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# CORPORATE & INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE AND INDEPENDENT TRAVEL PLANNERS

## *The Foodie Experience*

For Sophisticated Attendees, Creativity  
in Cuisine and Presentation Is Everything  
PAGE 12

Hilton Chicago  
Executive Chef Mario Garcia

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## *Loyal to a Flag?*

Planners Reveal  
Their Favorite Hotel  
Brands and Why  
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ISSN 0739-1587

USPS 716-450

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JANUARY 2017

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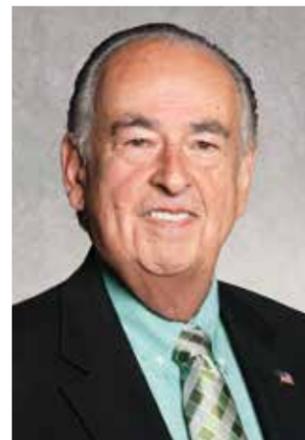


Cisco Live 2016 was hosted by several Las Vegas MGM Resorts International properties, including T-Mobile Arena. **PAGE 52**

# Publisher's Message

## A Recipe for Success

Our reader surveys have shown us time and again that you have a big appetite for learning about the latest and greatest in food and beverage. It's not surprising, as "foodie" attendees have ever higher expectations for the overall dining experience, from the method of preparation and presentation to the consumption. So in our cover story, we talk to experts and planners about some of the most popular F&B trends that make meetings so much more engaging, memorable and satisfying.



"It's about creating an experience," says Mario Garcia, executive chef at Hilton Chicago, who graces our cover. "The Food Network, Anthony Bourdain and social media have collectively changed the expectation for group meals." He continues, "Attendees want a foodie experience built around creativity, flavor, balance, health options and an ever-increasing number of dietary restrictions and personal preferences." And Alexander deHilster, event design manager for Meetings & Incentives Worldwide Inc. says his clients "want more interesting flavors, more unusual dishes and more creative ways of displaying, plating and preparing dishes, and they're willing to pay for it. Many of our clients have seen and done it all, so it's a challenge to come up with the next wow factor." Dig into our feature on page 12 and find out all the creative ways hotel chefs and catering departments are wowing groups.

As we begin a new year, diet and fitness are especially top of mind for all of us — I, for one, vow every January 1 that I will keep my resolution to eat better and exercise more — especially while traveling for business, when it's harder than ever to stick to the plan. Toni Zoblotsky, director of B2B marketing at Hilton Worldwide, comes to the rescue with her "10 Practical Tips for Planning More Healthful Meetings in the New Year" on page 10. Zoblotsky helped to launch Hilton Worldwide's Meet With Purpose program, which aims to "make nutritious meals and snacks and exercise breaks as much of a priority as the meeting agenda."

This issue has a full menu of enlightening features, including an update on meetings technology, planners' favorite hotel brands, safety tips for women business travelers, understanding millennials, and updates on destination heavyweights Florida and Las Vegas.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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**CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL**  
THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

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Corporate & Incentive Travel (USPS 716-450) is published monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$12.00 U.S.A. only. Yearly subscription price is \$125.00 in the U.S.A.; Canada and foreign is \$165.00. Back copies \$14.00 U.S.A. only. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Corporate & Incentive Travel, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Corporate & Incentive Travel), and the publication disclaims any liability with respect to the use of or reliance on any such information. The information contained in this publication is in no way to be construed as a recommendation by C&IT of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted, by or to be 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. Subscribers: Send subscription inquiries and address changes to: Circulation Department, Corporate & Incentive Travel, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Provide old and new addresses including zip codes. Enclose address label from most recent issue and please allow five weeks for the change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2017



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## News & Notes

### Wynn Las Vegas Placing Amazon Echo in All Hotel Rooms

LAS VEGAS, NV — Las Vegas and Amazon have announced plans to equip all 4,748 hotel rooms at Wynn Las Vegas with Echo, Amazon's hands-free voice-controlled speaker. The introduction of this technology into every guest room, which began in December with installation in suites, will be an industry first in the world, allowing guests of Wynn Las Vegas to control various hotel room features with a series of voice commands via Alexa, the brain behind Echo.

Alexa will be fully operational in all guest rooms by summer 2017, and



will initially control guest room lights, room temperature, drapery and the television. As the project evolves, fu-

ture features such as personal assistant functions will be introduced.

Alexa is the brain behind Amazon Echo and other Alexa-enabled devices — just ask and she'll answer questions, read the news, set timers and alarms, recite calendars, check sports scores, control smart devices in-home, and more. Since Alexa runs in the cloud, she is always getting smarter — plus, it is simple and free for developers to build Alexa skills and integrate Alexa into their own products. In the US, there are already more than 6,000 skills available for Alexa. [www.wynnlasvegas.com](http://www.wynnlasvegas.com)

### 6 Trends in Experiential Learning for 2017



LEESBURG, VA — The National Conference Center, with its partner The Browne Center, has observed six trends in experiential learning for 2017.

Experiential learning presents a highly unique growth opportunity for participants, and a tool that planners can use to achieve a specific outcome. Differentiated from the more traditional teambuilding, experiential learning uses a blended approach to learning, integrating activities, exercises, adventure elements, quiet time and ongoing post-event coaching to create powerful

programs of leadership development, strategic planning, mentoring and coaching, communication, feedback and observation, and enhancement of behavior styles.

Here are the six trends:

1. **Barrier-free learning** is a hands-on training in a lab-like setting versus the traditional meeting room or classroom. For example, The National has created an entire workroom and lab for simulation or scenario training for a top major client to deliver new skills, taking away the barrier of the "white

table" with attendees learning in a lab or open space area.

2. **Learning by choice** mixes classroom training with outdoor activities. The Challenge Course (left) at The National has high and low rope elements, and increasingly facilitators are using a Challenge-By-Choice approach.

3. **Learning by shared experiences**, where everyone is involved collectively, takes each participant out of their comfort zone and into a creative problem-solving task to construct the future.

4. **Learning by silence** provides powerful reconnection with the natural world and the true inner self, opening new channels of connection and learning.

5. **Learning by doing** engages the learners to be in direct experience, to be doing something that connects to an area they hope to improve or develop.

6. **Learning through application** assists participants over time with how learning translates back at the office. There are a number of strategies that can be arranged to help facilitate this continued learning process.

For more information, contact Denise Benoit at 703-919-1589. [www.conferencecenter.com](http://www.conferencecenter.com)

### Hyatt Acquires Wellness Leader Miraval Group

CHICAGO, IL — Hyatt Hotels has acquired Miraval Group, the renowned provider of wellness and mindfulness experiences, from an affiliate of KSL Capital Partners LLC.

Along with acquiring the flagship Miraval Arizona Resort & Spa, Hyatt will continue Miraval's plans to redevelop the recently acquired 220-acre Travaasa Resort in Austin, Texas, and pursue the acquisition and redevelopment of the 380-acre Cranwell Spa & Golf Resort in Lenox, Massachusetts. The transaction also includes the acquisition of the Miraval Life in Balance Spa brand.

"Adding Miraval to the Hyatt family creates a great opportunity to advance the Miraval brand expansion while building a greater depth of expertise in wellness and mindfulness," said Steven Rudnitsky, president and CEO of Miraval Group. [www.hyatt.com](http://www.hyatt.com)

### Ken Lawson Named President and CEO of Visit Florida

By William Talbert, III, CDME

I am proud to announce the appointment of Ken Lawson as Visit Florida's



LAWSON

new president and CEO. The announcement was made following a unanimous vote of the Visit Florida Board of Directors (January 10). Lawson, who currently serves as the Secretary of the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR), will assume his new position with Visit Florida on January 11.

