when budgets are tight or if you're looking to get a big bang for your dollar."

Orvis has been using cruise ships

as venues for 15 years, with her most recent program in 2012 using Royal Caribbean's Liberty of the Seas, out of Barcelona, Spain, for a five-night Mediterranean itinerary that included Monaco, Rome and Majorca. This June, she will do a seven-day river cruise program with AmaWaterways along the fabled Rhine River from Amsterdam to Basel, Switzerland.

The favorable value proposition that cruise programs offer has always been a factor in the appeal of cruise programs for her, Orvis says. "But at the same time, I do think one thing the cruise lines have done to make cruising more attractive is that they have added even more value over the years," she says. "For example, the spas are bigger and better now. The onboard amenities, such as specialty restaurants and activities, are more varied. And now, almost every day you hear about some brand

new ship that is coming online and offering something new and different."

The bottom-line value derived from a cruise program also is a major factor for Amy Ingalls, senior meeting and event planner at Transamerica Life & Protection in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

She has planned several Caribbean and Alaska cruise programs, ranging in size from 200–650 attendees. A particular favorite was a program aboard Royal Caribbean's Allure of the Seas. "That ship and all of the amenities it offers were major factors in our decision to do our cruise programs," Ingalls says. "The wide range of entertainment options, dining options, ports of call... the list of reasons why we like Allure of the Seas goes on and on. We've used other cruise lines for incentive trips, too, and they are always a positive experience for the qualifiers."

In fact, she and her qualifiers like

cruise programs so much she is planning another Alaska cruise for next year.

"Cruise programs are a great value, for not only my convention budget, but also for the attendees' budgets," Ingalls says. "It is easy to understand what is and isn't included. And I've had some attendees tell me that they have walked off the ship with a zero balance."

She also likes cruise programs because of what they offer attendees. "For some of our first-time qualifiers, a cruise program was also their first time out of the country," she says. "And the fact that they can go to multiple countries on a cruise ship, makes the experience that much more memorable."

Ingalls says she marvels at the reaction she gets from attendees who experience a cruise program for the first time — a unique manifestation of the wow factor. "One of my favorite parts of a cruise is when attendees first

step foot onboard the ship," she says. "Their eyes are wide open, and 'ooohs' and 'aaahs' follow. Then this huge rush of energy comes over them, and they scurry around to discover every corner of the ship."

Her attendees also tell Ingalls they consider a cruise a huge reward. "They love it," she says. "Stop and think about how many people in this world have 'take a cruise' on their bucket list. I have helped hundreds and hundreds cross that off their bucket list."

An Ever-growing List of Options

One of the key reasons why cruise programs are steadily gaining awareness and popularity among planners is the ever-growing range and diversity of options, both in terms of type of ship and itinerary, says Jo Kling, president of Miami-based Landry & Kling, Events at Sea, the industry's leading provider of cruise program planning services.

The offerings and itineraries vary from cruise line to cruise line and even within the same cruise line, different ships offers different experiences that can be perfectly tailored to an individual group, Kling explains.

At the same time, land-based options in ports of call offer an ever-increasing array of options. "Not only are there more and more things to do onboard cruise ships, but there are more and more things to do onshore," Kling says. "For example, Windstar now offers complimentary events ashore, such as an evening of entertainment

with music or something culturally exciting like fire dancers. Or you can do things like a wine-tasting in Italy."

The long recession and meeting industry slowdown of 2008–2010 also served as a catalyst for increasing planner awareness of the unique advantages and benefits of cruise programs, Kling says.

The simple fact that sleeping rooms, food and beverage, onboard entertainment and ground transportation for shore excursions are also included in a single price has greatly accelerated interest in and the use of cruise programs over the last several years.

"Every planner is looking for real value now," Kling says. "And nothing else out there delivers better value than cruise programs. And that's true even for companies that do have a large budget. Even then, you still get a lot more for your money on a cruise ship."

The other factor that is making cruise programs more popular for planners relates to the attendees, Kling says. "And that is based on the focus, the immersion, the unique experience that attendees get on a cruise ship versus a land-based program. And those things also contribute to attendee engagement, which is one of the hot terms now in the meeting industry. And what is more engaging than being on a cruise ship?"

A related and equally important benefit is that a cruise ship gives attendees a real VIP, red carpet experience, Kling notes. And that is especially important for incentive programs, she



Amy Ingalls, senior meeting and event planner at Transamerica Life & Protection, says cruise programs create memorable experiences for their incentive qualifiers.



“Stop and think about how many people in this world have ‘take a cruise’ on their bucket list. I have helped hundreds and hundreds cross that off their bucket list.”

Amy Ingalls, Senior Meeting & Event Planner
Transamerica Life & Protection, Cedar Rapids, IA

says, because motivation and recognition are core elements of the program.

“The other thing is that with a cruise program, you get to go to a number of exciting destinations and not just one,” she says. “And that by definition makes a cruise program a unique experience compared to a land-based program. And although you’re going to multiple destinations, you only have to pack and unpack once.”

Planner Perspective

“In terms of when and why we look at cruise ships, our incentive programs rotate the kinds of destinations we do,” Orvis says. “We do not do the same thing back to back for the same group. We always try to mix things up and keep the programs exciting. So that means that every two or three years, we choose a cruise option for the programs I do. But other divisions within our company also use cruise ships for some of their programs.”

When planning a program, Ingalls analyzes the relative advantages of a smaller ship versus a bigger ship. “In general, we tend to prefer smaller ships because our groups are smaller,” she says. “But on the other hand, a bigger ship gives you more space and more dining and entertainment options. And if you’re going on a seven-day program, on a bigger ship you also get the advantage that home office people do not have to be in such close quarters with your attendees all the time. There’s plenty of space to move around and be on your own, and not feel like you are always running into and talking to the same people every day.”

Food and Entertainment

Two other important factors that often convince planners to use a cruise ship versus a traditional land-based program are the exceptional quality of the food and entertainment.

“The food experience you have on a cruise ship simply cannot be matched by most hotels, and especially not on the tight budgets so many planners have since the recession,” Kling says.”

And each year, she adds, cruise lines offer more and more specialized dining experiences, such as sushi bars and fine Italian restaurants. “And on a ship from a line like Norwegian Cruise Line, you might have as many as 25 different restaurants.”

The ever-growing list of specialty dining options also means that many ships now offer what is, in effect, a built-in onboard dine-around program, Orvis says, adding that larger ships offer more restaurants and dining options that meet the specific preferences of individual attendees. Larger ships, she says, also offer more options for a small

group to do a buyout of a specialty restaurant for a special event such as an awards banquet or cocktail reception.

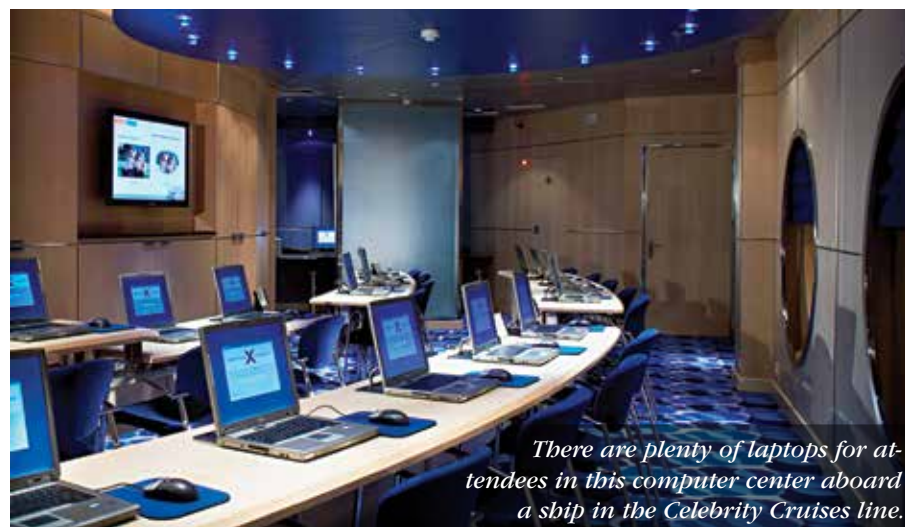
The entertainment aboard a cruise ship is every bit as spectacular as the food. “And the choice and range of options you have on a cruise ship is just completely different from a hotel, where you have to choose your entertainment and then book it and then pay separately for it,” Kling says. “On a cruise ship, the entertainment is also included in the price and we are talking about Las Vegas-quality entertainment, and Broadway-style shows or extravaganzas like Blue Man Group.”