The work Visit Florida does to promote tourism is vital to the continued growth of the state's economy and hav-

### Hospitality Veteran Francis Purvey Receives SITE Master Motivator Award

Francis Purvey, (center) executive vice president of Sunlark Associates, was presented the "Master Motivator" Award from (left) Jorge Colona (2017 President) and Paula Carlson (2016 President) of the SITE Florida & Caribbean Chapter at their 2017 Board Installation onboard the Caribbean Princess. Purvey brings years of successes in tourism and hospitality management, sales and marketing focused on upscale and luxury resorts and destinations.



The SITE Master Motivator Award is presented at the IMEX Gala each May to a person who holds the highest standard of excellence in creating or executing motivational events. Energy, enthusiasm and a collaborative spirit is evident in all they do. SITE especially honors the Master Motivator for their drive to keep the incentive travel industry vibrant and our business flourishing. The SITE Florida & Caribbean Chapter customized the Master Motivator Award for their chapter and extended the award to Purvey.

### JetBlue Offering Free Wi-Fi in All Domestic Flights

NEW YORK, NY — JetBlue announced its latest onboard enhancement: always-free and speedy Wi-Fi connectivity on every aircraft from the departure gate to the arrival gate.

JetBlue's Fly-Fi, which clocks in at broadband speeds beating sluggish and pricey Wi-Fi offerings onboard other carriers, keeps customers connected with an internet experience similar to what they have at home, including the ability to stream video and use multiple devices at once. The service enables JetBlue to deliver Amazon video streaming entertainment to customers onboard to their personal devices, as well as web surfing and chatting on favorite messaging apps.

First introduced in December 2013 on a single aircraft, JetBlue has expanded Fly-Fi, recently completing installation on its entire fleet of 227 Airbus A320s, A321s and Embraer 190s. During this time, Fly-Fi has become one of JetBlue's most popular features, joining other customer favorites like free DirectTV at every seat, all-you-can-eat name-brand snacks, and the most legroom in coach.

"It's 2017, and our customers expect to be connected everywhere, whether that be from the comfort of their sofa or 35,000 feet above it," said Jamie Perry, vice president of marketing, JetBlue. "That's why we're so proud that JetBlue is now the only airline to offer free, high-speed Wi-Fi, live TV and movies for all customers on every plane." [www.jetblue.com](http://www.jetblue.com)

ing someone with Secretary Lawson's strong leadership background will secure our continued success.

Lawson, a native Floridian and former U.S. Marine Corps Judge Advocate General, has spent 12 years serving and protecting the public in numerous regulatory positions.

"Florida tourism has great momen-

tum with five consecutive years of record visitation, visitor spending and industry-related employment, and I look forward to building on this momentum to take Visit Florida to the next level," said Lawson.

William D. Talbert, III, CDME, is chair of the Visit Florida Board of Directors. [www.visitflorida.org](http://www.visitflorida.org)

## Destinations Report Robust Growth in Visitation

### Las Vegas Breaks Visitor Records Again

LAS VEGAS, NV — For the third consecutive year, Las Vegas continued historic visitation growth, setting a new all-time record. The “Entertainment Capital of the World” welcomed 42.9 million visitors in 2016, surpassing 2015’s record-setting 42.3 million.



RALENKOTTER

“Las Vegas continues to see increased interest in the destination, and we are excited to announce that once again we are celebrating record visitation,” said Rossi Ralenkotter, president and CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. “Together with our resort partners, we look forward to aggressively marketing the destination around the world to continue attracting more visitors and break the record again this year.”

In addition to hosting millions of leisure travelers, Las Vegas celebrated record-breaking convention visitation in 2016. The destination welcomed more than 6.3 million business travelers during the year, contributing to the overall increase in visitor traffic.

The destination continues to enjoy industry-leading occupancy rates with an extremely large base of nearly 150,000 available rooms.

Tourism generates nearly \$52 billion annually in Southern Nevada and the Las Vegas valley. The industry supports nearly 370,000 local jobs, representing more than 40 percent of employment within Clark County.

In 2017, the LVCVA is projecting another record, surpassing 43 million visitors for the first time. [www.lvcva.com](http://www.lvcva.com), [www.lasvegas.com](http://www.lasvegas.com)

### Meet AC Reports Year of Growth

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Meet AC, which is Atlantic City’s Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Atlantic City Sports Commission, are reporting a record year in booking future meeting and convention business for Atlantic City. Even with the challenging year that Atlantic City has gone through, Atlantic City enjoyed an incredible year of



WOOD

hosting industry shows and unique sporting events throughout 2016.

In 2016, Meet AC booked a total of 260 meetings and conventions representing 289,422 future hotel room nights for. The Group Tour market was a part of the overall booking number attracting 22,600 hotel room nights. The number of future convention delegates to Atlantic City will reach more than 863,602 with a projected economic impact of more than \$285 million. Meet AC had a 2016 operating budget of \$8,100,000. Those funds come from the luxury tax revenue.

“Our 2017 sales and marketing strategies are designed to help us continue to book more business into Atlantic City,” said Jim Wood, president and CEO for Meet AC. “The Atlantic City Convention Center as well as the casino resorts, restaurants, retail and other businesses are relying on us to attract customers to our city,” added Wood. “It is our goal to continue to grow the meetings market, which offers an added bump to our local economy as evidenced by the \$285 million we booked in 2016 alone. 2016 was a year of advancing Atlantic City’s image in the meetings and convention market, and Meet AC looks forward to selling and marketing the destination to book future meetings, conventions and sporting events into the destination.” [www.meetac.com](http://www.meetac.com), [www.atlanticcitysports.org](http://www.atlanticcitysports.org)

### San Francisco Welcomed 25 Million Visitors in 2016

SAN FRANCISCO, CA — The San Francisco Travel Association reports that tourism in the city and county had another record-breaking year in 2016. San Francisco welcomed a total of 25.1 million

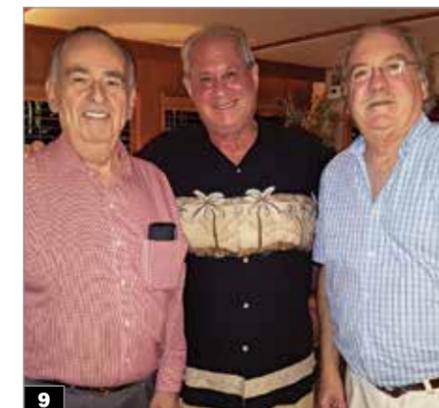
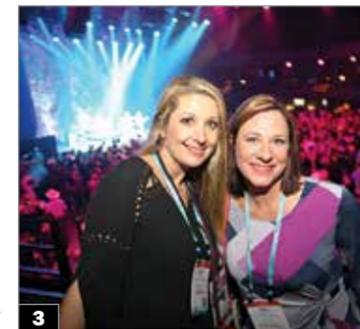


D'ALESSANDRO

visitors in 2016, an increase of 2.3 percent from 2015. In 2016, the 25.1 million visitors brought \$9.69 billion in spending to San Francisco, up by 3.3 percent from 2015.

“This is the seventh consecutive year of record-breaking growth for San Francisco’s tourism industry. The 25.1 million visitors and \$9.96 billion in spending create jobs and support services for people throughout the city and the entire Bay Area,” said Joe D’Alessandro, president and CEO of San Francisco Travel. “We continue to see steady growth, especially in the area of visitor spending.”

Of the 25.1 million people who visited the city last year, 10.4 million were overnight visitors and 14.7 million visited for the day, with both figures increasing by 2.3 percent. Overnight visitors spent \$7.77 billion (86.8 percent of all visitor spending), up 3.4 percent over the previous year. Day visitors spent \$1.18 billion (13.2 percent of visitor spending), up 3.5 percent from 2015. Total direct spending by visitors was \$8.9 billion. Convention/meeting direct spending is estimated at \$754 million. [www.sftravel.com](http://www.sftravel.com)



1-8 More than 4,000 event pros attended PCMA’s annual conference Convening Leaders — Designing ColLABoration — January 8-11 in Austin, Texas. Featured were inspirational presentations, unique learning experiences and networking. The conference helped attendees “understand how audience behaviors are evolving and where design and collaboration intersect.” 1 Actor and Austin resident Matthew McConaughey made a surprise appearance at the opening session on Monday. 8 The closing night reception featured Austin’s living legend Willie Nelson. 9 Florida SITE members (l to r) Harvey Grotzky, publisher of *Corporate & Incentive Travel*, Stuart Gardner, president, Florida Meeting Services and Francis Purvey, E.V.P., Sunlark Associates enjoy an Intracoastal cruise onboard the Lady Chateau.

Credits: 1-8, Jacob Slaton

By Toni Zoblotsky

# 10 Practical Tips for Planning More Healthful Meetings in the New Year

As someone who has worked hard to lose 40 pounds over the last two years, I know it's a struggle to eat well when traveling for business. It's easy to deviate from a healthful regimen and resort to splurging and snacking when you're tired and far from your kitchen. I'm sure you'll likely agree!

In my role as director of B2B Marketing at Hilton, and as an attendee of many meetings throughout my career, I am especially attuned to the desire of business guests and meeting attendees to pay attention to their weight, exercise regimen and their overall stress levels. That proves especially true come new year when many of us make — and try hard not to break — our 2017 resolutions about exercise and diet habits.

Of the most common New Year's resolutions, the top is lose weight, with another popular goal to stay fit and healthy. But only 8 percent of people actually achieve and maintain these aspirations. Oftentimes it's because routines become hectic, and business trips, conventions and corporate meetings can turn into the busiest of days.

A recent Hilton survey of meeting attendees underscores this challenge. Over half of our survey respondents said they pay attention to what they eat and make sure to exercise in their daily lives, but most were unsatisfied with the ability to maintain this lifestyle while attending meetings at hotels. In fact, 52 percent said they ate a meal or snack they didn't want because a better option wasn't available. Plus, 39 percent reported falling asleep or being drowsy during meetings.

Of course, meetings are vital for business success. And for attendees to contribute and collaborate in the most fruitful way, they need to be in their element, feeling comfortable and refreshed. With my own experiences in mind, we at Hilton made it a pet project to be the change that others desired to see in this industry. We launched Meet With Purpose.

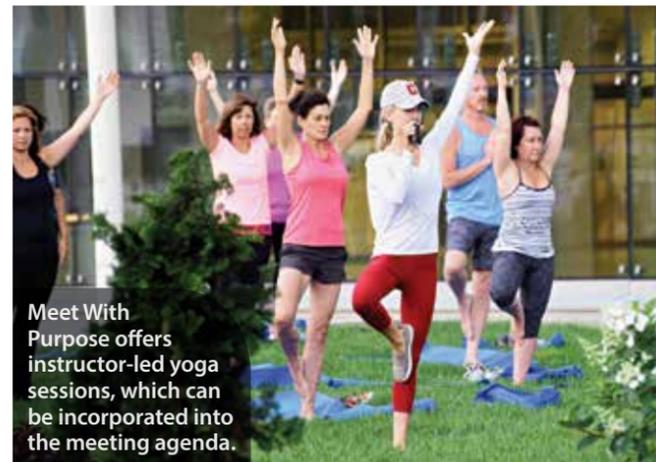
It provides meeting and event professionals with ideas that pump up energy and boost creative thinking. They can make nutritious meals and snacks and exercise breaks as much of a priority as the meeting agenda. We made it our mission to define the key details that would make attendees happier, healthier and more productive while convening for their business conference or event at our properties.

In short, when it comes to food, we strive to instill a "quality over quantity" mindset. Teaming with meeting planners, our executive chefs source ingredients locally and seasonally. We fight

food fatigue with items high in protein that keep attendees alert and able to concentrate. Then we team the nutritious and tasty meal offerings with common fitness activities that can be built into a meeting agenda, such as walking and gentle yoga.

One marquee offering embodying wellness and health is our Yoga & Yogurt menu item. It features a morning yoga session followed by a nutritious and delicious yogurt parfait bar. Our "Cut and Create Salad" menu item is another option that delivers nutrition-packed dishes. With scissors in hand, meeting attendees prepare their meal from a unique, custom-made display of local greens and accoutrements — items such as edamame, pickled papaya, jicama and polenta croutons — placed along the center of a conference table.

Reflecting on my own weight-loss pursuit, and based on



Meet With Purpose offers instructor-led yoga sessions, which can be incorporated into the meeting agenda.

the positive reception and feedback about Meet With Purpose we've heard from meeting planners and attendees, my team and I have seen a variety of ways meeting planners can help make meetings healthier, more active and productive.

Below are 10 simple, effective tips we encourage meeting planners to consider when mapping their next agenda:

- 1 Start early.** Offer attendees an early hike or walk before the meeting begins — but build it into the agenda so they don't feel like they have to set an extra alarm. Pair it with a nutritious offering of fruit, grain cereals and other healthful breakfast offerings including juices readily available in the meeting room.
- 2 Get outdoors.** Provide convenient access to outdoor



Attendees gather around a conference table to assemble a "Cut & Create Salad" with local greens and more.

space. If attendees will be splitting into breakout groups, encourage them to meet outside. Mix meetings with outdoor activities — whether time for a swim, a tennis match or any walking paths developed and recommended by the hotel.

- 3 Take short breaks.** Plan for opportunities where attendees can switch seats and walk around during meetings. Incorporate shorter breaks more often vs. a few longer breaks. Incorporate a stretching exercise mid-morning or afternoon.

“We made it our mission to define the key details that would make attendees happier, **healthier** and more productive.”

- 4 Create a "fit" environment.** Accessorize the meeting space with "fit" gear such as standing tables, exercise balls and yoga mats. Encourage attendees to sit on the floor, the chair-balls or stand so they're more comfortable. Consider setting up a mindfulness booth, perhaps incorporating massage chairs or headsets with relaxing music at a busy convention or outside a packed ballroom space.
- 5 Choose comfy.** Relax the dress code, allowing for more comfortable clothes and shoes so attendees can use down time to walk around.
- 6 Find fitness time.** Allot time in the schedule for, perhaps, a 15-minute yoga class or light jog. Find a local fitness instructor to come and teach a class. If you're in a big conference room or ballroom, lots of room exists for

attendees to see who can accumulate the most steps during the meetings.

- 8 Treat the team.** Consult with the hotel's spa to see if you can get special promotions for attendees. Plan a game or two of bowling at a nearby facility.
- 9 Beautify the buffet.** If you do opt into a buffet, make it colorful and healthful with different lettuces, vegetables and sides. Eat the rainbow as they say! Attendees can still make choices according to their liking, and they'll feel satisfied but not stuffed. Plus, a beautiful spread

or individual plate makes for a perfect Instagram about the meeting!