And the astonishing offerings seem to become more exciting every year.

For example, Kling says, Holland America’s new Koningsdam will offer a “Music Walk” with three distinct entertainment experiences that include a partnership with Lincoln Center, a B.B. King Blues Club and Billboard Onboard, which will deliver a live interactive music experience.

Celebrity Cruises will unveil 18 new shows in 18 months, created exclusively for Celebrity. They will feature elements of drama, dance, comedy, musical theater and concert-style performances. The shows include Elyria, an energetic, late-night production, where guests are transported to a witty, mischievous, dreamlike world.

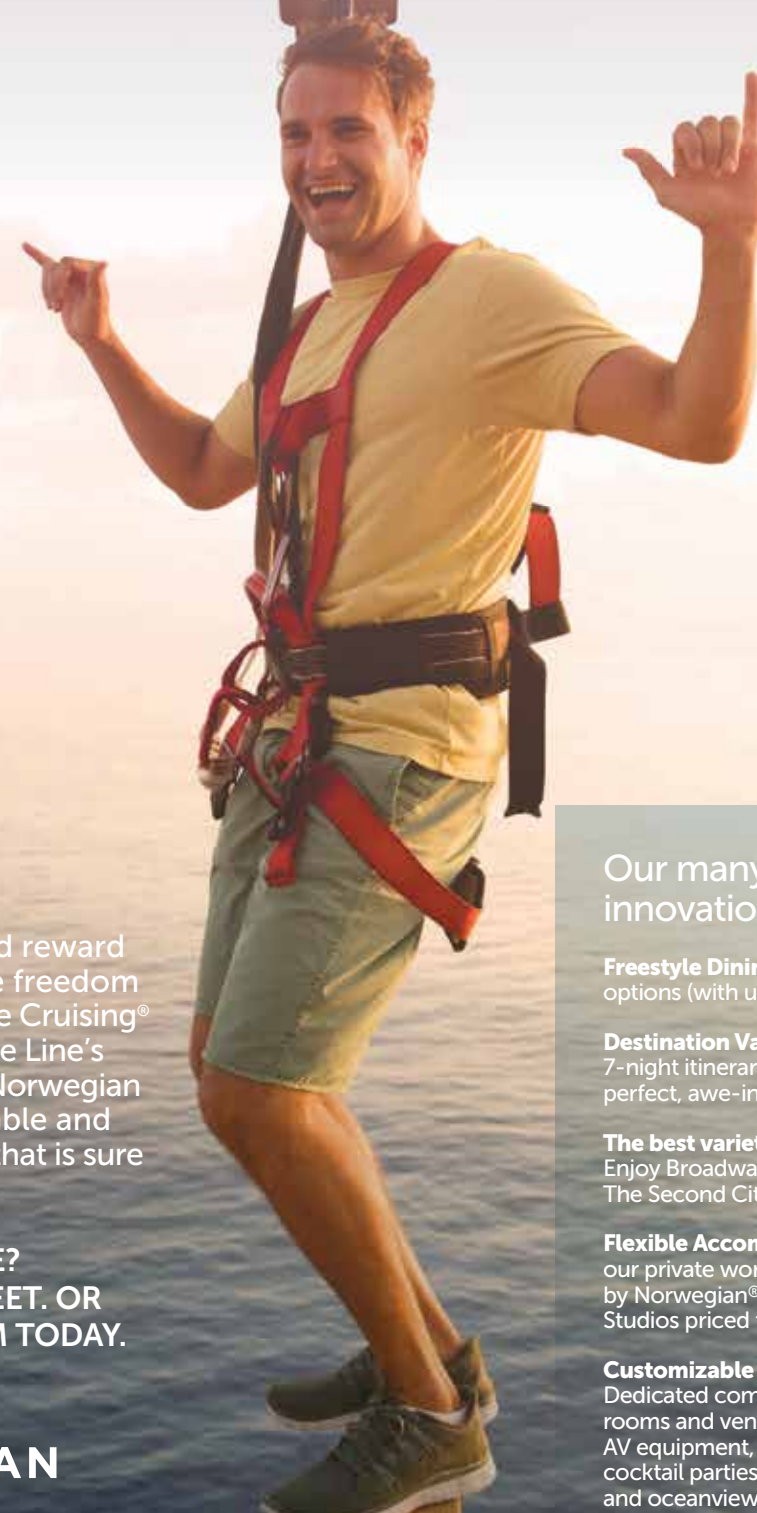
Celebrity also will present 10 engaging entertainment experiences on every ship such as Side Show, an interactive and vintage circus theme party and



There are plenty of laptops for attendees in this computer center aboard a ship in the Celebrity Cruises line.

Credit: Celebrity Cruises

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Night of the Dragon, which features the delicate beauty of Asian culture mixed with pop music.

Princess Cruises has announced a partnership with award-winning Broadway composer Stephen Schwartz, who will oversee creative development of four new musicals.

Norwegian Escape will feature two Tony Award-winning Broadway musicals including the smash hit “After Midnight,” which recently completed its Broadway run.

“Those are just the most recent examples of the kind of sensational entertainment you can get on a cruise ship,” Kling says. “And those options are included in the price, and planners don’t have to do any work to arrange them.”

New & Noteworthy

As a result of burgeoning demand for new cruise ships from both individual travelers and groups, the major cruise lines also continue to develop and build new ships, each more spectacular than its predecessors. The major lines also regularly introduce new itineraries.

Royal Caribbean will introduce four innovative new ships between now and 2018. Anthem of the Seas will sail for five-night itineraries from Bermuda starting next spring. Harmony of the Seas will sail for seven-night



“The big thing that appeals to me as a planner is that cruise programs are easy to do. They are also basically all-inclusive. So that means I get good value.”

Barb Orvis, Senior Meeting and Event Planner
Voya Financial, Minneapolis, MN

itineraries from Barcelona to “the best of the Mediterranean” next June and then move to South Florida for seven-night Caribbean cruises beginning in the fall of next year. Ovation of the Seas will sail from China, with the itinerary of a fourth new ship to be announced in the future.

OB3 technology, the fastest Internet speed/bandwidth at sea today (land speed) is now available on both Oasis and Quantum class ships, according to a Royal Caribbean spokesperson.

Royal Caribbean also boasts a number of unique venues for private events including the Main Theater for up to 1400 guests; Studio B for up to 900 attendees; Boardwalk neighborhood — an open-air area suitable for receptions — for up to 1,500 guests; the Solarium, a semi-outdoor event venue for receptions for up to 1,200 guests; and conference centers for up to 400 participants.

Royal Caribbean will debut “Mamma Mia” on Allure of the Seas and “We Will Rock You” on Anthem of the Seas.

Some of the most unique activities at sea can be found on Royal Caribbean ships. Great options for teambuilding include IFly (sky diving), Flowrider (surf simulators), rock climbing, zip lining, ice skating, mini golf and much more.

Customized VIP and Group Shore Excursion experiences also are available in all of Royal Caribbean’s ports of call.