- 10 Support local purveyors.** Attendees are always looking for a way to immerse themselves in a local city or region when traveling on business. Is there a local farm that makes great jam, or is the hotel near a fish market? Work with your venue to see what's fresh and local to their community and how you can impress and nourish attendees with healthful, homegrown menus.

Good luck in reaching your 2017 resolutions as it applies to ensuring that your meetings keep participants engaged via action-packed meals and movement. And don't forget to survey attendees after an event to gauge what they liked best and incorporate their satisfaction drivers into future meetings. **C&IT**



**Toni Zoblotsky**

is director of B2B marketing at Hilton Worldwide, responsible for leading teams that deliver quality creative assets to elevate the client experience and perception of the Hilton portfolio. As part of this overall effort, Toni helped bring to life the Meet With Purpose program. Launched corporately in 2015, the program offers socially and environmentally responsible ways for meeting planners to reduce waste, improve efficiencies and incorporate healthy eating and well-being into their meetings to enhance the attendee experience and support their own corporate responsibility goals. Always one to stretch herself with new challenges, Toni enjoys participating in yoga several times a week and hopes to become teacher-certified in 2017.

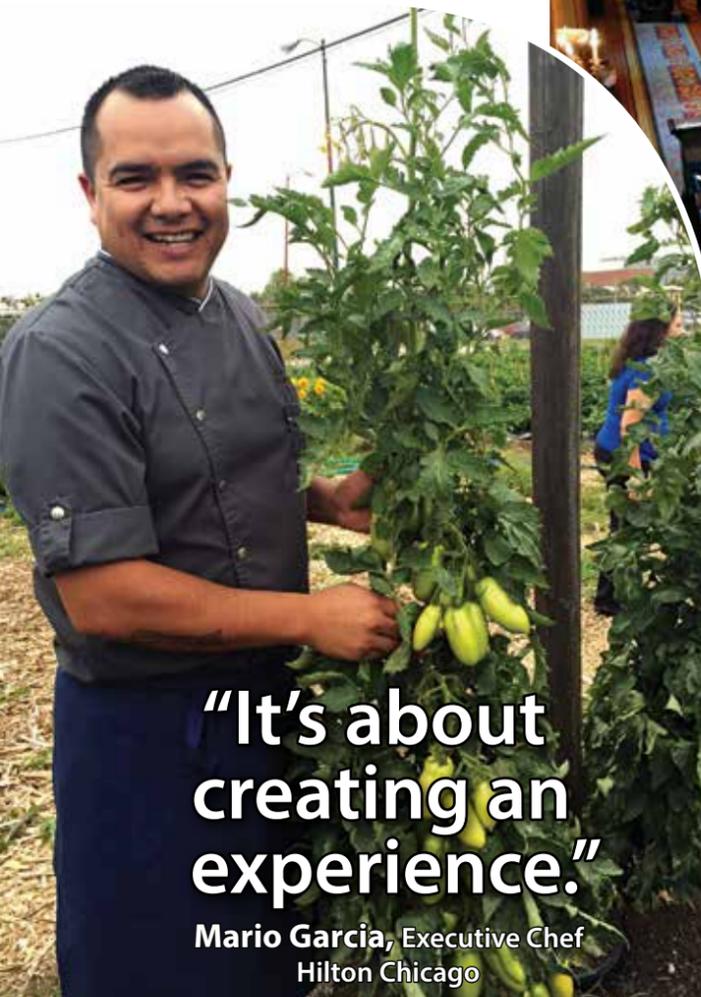
# The Foodie Experience

## For Sophisticated Attendees, Creativity in Cuisine and Presentation Is Everything

By Christine Loomis

One of the biggest trends in F&B these days is not actually about the food. It's about how the food is presented and displayed.

"It's about creating an experience," says Mario Garcia, executive chef at Hilton Chicago. "The Food Network, Anthony Bourdain and social media have



**"It's about creating an experience."**

Mario Garcia, Executive Chef  
Hilton Chicago



Hilton Chicago executive chef Mario Garcia says more adventurous cuisine and presentations — for example, using whole animals like this whole pig at a taco action station — are trending.



Credits: Hilton Chicago

collectively changed the expectation for group meals."

Naturally, the food also matters, and thanks to TV food shows and celebrity chefs, we're all foodies now, and that dictates what we want. "Attendees want a foodie experience built around creativity, flavor, balance, health options and an ever-increasing number of dietary restrictions and personal preferences," Garcia says.

Alexander deHilster, event design manager with Meetings & Incentives Worldwide Inc., set two events in the Conrad Suite at Hilton Chicago last fall, the first for a corporate real estate firm, the second for a global consulting firm. "The room itself was for me initially the biggest draw," he says.

But in the end it was the innovative execution that wowed him. "From the gorgeous, artfully passed miniature hors d'oeuvres to the unusual serving dishes such as the tins, the bamboo steamer and the salad served in an acrylic ball, to the miniature pans with a nearly one-bite meal in each, the hotel went out of its way."

### The Wow Factor Challenge

It was all part of creating a full-on experience for clients who've been there, done that. "Those clients want more interesting flavors, more unusual dishes and more creative ways of displaying, plating and preparing dishes, and they're willing to pay for it," deHilster says. "Many of our clients have seen and done it all, so it's a challenge to come up with the next wow factor. Hotels in general seem to have the least wow factor, possibly because they're trying to keep it safe in order to please all."

But the Hilton Chicago surpassed expectations, particularly for the second event. Clear communication was one key.

"As I was adamant with the client that the dinner should be at the Conrad Suite," deHilster says, "my instructions to the hotel were 'think out-of-the-box.' Originally the dinner was going to be a seated affair for 40, which changed just three to four days ahead to a buffet station for 60. The hotel staff had no time

to provide us with menu suggestions so we didn't know what we would be walking into. Needless to say, they pulled through and blew us away. We're considering taking the 2018 holiday event from an offsite property with outside catering back to the hotel."

While catering staff and chefs have become increasingly creative in presentation and execution, clients, too, have changed. In addition to a continued focus on sustainable and local sourcing, Garcia says, "Groups are now more open to experiencing alternatives in F&B — different cuts of meat, different types of fish, different veggies and more ethnic items."

Some experts believe that new openness to unfamiliar tastes and cui-

**"(Clients who've been there, done that) want more interesting flavors, more unusual dishes and more creative ways of displaying, plating and preparing dishes, and they're willing to pay for it."**

Alexander deHilster, Event Design Manager  
Meetings & Incentives Worldwide Inc., Chicago, IL

sines can be attributed to millennials, with Generation Z right behind them. They appear more adventurous in terms of food than their older counterparts, and that's driving American cuisine toward a new "melting pot" sensibility that embraces a multitude of cuisines. That trend also exists within a host of other trends.

At the Hilton Chicago, Garcia says action station variations are very popular, "such as Peking duck taco stations, made-to-order steam-bun stations and made-to-order pasta stations with made-to-order gnocchi or ravioli." Also trending: presentation of whole animals such as whole pig, whole lamb or whole roasted groupers (20 lbs and up), along with small-plate variations and exotic fruit desserts made with passion fruit, quince, kiwi, guava and lychee.

The art of presentation and the ultimate experience is so integral to today's corporate events that Rosewood Sand Hill in California's Silicon Valley

launched its own Event Studio, in collaboration with celebrity event planner Colin Cowie, to provide planners with one-stop shopping and design assistance for experiential, curated, bespoke events in the region. Hundreds of design elements are locally sourced, and planners can incorporate detailed branding options, such as personalized M&Ms in corporate colors, as well as local foods, into the mix to create exactly the right experience.

### Locavore Trend

While the concept of focusing on local purveyors is hardly new, it continues to evolve, for example in combination with less familiar and ethnic foods. One ethnic food making a splash on the F&B

scene is Caribbean Sea cuisine, local not just for island resorts but also for many Florida mainland hotels.

At St. Joe Club & Resorts on Florida's northwest Emerald Coast, corporate executive chef Todd Rogers notes that all seafood is caught locally and stars in such (unusual or ethnic) dishes as grilled octopus with Cuban cooked plantains and Gulf-caught grilled cobia. Rogers says he even gets a call from the boat when a line-caught tuna is landed for the resort's sushi bar.

St. Joe Club & Resorts also works with a local farmer who grows only for the property and only certified organic herbs and vegetables. These kinds of relationships go far beyond buyer and seller for many chefs and growers these days, another aspect of the evolving locavore trend. "We have been to his farm to help harvest. It is way out there in the middle of nowhere, and we get there by bumpy red-clay roads with no signs or a GPS, so it's hard to find," Rogers says.



Honey harvested from the Rooftop Bee Sanctuary at Clift San Francisco is used in cuisine as well as craft cocktails.

Credits: Clift San Francisco

### Pick or Catch Your Own

More often these days, attendees also have direct access to the foods they will consume. For example, groups continue making an intimate, often hands-on connection to local foods as hotels provide programs connecting attendees with gardens and farms — often right on property. And that trend often combines with the ever-evolving craft cocktail movement as well as health and wellness at spas.

Attendees in Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor Beach Resort's mojito mixology classes start in the hotel's herb garden to handpick mint they'll muddle into their mojitos. At the JW Marriott Grand Rapids in Michigan, groups pick pineapple sage from the resort's outdoor garden and living wall to create a pineapple sage mojito. Both the Waldorf Astoria Orlando and nearby Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek give guests a chance to pick and create their own salads, while the Hilton West Palm Beach offers groups an experiential mason-jar class in which participants pick fruit from the hotel's potted orange trees and create a citrus dressing.

That hands-on experience is sea worthy, too. Executive chef Pedro Abascal at Thompson Playa del Carmen in Mexico takes attendees on a "catch your own catch of the day" experience with local fishermen. Afterward, the catch can be

grilled or made into ceviche or sushi for the group's dinner.

At the Clift in San Francisco, combined trends includes bees, which made an entrée into corporate events in recent years as hotels began managing their own hives on rooftops across the country. That trend not only continues but thrives as awareness about the importance of bees and their dwindling numbers increases. The Clift's Rooftop Bee Sanctuary originally housed 100,000 bees. Today, it's home to 800,000, and the hotel continues to artfully introduce honey into menus that highlight several F&B trends, including creative craft cocktails.

The hotel's mixologists experiment with intriguing flavor combinations for their cocktails, often using on-property ingredients including honey. The 49er Tea Time, for example, combines black-tea-infused whiskey with housemade honey syrup and lemon for a cocktail that melds local ingredients with a nod to another local element, history. Patrons also can try a housemade lavender-infused gin with the honey syrup, lemon juice and lavender bitters.

The small-plates trend also is alive and well, and the Clift uses its honey and cocktail herb garden to create dishes such as compressed watermelon salad with lavender-infused honey, and

an ever-changing tapas platter served with house honey.

At Cedarbrook Lodge, located on 18 acres just a mile from the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, the Copperleaf Restaurant and the hotel's spa work together to offer Taste & Touch, a philosophy and program that combines health and wellness, and a focus on local foods and ingredients from the gardens, fields and forests of the Northwest for both F&B and spa patrons. "Taste & Touch is the pinnacle of the farm-to-table, farm-to-face and locavore movements," says Copperleaf Culinary Director Roy Breiman. "We're blessed with an incredible natural bounty here in the Pacific Northwest, and this series represents a lifetime of learning and a desire to see people fully immerse themselves in all things that nourish, both inside and out."

Joan Higdon, spa director, agrees, referencing seasonal highlights. "Taste & Touch marries the senses to jointly experience the replenishing powers of our homegrown botanicals, juicy heirloom tomatoes, warming ginger root and spices of the holiday season."

Taste & Touch can be customized for corporate meeting groups: Planners can choose to include parts of the program they like, such as set meals or jet-set therapies that incorporate the seasonal ingredients being featured.

Taking a cue from the wine industry, Cedarbrook Lodge points to the particular terroir from which its inventive cuisine and spa ingredients and treatments are derived, a terroir the lodge describes as "fueled by an enriched climate that creates a cohesive, artfully crafted experience unique to the region." For both culinary and spa teams, it's all about sourcing from small-scale, local artisans who produce sustainable, often organic products that help create that all-important experience.

### Meet With Purpose

The trend toward healthful, more sustainable meetings also continues. In September, Hilton Worldwide launched the next iteration of its Meet With Purpose program. It was prompted in part by the results of a May global survey conducted by Hilton that found, not surprisingly, that attendees struggle to focus in the afternoons, often thanks to heavy lunches, no chance to exercise and a letdown after the high of sugary break foods.

One in three respondents said they're drowsy in the afternoons during conferences, with 2–4 p.m. the least productive time period. Fully half of all respondents said they were not satisfied with their ability to stay on track with diets or normal eating and exercise during conferences and seven out of 10 said they consider good diet and exercise an important part of daily living. When asked how to promote a more satisfying meeting experience, 46 percent were in favor of fitness activities

## Hottest Foodie Cities

While New York and San Francisco will likely never lose their cachet as foodie capitals, regional cities are making their own culinary mark. In 2016, Zagat's list of the hottest food cities put Washington, DC, at No. 1, Los Angeles at No. 2, Denver at No. 3, Boston at No. 4, Seattle at No. 5, New Orleans at No. 6, Asheville, NC, at No. 7, Philadelphia at No. 8, and Charlotte and Atlanta at Nos. 9 and 10, respectively. Other lists include Chicago, Nashville and Memphis.

While lists differ, there's a clear trend toward food excellence in cities of different sizes across the country, meaning planners can wow clients with top cuisine and presentation almost anywhere they choose to meet. — CL

in the local area, such as guided walks or runs, and the same number thought spa promotions to unwind after meetings would be helpful. As for food, 52 percent voted for balanced menu options, including locally sourced and seasonal ingredients.

If these options are available, the survey found that four out of five attendees would be more likely to participate and to be attentive during sessions, which would increase overall meeting satisfaction and, as a result, ROI.

Hilton Worldwide took that information and created combination menus of healthful foods paired with activities, such as Yogurt & Yoga, a 50-minute, instructor-led yoga class paired with a menu featuring such items as watermelon, yuzu and mint salad with citrus-basil dressing; house-made granola with nuts; a chef's choice of protein and savory; and seasonal fruit-infused yogurt. Other activities on offer: a one- or two-mile fun run or power walk and a 25-minute stretch session. Hilton's Meditative Moment pairs a 10-minute meditation session with a customizable

lean protein plus veggies or a fruit smoothie. Health and wellness menus are available at more than 40 Hilton hotels in the United States, a clear mandate for wellness and healthful food trends at meetings. (Read more about Meeting With Purpose on page 10.)

### More Trends

When it comes to trends directly related to the dishes appearing on menus for

2017, Elizabeth Blau, James Beard semifinalist and investor on the "Restaurant Startup," the CNBC television show, has an expert take on what we're likely to see. The Las Vegas restaurateur and founder/CEO of Blau & Associates, a strategic restaurant planning and development company, is tuned into the foods American diners want as well as the innovations of the country's most promising chefs. Among the trends on her list: ancient grains and seeds "introducing unique and deep flavors" in such dishes as savory granolas and alternative risottos.