Disney Cruise Lines also has announced major news. In mid-May, the Disney Magic arrived in New York City as part of a transatlantic crossing to kick off a summer season in Norway and Europe. In the fall of next year, Disney Cruise Line will return to New York for a limited time with sailings to the Bahamas that include a visit to Walt Disney World Resort in Florida. New seven-night Caribbean cruises from Miami and a return to Galveston, Texas, will round out the season.

On October 7, 2016, the Disney Magic will sail from New York on an eight-night Bahamian cruise that includes stops at Disney’s private island, Castaway Cay in Nassau, Bahamas; and a stop in Port Canaveral, Florida, which is located just one hour from the Walt Disney World Resort.

On October 15, 22 and 29, 2016, the Disney Magic will sail from New York on seven-night cruises that stop at Castaway Cay and Port Canaveral.

On October 2, 2016, the Disney Magic will sail from New York on a five-night cruise to Halifax, Nova Scotia and Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada. In these charming Canadian ports, guests can soak in splendid natural vistas, ex-

Royal Caribbean boasts unique venues for private events. Here stadium seating for an ice skating rink is converted into space for a much larger general session.

Credits: Royal Caribbean International

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And for the first time ever, in 2016 Disney Cruise Line guests will provide a season of seven-night voyages from Miami to the Eastern and Western Caribbean. On November 20 and December 4, 2016, the Disney Magic will sail from Miami to the Western Caribbean, with stops in Key West, Grand Cayman, Cozumel and Castaway Cay.

In the summer of 2016, luxury cruise line **Regent Seven Seas Cruises**, part of Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, which includes **Norwegian Cruise Line** as well as **Oceania Cruises**, will debut its much-anticipated new, 750-passenger, all-suite Seven Seas Explorer, which is touted as “the most luxurious ship ever built.”

The Regent Seven Seas Explorer will debut a new restaurant, Chartreuse, akin to a chic Parisian fine-dining restaurant. In addition, the first Culinary Arts Kitchen will feature 18 fully equipped individual cooking stations arranged in three rows on the ship’s 11th deck.

According to Katina Athanasiou, vice president of charters, meetings and incentives for Regent Seven Seas Cruises, all of their ships are available for full charters for meetings and incentives. Regent Seven Seas ships could be considered as “floating conference centers,” as they offer everything needed for meetings, from state-of-the-art, multimedia facilities and conference rooms to wireless Internet access and audio-visual equipment. A full-ship charter allows planners to customize every detail including the company’s logo on all materials, entertainment, menus, on-board activities, shore excursions and even the itinerary.

As an added bonus, Regent Seven Seas Cruises is the only brand that offers free unlimited shore excursions in every port of call in every destination.

Carnival Cruise Line returned to the Port of Baltimore. The Carnival Pride’s year-round schedule from Baltimore includes a wide range of departures, from five-day Bermuda

cruises to seven- to 14-day voyages visiting destinations in the Caribbean, The Bahamas and Florida.

“We are thrilled to be returning to the Port of Baltimore, which is such a fantastic cruise departure point for people in the mid-Atlantic states, the Northeast and beyond,” said Christine Duffy, Carnival president. “Carnival Pride has just undergone a massive enhancement program that added a variety of great new features which, when combined with the wide range of itinerary options, makes the ship an excellent vacation choice for consumers and a great selling opportunity for our valued travel agent partners,” she adds.

Carnival Pride recently underwent an extensive multimillion-dollar dry dock that added a variety of the line’s Fun Ship 2.0 innovations, including new dining venues such as Guy’s Burger Joint, BlueIguana Cantina and Bonsai Sushi, exciting bar concepts such as Alchemy Bar, RedFrog Pub and the poolside RedFrog Rum Bar and BlueIguana Tequila Bar, as well as new entertainment choices. A massive WaterWorks water park featuring Green Thunder, the fastest and steepest water-slide at sea, was added, as well.

Carnival Cruise Line will debut in 2016 the new Carnival Vista, billed as the “largest and most innovative ‘Fun Ship.’”

Embodying Carnival Cruise Line’s motto of Fun For All, All For Fun, the new Carnival Vista will offer a variety of amazing, one-of-a-kind onboard features when it enters service next spring.

Costa Cruises’ new 1,130-cabin vessel Costa Deliziosa will debut at Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale during the 2015-2016 winter season and sail a series of 10-night voyages as well as shorter cruises to the Western and Eastern Caribbean. Costa Deliziosa’s series of six 10-night sailings will include visits to Nassau or Freeport, Bahamas; Amber Cove, Dominican Republic; Ocho Rios, Jamaica; Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands; Roatan, Honduras; and Cozumel or Costa Maya, Mexico. The



Credit: NCL

Norwegian Epic has something for everyone from the multislide Aqua Park to the rock-climbing wall or shooting hoops in the Sports Complex.

ship features four restaurants, 11 bars, three pools, a 4-D cinema, golf and Costa Cruises’ signature Samsara Spa.

Given the ever-expanding list of options planners have, one key to a successful cruise program is analyzing the vast array of choices and matching the ship and itinerary to the demographics of the group and the goal of the program, Kling says. “There are so many choices now that a planner has to start by looking at things like the range and interests of his or her group,” she says. “And you also have to look at the organizational goal for the program. Then you start to look at your options for making a particular ship and itinerary support your demographics, interests and goals. Those are the real keys to success.” **I&FMM**

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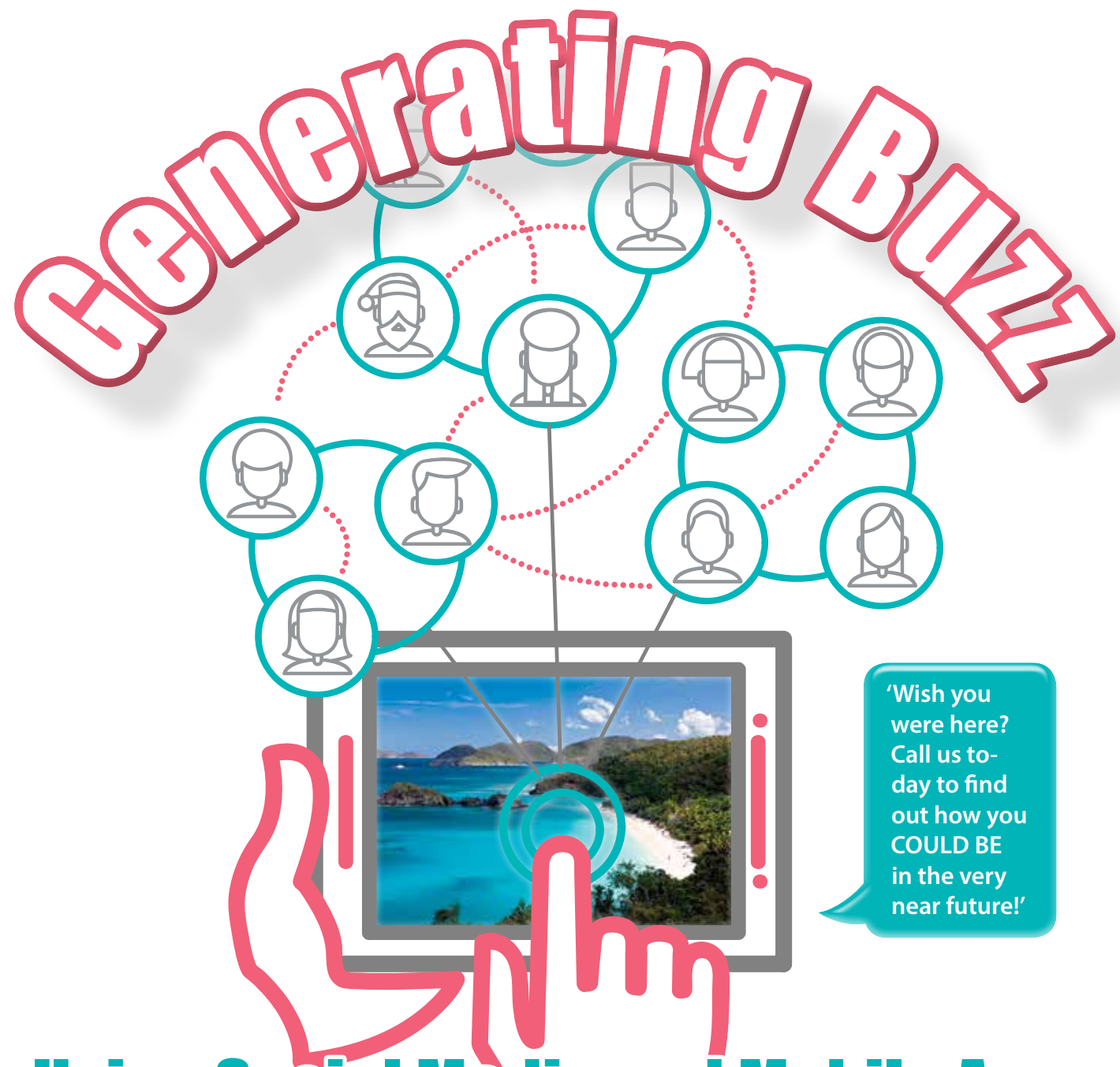
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Using Social Media and Mobile Apps to Promote Incentive Programs

By Karen Brost

Part of what makes an incentive program successful is the ability to generate enthusiasm for it so participants will be willing to do whatever it takes to earn a coveted spot on the list of winners. And one way to do that is to tap into the power of social media.

Continued on page 51

Continued from page 18

"We're seeing a trend in the industry towards competitive reward using social media to engage participants," explains Lynn Randall, senior strategist for the Strategy Solutions Group of the business communications firm InVision Communications. "An example would be using your existing winners (perhaps last year's winners) to tweet six other potential winners, encouraging them to join them at this coming year's trip. You could also encourage previous winners to post photos from the previous year's trip on Instagram and on Facebook encouraging comments and 'likes' for their efforts in earning the current year's trip."

Randall and InVision's Digital Practice Manager Nicole Bojic offer another suggestion. "A unique way to use social media to promote the incentive trip destination is to link to a program website where images of the destination are concealed behind a digital object (like an orb or ball). With each tweet using the trip hashtag, a digital hammer hits the ball, creating cracks until the time that the ball cracks open to reveal the destination image."

Promoting Peak Performance

Randall and Bojic also suggest ways to use social media to provide performance updates to keep prospective winners engaged and motivated. "Facebook and LinkedIn can be leveraged to both encourage and provide performance and productivity tips to lower-performing individuals." The two experts also recommend encouraging managers and top performers to tweet out their progress and achievements toward earning the trip.

They also describe other ways that social media can be used to share helpful sales strategies. "Top performers can also be encouraged through social gamification to post onto Twitter, Pinterest or Instagram their best practices and success stories (what they do that keeps them at the top of the performance lead-

erboard). We're also seeing a trend toward social exclusivity, where special content or information to help aid success can be unlocked based on social participation. If you're socially involved and engaged, you are invited in to special top performer group exchanges on LinkedIn or other social media."

Tag, You're It

Amber Finken, incentive trip coordinator for the insurance firm Western Marketing, describes how her company uses social media. "We primarily use Facebook as our social media outlet to promote our incentive trips," she says. "First, using our company's Facebook account, I will 'like' the official page of the resort or hotel property where we will be hosting our trip. After that, I will share specific postings the hotel makes on its page, or at least ones I feel would motivate or excite our attendees. Sometimes I even go so far as to personally tag a few of our regular attendees in the posts I share just to increase the odds of them paying attention to what I want them to see. And once we get a little bit closer to the actual dates of the trip and we've determined who has officially qualified, I will post a picture of our trip destination to their individual wall with a short congratulations message from our entire staff, while telling them we look forward to seeing them soon to celebrate their hard work."

"Sometimes I will also post a particularly appealing photo or video of our upcoming destination and will include some kind of teaser comment like: 'Wish you were here? Call us today to find out how you COULD BE in the very near future!' And in the past, if I happen to notice our company page has gotten a lot of new recent 'likes' from new agents, I'll post a few pictures and videos from our past incentive trips with a comment that says, 'If you think THIS trip

looked fun, wait until you see where we're going NEXT!' and I'll include an additional link or video to the hotel property or destination of our next upcoming trip."

Qualification Updates

She also uses social media to communicate updates. "I also like to post a few friendly reminders at least once a month letting everyone know how much time is left during the qualification period and to make sure they're staying on pace to qualify. To give some agents a little extra incentive, sometimes we'll run a couple of short promotions where they will get double-trip credits toward qualifying



"We're seeing a trend in the industry towards competitive reward using social media to engage participants."

Lynn Randall
Sr. Strategist, Strategy Solutions Group
InVision Communications
Walnut Creek, CA

if they write so much business within a specified amount of time. That way, if a person is motivated enough, they may end up qualifying for our trip on half the production it would normally take."

Making the Most of Mobile Apps

To capture the interest of potential incentive trip winners, it makes sense to focus on the one place that already has their attention — their mobile phones. As a society, we've become so attached to our phones that a special term "nomophobia" has even been coined to describe the fear of being out of mobile phone contact. Using a mobile app to promote an incentive program can help ensure that

“Once...we’ve determined who has officially qualified, I will post a picture of our trip destination to their individual wall with a short congratulations message from our entire staff.”



Amber Finken
Incentive Trip Coordinator
Western Marketing
Missouri Valley, IA

participants take the contest’s parameters with them wherever they go.

When choosing a mobile app platform, there are a couple of directions planners can go. One option is to choose a commercially available event app, such as Lanyon. Michael Douglas, director of sales for Lanyon Mobile, describes the advantages of using a mobile app to promote an incentive program. “A platform available 24/7 like mobile can stimulate in a way the desktop can’t by delivering a constant reminder of the rewards and the participant’s path to winning them. Plus, once on the trip, a mobile guide can ensure easy logistics as well as maximizing networking and other business returns.”

In Lanyon’s white paper “Mobile Meetings and Events: Best Practices for Launching a Mobile Event App,” it is recommended that planners consider the event’s life cycle when deciding how to incorporate a mobile app into their programs. For example, before the event, they recommend promoting the mobile app early and often to encourage downloads. Another option is to upload a series of two- to three-minute videos that are only available on the mobile event app. During the incentive trip, the app can be used to provide maps and personalized schedules

and also to push real-time updates and announcements such as schedule changes. Social media posts can be displayed on an event wall, and attendees can be encouraged to upload photos they’ve taken on the trip to the app.

Another best practice Lanyon recommends is to use the mobile app to continue the conversation after the event by loading video clips and highlights of the event; announce plans for the next event; and solicit attendees’ feedback to help shape the next event.

Karen deKanter, GLP, director, business development, for the meetings and events company BCD M&I, also advises that her clients consider using a meeting app with the functionality to send individual notifications to provide personalized content. She also recommends selecting an app that offers multiple levels of sharing so planners can customize and support their event goals and policies.

Another option is to do what Western Marketing does: incorporate incentive trip information into an existing app that the company already uses. “The main purpose of our smartphone app is to provide insurance agents instant, easy access to the multiple different selling tools we provide to them, but it also features all of our contact information as well as some basic info on our incentive trips and how they can qualify,” Finken explains. “Within the app, agents can see all of our trip qualification details, including the qualification period as well as the specific production requirements. They are also able to flip through a few pictures of our featured destination.”