Chef-focused delivery is another trend. "2016 was the year of the chef-driven, fast casual concept," she says, "or fine casual, and that is a great thing — scaling high-quality food that is created with the consumer in mind but also our supply chains. This year I am excited about chefs moving their restaurants out of storefronts and onto apps. From home meal replacement options to the best lunch delivery in New York City, chefs are fighting back on some of the litany of operational challenges they face with exciting and innovative combinations of technology and limited-edition menu items."

This delivery focus may allow planners more flexibility to bring the cuisine of top chefs into corporate boardrooms and other non-restaurant or hotel venues where meetings take place.

### One Menu a Day

Rising rents and increased labor costs are driving additional restaurant trends. Solution: One Menu a Day. According to Blau, more and more chefs are offering a single menu every day and chang-



The outdoor herb garden at JW Marriott Grand Rapids.

Credits: JW Marriott Grand Rapids

“(Taste & Touch) represents a lifetime of learning and a desire to see people fully immerse themselves in all things that nourish, both inside and out.”

**Roy Breiman**  
 Culinary Director  
 Copperleaf Restaurant  
 Cedarbrook Lodge  
 Seattle, WA



Credit: Jeff Caven Photography

Roy Breiman focuses on using locally sourced foods and ingredients for both F&B and spa menus.

ing it every day. Whether that’s making chefs’ lives easier or harder is unclear. But either way, Blau says, “They are making ours more delicious.” She describes these menus as a “curated list of the best ingredients and the most inspired dishes that make these restaurants a joy to visit time after time. They also bridge the gap between the inherent trust in a chef and the (sometimes) perceived arrogance or restraint implied by a tasting menu. As more and more chefs continue to explore modes of expression that suit their voice, I think the short, constantly evolving, single menu will overtake the tasting menu as the vehicle of choice.”

Some of the other trends Blau sees coming: fewer meat burgers, lower-alcohol cocktails (e.g. session cocktails), breakfast grain bowls, Paleo 2.0 and more fermentation.

As for what she hopes to see in 2017, that list includes loaded sweet potatoes, veggie tartares and pokes, creative hybrid sprouts, next-level oatmeal and porridges, savory smoothies, dim sum carts at brunch, the rise of Filipino cuisine, organic artisan chicken nuggets and kelp as the new kale.

### Dine & Recline

In the realm of out-of-the-box trends, there is now an interesting flip on the “unconstructed dining” at work in many hotels, which allows guests to eat where and when they want in the hotel, not just in traditional restaurants. In this newest version of that dining freedom, small groups can base their meeting location in a hot restaurant rather than a hotel as some savvy restaurateurs lead the way in adding hotel rooms to their dining establishments. With many of these restaurants in the highest echelons of upscale dining, this may prove especially alluring to high-end incentive groups and the planners tasked with not just satisfying but truly wowing this ultimate “been there, done that” clientele.

Among the restaurant-lodging combos is Brae, one of Australia’s most coveted restaurants but located 1.5 hours from Melbourne. It now features six uber luxurious hotel rooms on the farm property that currently sell out months in advance. Closer to home in West Texas, Rancho Loma, three hours from the nearest big city, opened five

suites for its guests. As the Airbnb mentality fully permeates American culture, and as chefs and restaurateurs demand more control over the experience they create, this trend will likely grow — incentive planners take note!

### Sustainability

In terms of trends that should not continue, there’s one high on the list of chef Garcia of Hilton Chicago: waste at conventions. “Many planners ask for a lot of food stations,” he says, “which results in heavy waste.” Good communication could help with this issue as chefs and catering staff understand group numbers and the appropriate amount of food for them; planners need only take their advice into consideration.

And there’s waste of time and energy, too, elements also lessened by good communication. The primary tip Garcia offers planners who are set to meet with chefs and caterers on F&B is simple: “Have a clear vision of what you want to offer to your conference attendees. It makes the planning and developing process much easier.” **C&IT**

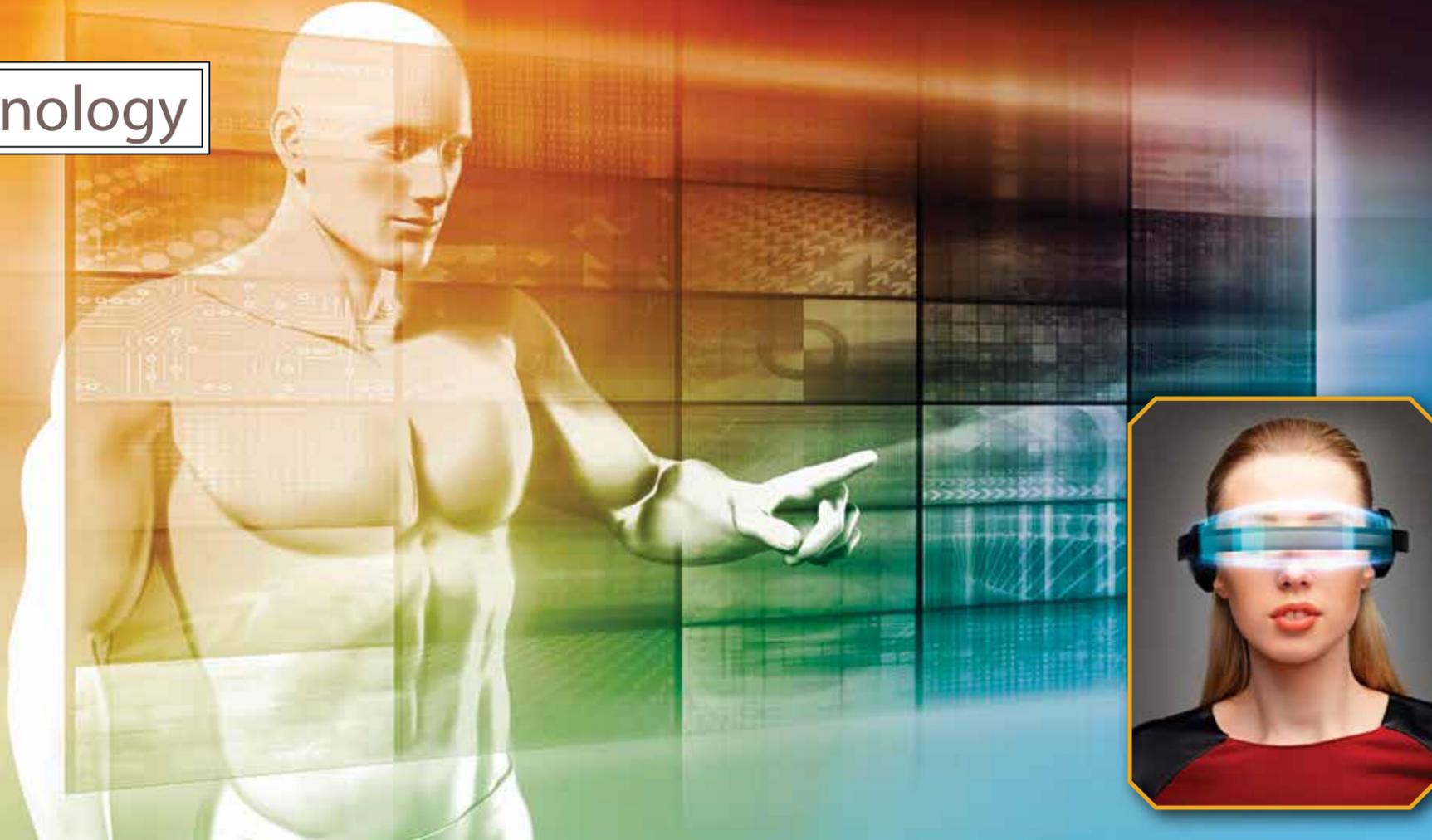
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# Meetings Tech Trials and Tribulations

## How to Best Explore the Ever-Changing Path to Tech Utopia

By Derek Reveron

It's getting to the point where using technology to plan at least some aspect of a meeting is a must, not an option. More planners are turning to tech to make planning more efficient and less costly, and enhance the meeting experience for attendees.