Managing Expectations Onsite

DeKanter says that another advantage of using social media and mobile apps for incentive programs is that

they provide a way for attendees to provide instant feedback to the host so that any problems or issues can be addressed immediately. Knowledge is power; with real-time access to attendee feedback, “You can inform hotel operational teams to address any challenges. It moves service to a new level when you can let your attendees know ‘We heard you, we’re on it.’” She says this can help avoid the “mad herd” mentality that can occur and make an issue bigger than it really is.

“The biggest fear I see in customers about launching social media campaigns and mobile apps is they feel that it’s all of a sudden going to be a complain-a-thon,” deKanter adds, “and, in fact, the reverse has proven true.” She says that attendees are more likely to use a program’s social media to share discoveries, such as great restaurants, with other attendees once they’ve arrived at the destination, and it provides a line of sight into attendee satisfaction throughout the event.

Making It Personal

Social media and mobile apps also offer opportunities to give attendees a more personalized incentive trip experience. Randall and Bojic provide a few suggestions on how to do this. “Using Instagram and Pinterest,

“The biggest fear I see in customers about launching social media campaigns and mobile apps is they feel that it’s all of a sudden going to be a complain-a-thon, and, in fact, the reverse has proven true.”



Karen deKanter, GLP
Director, Business Development
BCD M&I
Chicago, IL

Keeping Your Event App Safe and Secure

Event apps can go a long way toward generating excitement for an incentive program and keeping participants updated on sales rankings and trip details. But, as with any activity that involves a mobile device, it’s important to take the right security precautions. The event management software company Lanyon offers these suggestions:

Verify your app provider’s security credentials. Make sure the event technology company you’re using has been certified by an independent, third-party security verification organization such as Veracode.

Secure your team. The simplest way for anyone to hack into a system is to exploit the naiveté of the people who have access to it. Take steps to make sure that access is only given to those who have the proper credentials. Also, make sure that passwords are frequently updated and that access is revoked for anyone who leaves the team.

Remember that security is a process, not a state. Maintaining security on mobile devices is an ever-evolving process. Be sure to choose an event technology partner who is prepared to adapt to new circumstances and security threats as they arise.

— KB



you can post real-time photos from onsite activities where top achievers provide a peek into what’s happening at that moment on the incentive travel program.” In addition, “Spontaneous gatherings can be encouraged via a ‘tweet up’ that is hosted during non-activity times for on-the-spot recognition and additional reward (for example, a special cocktail reception for tweeters only).

“Recognition can also be encouraged using a photo gallery or museum concept for recognizing winners,” they continue. “Photos of winners are posted along a public hallway or frequently traversed area of the incentive destination or property. Each winner’s image includes a unique hashtag for posting on Instagram, Twitter or even Facebook. Passing by the photo

prompts spontaneous acts of recognition through a quick tweet recognizing the winner’s accomplishment.”

Covering the Cost

DeKanter offered a few suggestions for keeping the cost of a mobile app under control. “If the company purchases an application and uses it over multiple events over the course of the year, the cost per usage goes down. And,” she adds, “the cost is not exorbitant.”

She says there also may be opportunities for sponsorships. For example, restaurants and venues may be interested in sponsorship as a way to reduce the cost of the app to the meeting owner and promote their choice of venues and activities directly to attendees.

Lanyon advises planners to be strategic about sponsorships. One opportunity the company says is worth considering is the sale of banner ads to help sponsors engage with attendees. Another opportunity involves placing the sponsor’s messaging on the loading screen, because it will be the first thing attendees see while the app is loading.

Meeting Expectations

DeKanter believes that the practice of using social media to promote events is here to stay. “It’s almost an expectation anymore,” she explains. “The traveler demographic is getting younger and younger. It’s becoming more and more common because people are expecting that access.”

I&FMM

Conference Centers of Attention



Credits: Destination Hotels

Why Business Is Up at Business-focused Properties

By Derek Reveron



Skamania Lodge, a Destination Hotel in Washington state, features 62,000 sf of meeting space. Skamania is one of six Destination Hotels properties with IACC-certified conference centers.

Tight training and education budgets along with pressure to justify spending and boost ROI make it more important than ever to plan productive meetings — and planners are finding that purpose-built conference centers deliver the value and business-focused environment they need to do just that.

Demand for conference centers is rising along with the economy even as supply of the facilities remains flat. As a result, rates, revenues and profits are up. The average daily rate (ADR) for conference centers grew 2.9 percent, according to the “Trends in the Conference Center Industry 2014” report by the International Association of Conference Centres (IACC) and PKF Hospitality Research, LLC.

Training meetings are leading the way. According to the IACC report, 57.8 of meetings at residential conference centers were training/continuing education sessions followed by management planning conferences. In addition, the American Express Meetings & Events “2015 Global Meetings Forecast” projects a 9 percent rise in training meetings this year.

Financial firms are significant contributors to the growth in conference center usage. “Financial institutions have a lot of training delivered, given the high levels of legislation in their sector,” says IACC CEO Mark Cooper. “Many training courses that take place are required training for financial pro-



Emory Conference Center Hotel's Great Hearth, a warm and inviting space to network; and the Starvine ballroom, set up for a collaborative meeting-in-the-round.

fessionals to carry out financial services. There is also a high level of leadership and management development training carried out in this sector.”

A Conference Center Convert

Protective Life Insurance Company, based in Birmingham, Alabama, decided to hold their annual meeting at a conference center for the first time in 2014 after having used resorts for the previous seven years. They selected Atlanta's Emory Conference Center Hotel, a newly renovated, LEED Silver-certified sustainable facility.



The insurer transitioned to a conference center based on feedback from attendees. “In the past, we would go to a great resort and give them a day of free time,” says Protective Life's Lisa Ramsay, CMP, assistant vice president, event and meeting management. “But they told us they didn't want to go to a resort anymore because it's too distracting. They wanted to go to a venue centered (on) learning to get the most out of their time. They wanted to get to the meat of the matter and get out.”

Attendees lauded the change after meeting in the conference center. “Our post-meeting survey numbers were off the charts as far as people saying it was a fantastic conference,” says Ramsay. “They said they loved the new format and to keep doing it. We held the two-day meeting at Emory again this year for 180 attendees and we have asked for a contract for 2016.”

Ramsay chose the Emory conference center in large part because of its meeting space and 325 guest rooms. The center offers more than 32,000 sf

The IACC Difference

The International Association of Conference Centres (IACC) is a global professional association that represents small- to medium-sized venues that focus on meetings, training courses and conferences. The organization has 400 members in 21 countries, and each member conference center agrees to adhere to a set of standards designed to create an exceptional meeting experience. These standards cover elements such as soundproofing, technology, ergonomic seating, lighting, unobstructed interior views and continuous refreshment service. Companies that use IACC-certified conference centers also receive a 24-hour hold on their meeting space, so they can leave their materials, displays and other items in the room overnight. This saves the time and effort involved in re-staging the room in the morning because it had been used for another event the night before.

of meeting space and accommodates groups of up to 500 people. Emory's main amphitheater, one of the largest in the Southeast, seats up to 240 guests. "We really liked the amphitheater feel," says Ramsay. "That works well for us instead of a regular ballroom. We held all of our functions there. We didn't have any breakouts. It was mostly PowerPoint presentations and panels. One panel included financial planners for our company sharing their secrets of success."

Value was an added plus. "Before changing, I was wondering if I would like the costing structure, but I find it very economical," says Ramsay. "All the meals and breaks are priced into the CMP. So is the AV. You don't need to bring in a big production company. It works well for getting value."

The meeting also included moti-

"The sharper increase in occupancy and general demand did not transcribe into sharper increases in rates when compared against the hotel sector."

Mark Cooper, CEO
International Association of
Conference Centres
Warwickshire, UK

ational speakers, including one who spoke at a non-traditional time. "One night after we finished dinner, we went back into the amphitheater at about 8 p.m. and had another speaker," says Ramsay. "It was a dynamic speaker that kept everybody engaged. That's probably the only way you'd be able to do that after a group has met for the entire day and eaten dinner. It wasn't mandatory, but more than three-fourths of the group came."

A Growing Membership

IACC-certified conference centers are solely dedicated to the service



Lansdowne Resort, a Destination Hotel, overlooking the Potomac River in Leesburg, Virginia, features 296 guest rooms and 55,000 sf of IACC-certified meeting space.

and positive outcome of meetings, providing a variety of specialized and configurable meeting spaces complete with all the necessary meetings-related tools (see *"The IACC Difference" on page 55*).

The distraction-free conference center environment typically also provides plenty of open spaces outdoors, most of them nearby meeting rooms, where small groups can network and take walks during breaks.

Meanwhile, more properties are becoming IACC members. The organization recently reported its highest single-year growth in membership worldwide, with 58 new members, 54 of which are conference centers. The organization currently has 400 members in 21 nations.

The growth of conference centers compares favorably with that of hotel competitors. "Our members work incredibly hard to provide meeting environments that clients want to run their meeting in, and when the economy returns to growth, as it has in the last 18 months, we have seen a faster recovery than hotel benchmarks have been reporting, which is very encouraging," says Cooper. "It is also worth noting that investment in creating inspiring meeting rooms has been rapid as members seek to differentiate from the more traditional, non-focused venues."

Flexible CMPs

Conference centers offer an all-inclusive Complete Meeting Package (CMP), which provides accommodations, meeting space, AV services,

three meals a day and continuous breaks. But these days, planners are asking for flexibility with CMPs. The more customized versions are known as MMPs (Modified Meeting Packages), and conference centers are more willing than ever to oblige, says Cooper. "The core ingredients — meeting room, technology, refreshments and dining — are still there. But the style of lunch, the equipment packages, Wi-Fi and other items are available in flexible meeting packages that suit the client's exact needs. There is anything from culinary teambuilding to zip-wire and team development pursuits. We are seeing some unique ways of packaging these activities into delegate rates to help clients manage costs effectively. It's no different than ordering a car and adding the extras that make it your car."

Carol Gillenwater, founder and president of Woodlands, Texas-based Corporate Meetings Unlimited, agrees. "All-inclusive is usually a better deal," she says. "At a hotel you usually need a food and beverage minimum to have the meeting space, and you have a variety of choices. Most conference centers have a pretty standard approach. A conference center usually has pre-established packages, but there is a lot of customization involved based on the group's needs. They know there isn't a formula that works for everyone in terms of price."

Value Comparison Shopping

Although conference centers can be a very good deal, planners must do their homework to take full advantage of pricing. Gillenwater suggests that planners take the following approach

when considering conference centers: "Tell them how much space you need and for how long, and the type and number of meals needed," says Gillenwater. "Then run the numbers. Do the same for hotels. Remember that a hotel could very well, depending on its occupancy, charge you more for its meeting space than would a conference center. If you don't need hotel services and people are booking their own reservations at different properties, then a conference center may be a better bet."

Last year, Gillenwater held a four-day education meeting for 600 people at a conference center after comparing it to hotels. "When we ran the numbers, the size, accessibility and package were very affordable versus a ho-

"A conference center usually has pre-established packages, but there is a lot of customization involved based on the group's needs. They know there isn't a formula that works for everyone in terms of price."

Carol Gillenwater, Founder and President
Corporate Meetings Unlimited, Woodlands, TX

tel. It was an easy decision to make. The package included space for the general session, five or six breakout rooms, and exhibition room, food and beverage, and basic AV. The size and layout of the space was attractive. And the food was very good."

According to Cooper, the value that conference centers offer remains con-

stant despite the rise in demand. "In the PKF conference center trends report, compiled from data from IACC members and compared to similar hotel reports, the sharper increase in occupancy and general demand did not transcribe into sharper increases in rates when compared against the hotel sector," Cooper explains. "One

IACC's Top 10 Food Trends

Whether you're a hardcore foodie or not, the highlight of any meeting usually has a menu, rather than an agenda, attached to it. Now more than ever, innovative and memorable F&B is integral to the perceived success of a conference. When booking a conference center, ask about the following "Top 10 Conference Foods Trends for 2015," courtesy of the International Association of Conference Centres.

- 1 Local is everything.** The importance of adding a local feel to meetings has been identified as a major trend as attendees want to experience as much as they can about their meeting destination.
- 2 Network your heart out.** Small plates of food items, continuously served in a reception format, add a nice break to an extended event. Another popular choice is to hold a more substantial networking-friendly dining reception midway through your event as it provides a great way for guests to meet up in a casual environment and build relationships while enjoying great food and beverage.
- 3 Small is the new big!** Bite-sized desserts have overtaken larger portions in popularity. Instead of that big slice of cake, delegates are favoring dessert stations with easy-to-handle selections such as warm, house-made donuts, chocolate truffles, French macaroons, mini cupcakes or house-made cookies.
- 4 In with flavor, out with fats!** Healthful choices don't need to resemble rabbit food, and conference chefs cook creatively, incorporating protein alternatives (quinoa, amaranth, tofu, beans) and high-nutrient green vegetables (kales, spinach) for low-fat and low-sugar menu choices that sound, look and taste great!
- 5 Making and breaking bread together.** Nothing brings the team together more than food, and having the opportunity to cook with somebody can create a whole new appreciation for a hidden talent not seen in an office environment or company outing. Culinary teambuilding has all the ingredients to cook up a winning team!
- 6 Contrasting environments.** Utilizing outside space to create a change in scenery and a casual dining experience will revitalize attendees, especially during multiday meetings and events.
- 7 Finale NOT gala.** Make sure the last night of your event has all the components to create a dynamic environment and brings people together to celebrate the end of a great conference. Be creative and choose your room seating layout and dining style to deliver that finale.
- 8 That's theater, darling!** Adding an interactive chef station also can highlight the menu with freshly prepared items (Panini, clubhouse or slider); remember to ask for gluten-free options.
- 9 Go micro for max effect.** With the explosion in microbreweries offering a brew for every taste, ask your conference planner if she can make pre-dinner drinks a local affair!
- 10 Infused tea cocktails.** Combine this with trend No. 9, and you can have a double brew at your next reception!

www.iacconline.org



All of the conference rooms at the Hotel Contessa, a certified Benchmark Conference Center on the Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas, offer views of the city.

reason for this may be the longer term pricing approach taken by conference centers and the fact that their client relationships are also long-standing with a realization that delivering value for money and approaching pricing in a non-volatile way, leads to better long-term client relationships.”

Master of Learning

When the focus is on training or education, conference centers excel. “They are designed for learning and there is often no compromise,” says Cooper. “Multifunction venues that are not focused on meetings often have to provide a room, which can accommodate all types of events and

purposes such as dining, social events and meetings. This compromises the overall design and decoration of a room. There is a saying, ‘jack of all trades, master of none,’ and this applies to many other (non-conference center) venues.

Conference Center News

The rate of growth in new conference center construction lags behind that of hotels. However, conference centers are investing to maintain state-of-the-art facilities. “With improving margins and greater stability in the marketplace, we expect to see our members investing further in their conference environment for their clients,” Cooper said in a statement.

In addition, conference centers are acquiring new facilities and re-branding current properties. For example, last year Benchmark Hospitality International introduced benchmark Conference Centers (BCC), properties specially designated to provide a productive meeting experience. Benchmark Conference Centers meet IACC standards — although IACC membership is not a prerequisite — and offer four-diamond lodging as well as customized cuisine.