Kathy Miller, CEO of Total Event Resources, a Chicago meeting and event planning company, has been using Social Tables for about three years to create room layouts and seating charts online. Social Tables is a web-based event planning platform for hospitality, meeting and event professionals.

Miller uses Social Tables prior to making site visits. "You can see rooms online from a 360-degree angle, lay it out and take it with you to compare it to the actual space and make adjustments," says Miller. "The technology saves us time onsite. We did a 600-person meeting in Las Vegas last year and laid out the

registration site with where we wanted branding, signing, desks and entrance treatments. We did the same for entertainment in the reception area."

Experts predict that planners will eventually use technology for every phase of planning including research, site and destination selection, registration, networking, RFPs, sessions and post-event feedback.

Technology adoption rates among planners are growing. Almost 60 percent of planners use events or meeting management technology or software, and 96 percent find value in doing so, according to a study conducted by

the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) and Lanyon.

Another statistic bodes well for adoption rates: Fifty-eight percent of planners who don't use technology say that it has the potential to improve their programs and processes.

Here are some of the technologies that planners value most, according to the study.

### Event Management Software

Miller frequently uses event management software that provides hotel, venue and destination sourcing tools. "We used to do it manually with

national sales offices of hotel chains or CVBs," says Miller. "Now you can use technology to pick the destinations and hotels you want, and sort through many things such as size of general session space, and specifications for food and beverage functions. You can sort the responses to compare specs such as room rates, food and beverage minimum and attrition — everything that's important for a piece of business."

Several firms are developing integrated software tools to meet the needs of planning meetings from beginning to end. "One of the hot button issues in planning technology is integration," says Lucy Giovando Watts, CMP, CMM, a seasoned meetings and event planner. "There are lots of great technologies, but how do they integrate with each other? More companies are working to integrate technology so planners can go to one source and have a menu of tools."

According to meeting technology

consultant Corbin Ball CMP, CSP, companies developing integrated tools include Cvent, which offers Supplier Network (online registration) Crowdcompass (event app) OnArrival (event check-in) SignUp4 (SMM) Elite Meetings/Speed RFP (sourcing) and AllianceTech (lead retrieval).

Lanyon, a corporate travel software company, offers Active Network, which includes RegOnline (attendee management), Starcite (sourcing and strategic meetings management), Passkey (room block management and housing), GenieConnect (mobile event apps) and Wingateweb (exhibitions and lead retrieval).

### Tools on the Cloud

The cloud is home to a growing number of integrated planning software tools designed to be compatible with other systems. Examples include Eventbrite event invitation, registration

and ticketing software; etouches with 16 event planning and data analytic options; and EventGeek, which offers several event budgeting, logistics, analytics and marketing software options.

Giovando Watts developed an online platform designed to work with other systems. In 2016, she introduced Lasso40, which provides electronic check-in and e-signature capture at meetings and events.

Giovando Watts developed Lasso40 to solve one of her own pain points. "I manage the paper check-in and sign-in sheets for one of my Life Science clients. Many companies in the industry use a signature to show proof of attendance and calculate the per person cost using basic technology," she explains. In the past, Giovando Watts captured the signatures in writing. "I had tons of sign-in sheets on my desk and was manually entering the data into a spreadsheet," she says. "I thought there had to be a

better way. I researched whether there was software that could do this, and there was, but they were expensive."

So Giovando Watts created Lasso40 to capture electronic signatures and calculate the per person cost on the back-end, all for an affordable monthly subscription rate. "I wanted to provide planners with the flexibility and automation that they needed to work with their existing event technology."

Lasso40 goes beyond Life Science events and can be used for any event across all industries that need basic electronic check-in or per person cost capture, such as incentives. In addition, the check-in app provides important data analytics for each event. "The software also provides the time that each person checks in," says Giovando Watts. "The information can be used to adjust the staffing and start times of events, and verify attendance at continuing education sessions."

### Apps

There are hundreds of meeting and event planning apps with dozens more being released every year.

Planners can use apps to manage nearly every aspect of meetings and events. "One of the biggest shifts in planning is the ability to do every phase, from site selection to post-event feedback, using apps on mobile and tablet devices," says Brandt Krueger, a consultant specializing in event technology based in Richfield, Minnesota. "Anything that once went into a planner's binder can be put into handheld devices and then into the cloud and made accessible anywhere, anytime through the internet," says Krueger.

Prior to meetings, apps can book room blocks, restaurant reservations and airline tickets while providing alerts when prices drop to a specified price. Apps can help with RFPs as well as site, hotel and venue selection. Planners can track tasks and calendars, generate detailed reports and share files. In addition, planners can use apps to create other customized and branded meeting apps.

During meetings, planners can download programs and handouts, as

well as update schedule changes. Attendees can use apps to connect with each other via profiles. Apps can provide games, such as scavenger hunts, for teambuilding. Planners can use apps during and after meetings to survey attendees.

Miller uses an app for a meeting of a large beverage company. "They get



**Lucy Watts, CMP, CMM**  
Founder and CEO  
Lasso40  
Tiburon, CA

**"I wanted to provide planners with the flexibility and automation that they needed to work with their existing event technology."**

about 2,000 people and 200 exhibitors," says Miller. "The exhibitors want to attract booth traffic and educate people. Each division of the company had a team prepped with three key points about their division. Each team was sent out to have conversations with attendees about the key points, using QR codes (pixilated icons that can be scanned with a smartphone) on name badges to find the right people. They converted the number of conversations into dollars and donated the money to Wounded Warriors charity."

### Registration Systems

Registration software is one of the most commonly used meeting technologies. "There are lots of registration-related apps, too many providers to count at this point," says Krueger. "The technology has exploded along with the mobile phone revolution. Most event apps offer some registration component, but some provide it as a stand-alone service."

Options include full-service registration and housing firms, do-it-yourself templates and customized registration software. Some registration tools also allow planners to engage with attendees and generate reports.

Web-based event registration tools can handle a range of tasks. Attendees can sign up for sessions, access event information in real time, input travel information and pay registration fees. Some tools allow users to access attendee lists and receive alerts for VIP and special-guest arrivals.

### RFP Tools

Most planners once handled RFPs through written forms. Now, RFPs are largely handled online. Eighty-one percent of planners who use meeting technology use an option that allows them to send an RFP to several properties and respond in the same platform that permits easy comparisons, according to the GBTA survey.

Meanwhile, 70 percent of planners use technology to compare property information. "There are lots of platforms helping with site selection," says Krueger. "A lot of mobile app providers are starting to include that as part of their services. You can punch in the type of event, date and desired location, and the app will find locations that are already hosting a similar kind of event."

### Live Streaming

One of the fastest-growing uses of social media is live streaming, which allows real time participation in nearly every aspect of meetings, including seminars, breakouts, gaming, networking and keynotes. Live-streamed meetings are on the rise as more venues and hotels feature high bandwidth connections,

many ceiling-mounted microphones and state-of-the-art software.