The certified BCC properties include: Chaminade Resort & Spa in



Santa Cruz, California; Cheyenne mountain Resort in Colorado Springs, Colorado; Downtown Conference Center in New York City; Eaglewood Resort & Spa in Chicago; Edith Macy Hotel & Conference Center in Briar Cliff Manor, New York; Hotel Contessa in San Antonio; Stonewall Resort in Roanoke, West Virginia; The Chattanooga Hotel in Chattanooga, Tennessee; The Heldrich in New Brunswick, New Jersey; and the Inn at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. Two additional certified Benchmark Conference Centers are located in Tokyo.

Wyndham Hotel Group, a subsidiary of Wyndham Worldwide, recently acquired Dolce Hotels and Resorts and its portfolio of hotels, resorts, conference centers and day meeting centers. Dolce’s properties offer a combined total of 750,000 sf of meeting space that hosts about 4 million attendees each year. Many Dolce properties are IACC-certified and offer the all-inclusive Complete Meeting Package.

As rates rise at hotels and convention centers, conference centers are competing head-on with attractive packages that offer value and specialize in catering to every detail of a group’s needs. Customized packages, the latest facilities and technology, great service and availability make conference centers the smart choice.

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Use Proper Planning to Prevent Information Security Breaches

By Mark Rowh

It can happen to anyone. While in Orlando to give a speech on identity theft, security expert John Sileo took the opportunity to take his daughter to Walt Disney World Resort. The next day, he was informed by his bank that his credit card had been compromised. And it was no trivial purchase: Someone used it to buy \$3,000 worth of online merchandise. Sileo's theory is that a stranger used a cell phone to capture a picture of his card when he used it at the theme park.

This story, related by security expert Robert Siciliano of TheBest-

Companies.com, is unusual only in that it happened to a security guru. Unfortunately, such incidents are all too common. And for meeting planners, taking steps to help prevent them becomes an imperative.

Obviously no one likes focusing on security when so many other details are crying for attention. But as we become more and more connected, it's a necessary evil.

"Security issues, cyber security in particular, should be a high priority for event planners in today's digitally connected world," says Darren Guccione, CEO and co-founder of Chicago-based Keeper Security Inc.

"Security issues, cyber security in particular, should be a high priority for event planners in today's digitally connected world."

Darren Guccione, CEO
Keeper Security Inc., Chicago, IL



He says that a breach of security can not only create substantial financial repercussions but harm an event planner's reputation. It also can lead to legal ramifications if negligence can be shown in securing the digital information held by employees or clients.

"While physical security in the form of security guards to check for attendee badges may be at the forefront of security concerns, meeting planners should also ensure that the digital information of clients and attendees is safe," Guccione says.

Greg Mancusi-Ungaro, CMO of Toronto-based BrandProtect, says there is no such thing as a physical-only event.

"From parades to trade shows, conferences and sporting contests, today's physical events have a large and dynamic online and social media presence," he says. The enhanced visibility and reach of these events can make them attractive to threat actors who want to make a dramatic public statement, he notes, citing the

example of an outsider who has an axe to grind with a company and who may choose a popular event to make his views known.

"Disruptive actions, including bomb scares, active-shooter threats, threats to executives and political leaders or even flash-mob protests, are often first voiced, organized or confirmed over social media," Mancusi-Ungaro says.

Even if security isn't your responsibility, nobody wants anything bad happening to anyone for any reason while under their watch or attending their event, according to Steve Weisman

Esq., an expert on cyber security and identity theft and founder of the blog www.scamicide.com.

"In the end, if something is lost or stolen or someone gets hurt, it's a no-win situation for the planner," Weisman says.

Advising Business Travelers

For meeting planners, the most fundamental strategy may be providing basic security tips.

"Planners need to not only plan for their own security, but should also warn attendees of the need to take steps to protect their own security," Siciliano says. He notes that conventions and meetings are frequent targets for identity thieves, and that both planners and individuals should be concerned about the security of the Wi-Fi at the hotel or other venue where their computers, laptops and smartphones will be used.

"Identity thieves will set up alternative Wi-Fi that planners or attendees will unwittingly use and open their

devices to being hacked," he says. "Much sensitive information can be stolen if the electronic devices used by the planners and attendees are not protected."

The key is vigilance, says Sergio Galindo, general manager of Durham, North Carolina-based GFI Software

"Advise attendees not to be tempted by the lure and convenience of free Wi-Fi when traveling and at conferences," he says. "When connecting to a Wi-Fi network, they should

be sure of the host's legitimacy." This includes looking for anything out of place, and avoiding hotspots called "free access" or "free Internet." It's important to check the spelling of hotspots before joining, he says, since cyber thieves trick users and spoof real hotspots by simply adding a symbol or adding or switching letters.

One step anyone can take in safeguarding information is to password-protect electronic devices. Experts recommend using strong, unique passwords that are at least eight characters in length and contain a combination of uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers and symbols. And a password manager can be a very beneficial safeguard because it helps to generate, store and manage passwords, documents and information in a secure, encrypted vault, according to Guccione.

Another basic move is ensuring that all devices are protected with the latest security software updates and encryption software. For best effect, users should be advised to make sure their wireless router has an encryption mechanism and that it is turned on, says Siciliano, who notes that new devices with encryption capabilities are often delivered with this feature turned off.

Conversely, the "identifier broadcaster" feature available on most wireless routers should be turned off.

Otherwise, it will announce a traveler's computer presence to other devices in the Wi-Fi area.

Siciliano adds that even if an identifier broadcaster is turned off, wireless routers come equipped with a standard default identifier for a particular computer. Since this default identifier is known by identity thieves and hackers, it should be changed by the user.

“This (wipe-clean mechanism) along with a GPS finder application can save a traveler with a lost technology device much stress.”

Christopher Hawthorne, CPCU, CIC, Vice President
TGA Cross Insurance Inc., Wakefield, MA

A Virtual Private Network (VPN) is another alternative.

“A VPN will encrypt your communications and route them to a server controlled by the VPN company,” Siciliano explains. “Then if someone is eavesdropping on you through a compromised Wi-Fi, all they will have access to is encrypted data, which is worthless to them.”

While theft of information via un-

secured Wi-Fi is a major concern, the possible problems caused by lost or stolen hardware should not be overlooked, according to Weisman.

“Travelers should never leave hardware in a hotel room unless it is in a locked safe,” he says. “And they should never leave hardware sitting on a table when going to lunch or the restroom.”

Christopher Hawthorne, CPCU, CIC, vice president of Wakefield, Massachusetts-based TGA Cross Insurance Inc., touts the value of a wipe-clean mechanism so that if a device is lost, the data can be purged.

“This along with a GPS finder application can save a traveler with a lost technology device much stress,” he says. He also says it's important for all devices to have an option for

automatic shutdown mode. “This will prevent an unattended device from being accessed easily,” he says.

Care also should be taken with the use of public machines or hotel business centers. Galindo points out that closing down the browser after checking email or online banking is not enough.

“You must click ‘log out’ and never click boxes that offer to remember your information for next time,” he says. “Where possible, clear the history and cache. Remove as many obvious traces as you can.”

The same type of cautionary thinking applies to information that is not in electronic form.

“Business travelers need to be aware that they have their personal documents, such as I.D. cards, passports and credit cards on them at all times,” he says. “They should always be aware of their surroundings and who is nearby when using them.”

Any efforts to share such tips should be more than worth the trouble, according to Weisman.

“Certainly reminding attendees of their security responsibilities is a great

Developing a WISP

The following tips are derived from guidelines developed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. While targeted to small businesses, they may be useful to any organization.

In formulating and implementing a comprehensive Written Information Security Program (WISP), take these steps:

- Identify reasonably foreseeable internal and external risks to the security, confidentiality, and/or integrity of any electronic, paper or other records containing personal information.
- Assess the likelihood and potential damage of these threats, taking into consideration the sensitivity of the personal information
- Evaluate the sufficiency of existing policies, procedures, customer information systems and other safeguards in place to control risks.
- Design and implement a WISP that puts safeguards in place to minimize those risks.
- Regularly monitor the effectiveness of those safeguards.

— MR

first step,” he says. “This can be done in a handout or in the brochure with meeting registration.”

Planning for Security

Even the best set of tips for individuals can only go so far. Considering the nature of potential problems when groups assemble, meeting planners would do well to take their own security initiatives.

Matti Kon, CEO at New York City-based InfoTech Solutions for Business, says, “Security is always important when a large group of users gather

to be shared and discussed. If the information discussed in the meeting is common knowledge, with public data that anyone can access, moderate security measures may suffice. If on the other hand the information discussed is of a secret or confidential nature, it may be best to apply all security measures possible.

Taking things further, Kon advises performing a preventive security risk analysis. This might include, for example, identifying and evaluating who would

ing firm can be the best approach to ensure all network security measures are in place.

Kon says his IT firm is regularly asked by their clients to set up and secure their meetings.

“Several of our clients in the financial industry run daily morning meetings where the key decision-makers gather to review confidential data and make critical decisions for the day. Since we approach these meetings with preventative security maintenance, our clients have not been breached.” Perhaps the most basic strategy is to secure free Wi-Fi offered to attendees.

“A simple step to ensure that meeting attendees feel secure is to password-protect your private Wi-Fi network and only issue the password to meeting attendees,” Guccione advises. He notes that restricting attendance to meetings only to people with badges limits the accessibility of hackers having access to the meeting's Wi-Fi.



Matti Kon, CEO
InfoTech Solutions for Business, New York, NY

“Security is always important when a large group of users gather, as hackers tend to prey on larger groups and look for vulnerabilities within the network.”

together, as hackers tend to prey on larger groups and look for vulnerabilities within the network.” He suggests as a first step for any meeting, assessing the nature of the information to

benefit from interrupting the meeting and accessing the data. The task then would be to do as much preventative network security as possible. In some cases, retaining an IT consult-

Watch Those Laptops

Forget it, would-be jewel thieves. The real money may be in laptops and other portable devices.

Christopher Hawthorne, CPCU, CIC, of TGA Cross Insurance in Wakefield, Massachusetts, relates the experience of a virtual company that held meetings at a hotel once a month so the employees could see each other in person.

“After each meeting the group would head to dinner,” he recalls. “They were in the practice of putting all their laptops in the closet while they ate. One night they returned to find a very empty closet. From that meeting on, the laptops went to dinner.”

And security expert Steve Weisman reports that when he presents at an event, he always scans the area where attendees set themselves up for his presentations. He likes to see how close he can get to their tablets, laptops and mobile phones when they aren't looking or when they head to the restroom or lunch.

“If I were a criminal, I would own thousands of laptops today,” he says. “Attendees are generally just too trusting. They leave their devices around, making it easy for a criminal to walk in and walk out and sell off their hardware. In some cases that hardware would contain enough personal information to be considered a data breach.”

— MR



Guccione adds that since meeting planners have access to sensitive data from clients such as credit card numbers, hotel information and contact information, it's essential to take into consideration how it is shared and who has access.

"For this reason, meeting planners should have internal file-sharing capabilities that are secure," he says.

"In the case of an employee being fired or leaving the company, the files need to be controlled by the stakeholders of the company so the employee cannot access them upon termination."

In the field, planners should make sure that any computers being used for presentations are protected from hackers and identity thieves, according to Siciliano. In addition, any material sent through the Internet or brought on CDs or plug-ins should also be security screened.

"Also be careful when using faxes and copy machines at meetings if you are copying or sending documents with personal information," he says. "Keep in mind that this information is stored on the machines and accessible by identity thieves."

Dealing With Breaches

Even with the best of efforts, security may still be breached. What then? "Be sure to have a plan in place be-

also be determined, he notes. Was it intentional? Was it disruptive or was something taken? Was it for attention or for gain? What were its origins?

To answer these questions, forensics and network monitoring tools would be employed.

Speed is of the essence once a breach is discovered, Kon adds.

"Immediately evaluate the situation and react as quickly as possible," he says. "If you discover that there is a data leakage or data compromise through a specific URL you have been using, cut the access



Greg Mancusi-Ungaro, CMO
BrandProtect, Toronto, Canada

"Disruptive actions, including bomb scares...or even flash-mob protests, are often first voiced, organized or confirmed over social media."

to it, even if it means that users will be temporarily restricted from accessing valid data." This "cut your losses" approach will save other users from being compromised, he notes.

Also important is communicating with others about the problem.

"Be sure to let attendees know immediately that a malicious breach has occurred and warn them to take measures to protect their own devices," Galindo says.

It's also important to cooperate with security professionals.

"Advise attendees not to be tempted by the lure and convenience of free Wi-Fi when traveling and at conferences."

Sergio Galindo, General Manager
GFI Software, Durham, NC

forehand," Galindo says. "Never think 'if' but rather 'when.' Once a breach has occurred, that network should be isolated and shut down."

The details of the breach should

"Planners should already have a working relationship in place with event security personnel, which generally means someone from the hotel," Weisman says. "Knowing what

the existing protocol might be in the event of theft would help to determine the next move."

Depending on the nature and scope of the breach, detailed reporting may be necessary.

"Know your state laws on reporting and action requirements, as well as the state privacy laws for all those whose data has been compromised," Hawthorne says.

He says that all business entities should have a WISP, a Written Information Security Plan (or protocol) as dictated by some state laws. (See page 63.) This serves not only

as a prevention plan but also as an emergency response plan in the case of a data breach.

"Having a WISP and following it is critical to reducing the size of the loss," Hawthorne says. "Also if travelers maintain a cyber liability/data privacy insurance policy, notify the carrier immediately. The fines and penalties for not reporting promptly can be larger than the actual loss experienced."

Even when things go wrong, it's not just a truism that good planning pays.

"The best problems are the ones that never occur because people have taken the proper precautions," Siciliano says. "However, damage control is always important because people will not always be able to protect themselves from identity theft." He stresses that determining what information had been compromised, changing passwords, alerting businesses and people with whom you do business of the data breach and possibly putting a credit freeze on your credit reports are all steps that should be considered.

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Edd Karlan was appointed director of sales and marketing for Hilton West Palm Beach, Florida, currently under construction and expected to open spring 2016. He most recently led the sales team at the Hilton Atlanta.

The Lodge and Spa at Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Georgia, has named **Gail Drouillard** as director of sales and marketing. She was general manager at Destination Club Management in Seacrest Beach, FL.

The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa, Tucson, Arizona, has appointed **Mark Stavitski** as director of sales, **Nancy Miller** as Midwest account director and **Diana Kamper**, Southwest

account director. Stavitski was most recently director of group sales at The Westin Charlotte in North Carolina. Miller was director and top producer for the Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers and The Westin Chicago River North. Kamper was director of national accounts for The Grand Wailea, a Waldorf Astoria Resort, on Maui.

Lansdowne Resort, by Destination Hotels, located in Leesburg, Virginia, has appointed **Skip James** as director of sales and marketing. He formerly served as director of sales and marketing at Turnberry Isle Miami.

Wynn Las Vegas has promoted **Steve Blanner** to vice president of

sales and **Pedram Pakneshan** to executive director of convention sales. Blanner was most recently executive director of convention sales and services. Pakneshan was most recently director of convention sales.

The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs, Colorado, has named **Joshua Garcia** as national sales director for the Northeast region. Most recently, he was director of sales and catering for Ameristar Casino Resort in Black Hawk, Colorado.

Melia Hotels International has named **Paloma Castanon** as director of group sales, Punta Cana. She was senior sales manager for Velas Resorts. **I&FMM**

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