Live streaming increases attendance by allowing people to participate from anywhere in the world. "We will see increased demands for live streaming events by attendees," predicts Ball. "The challenges for event planners will be increased Wi-Fi bandwidth demand."

He adds that nearly every social channel has added or enhanced their video offerings over the past two years. The list includes Facebook Live, Facebook Instant Video, Periscope, Instagram Story, Snapchat Story, Meerkat, LinkedIn and Snapchat Geofilters.

### Virtual Reality

Adoption of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) eyewear for site and destination tours is slow. Seventy percent of planners say they still use pen and paper to record information on site visits, according to the GBTA survey. However, experts predict that the technology will catch on within five years.

The technology currently allows users to see the visual reality of a space along with information about it. Virtual reality has several uses, including VR site and destination tours, which more properties and CVBs are offering.

The Las Vegas Convention Authority (LVCA) provides Vegas VR, a download that showcases city sites. Shangri-La Hotels provides Oculus Rift VR site inspection tours available for download. Trade shows are using VR to immerse booth attendees in sales, marketing and product experiences.

Several companies, including Google, Samsung, Facebook and Microsoft are pumping billions into VR development and are demonstrating it at events and trade shows. "I'm excited by the possibilities of VR," says Krueger. "The technology is almost to the point where you can walk into a ballroom with a phone and use it to get a full 3-D rendering to scale including the measurements. An app would send the information from the phone to VR glasses, and you can use the information to lay out the room — seating, lighting, stage, props, sound, everything."

Another type of experiential technology also is expected to eventually have an impact. Video mapping projects realistic images of anything onto large surfaces such as the sides of buildings, says Miller. "A client is launching a new product in February, and we were talking to them about video-mapping the outside of a building, she says. "They



**Brandt Krueger**  
Owner  
Event Technology Consulting  
Richfield, MN

**"Anything that once went into a planner's binder can be put into handheld devices and then into the cloud and made accessible anywhere, anytime through the internet."**

would be able to see the product itself and how it's used, or the corporate offices or the headquarters city. It's technology that will get more advanced and widely used."

### Education Is Key

As technology options increase, planners must step up efforts to educate themselves about what's available. According to the GBTA survey, "Many planners express frustration with not knowing where to go to learn about

products in the marketplace that could address their specific needs. With a plethora of technology already available, it is imperative that planners look to industry trade publications to learn about the latest features, attend industry events to see new technology in action, and talk to peers to learn about the most current offerings."

Experts offer the following advice for planners who know little about technology and want to use it to plan meetings.

Make technology education an ongoing part of staff meetings. "We meet once a week and talk about the latest technology available, and what we already have and how to use it better," says Miller. "For instance, our creative manager is responsible for training staff on using Social Tables. She introduced the tool in a weekly meeting, sharing what it does so that we could use it to help clients visualize what a meeting room looks like in 3-D.

Miller also suggests talking to planners who are tech-savvy. "Ask what applications they are using and how they are being used," Miller suggests. "There are different ways that different planners can use a mobile app, for instance.

Tailor technology to the meeting. Don't use technology just to use it. "Take a look at your event and its objectives to determine which technologies can help you achieve your goals," Giovando Watts advises.

That's especially true with apps because there are so many of them. "What is it that you want attendees to do or know each day, and how can apps help?" asks Miller. "We have certain groups that love to use technology, while others don't. Some groups download apps but don't use them. You have to know your audience."

The meetings technology revolution is just getting started. "Meetings, special events, trade shows, conventions, incentive trips and more — each have their own widely varying set of needs," says Ball. "Consequently, a huge number of event software tools have emerged. I track nearly 1,700 products in 60 categories," says Ball. Expect many more products in more categories. **C&IT**

## Destination

# Fabulous Florida



## Why Planners — and Attendees — Love Meeting in the Sunshine State



By Maura Keller

As a meeting and incentive travel destination, Florida offers something for everyone. And Joanne Luce, meeting planner and vice president of marketing for Val-Test Distributors, can attest to the draw of “all things Florida.” Each year in January, Val-Test Distributors, a buying and marketing group of distributors servicing the hardware, sundries, plumbing and electrical industries based in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, hosts their annual show for their distributors and suppliers in Florida. The show allows the distributors to meet one-on-one with the suppliers whose products they house in their warehouses to discuss new products, discounts, marketing and promotions for the coming year.

A few years ago, Russ Meeks, president of Val-Test, along with Luce, found a unique resort located in Naples, Florida. They met with the management and decided to partner with The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club for their annual event. And the rest, as they say, is history.

“The resort is in a great location; since many of our distributors are located in colder climates, it gives them a nice break to enjoy some sun and warm weather,” Luce says. “And due to the size of the Val-Test show, the resort works really well as a Val-Test venue.” Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club offers 34,000 sf of indoor meeting space and spectacular outdoor and beachfront venues on the Gulf. The 319-room property is Southwest Florida’s only resort directly on the beach with an onsite championship golf course — which recently completed a comprehensive renovation of its championship golf course. The redesign of the AAA Four Diamond beachfront resort’s course was done with input from golf icon and acclaimed course designer Jack Nicklaus in collaboration with noted course architect John Sanford.

### Mini Vacation

While the warm weather climes are a draw for many, other corporate meeting planners enjoy the consistency that holding an event in Florida brings. Crye-Leike Realtors has held their company’s annual conference at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa every year since 2003.

“The resort is fantastic, our group loves the property from the ocean side to the bay side,” says Anita Frase, vice president of corporate projects at Crye-Leike Realtors. “It’s easy to get around on the property, and the staff at the Hil-

ton are wonderful. We have tried to move the conference to another location and our folks don’t want us to have the conference anywhere else. They are used to making a mini vacation each year by bringing their families. The families get to have beach and shopping time while the agent attends the conference.”

Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa can accom-



**Joanne Luce**, Vice President of Marketing Val-Test Distributors, Hoffman Estates, IL

“Since many of our distributors are located in colder climates, it gives them a nice break to enjoy some sun and warm weather.”

modate groups ranging from 10 to 2,000 attendees. They offer 40,000 sf of award-winning flexible meeting space, as well as cutting-edge technological capabilities. Options include opulent ballrooms, smaller breakout and prefunction spaces, an elegantly appointed boardroom, a theater and hospitality suites, all refurbished in 2013 with tasteful décor and fixtures, and colors and materials inspired by the resort’s beachfront setting.

Each year, Crye-Leike Realtors plans their conference with



Credits: Naples Marco Island Everglades CVB

Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club (above) and Naples Grande Beach Resort (inset) boast Gulf-view and beachfront meeting and event options.



Credit: DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld

Rendering of DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld's new Palm Court and Pavilion event spaces to be completed this summer.

the agents' families in mind — from their big welcome party and exhibit events to their activities and final night talent show. "Everyone has a blast," Frase says. "The resort offers easy access for our nine regions to travel to, and the property has everything that you need without leaving the property. That's why we keep coming back every year."

### Positive Feedback

Deanna Ricci, meeting and event planner with Liberty Mutual recently orchestrated an event at DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld. It was a training and information-based seminar for insurance investigators, law enforcement and defense attorneys.

*"I was very pleased with the wide variety of activities offered to my group. (Streamsong's) bass fishing and the clay shooting were highlights, and of course the golf and steakhouse were wonderful."*

**Therese Bottino**, Meeting and Events Planner  
Williams Automotive Group, Wesley Chapel, FL

"The organization that put the event together is based in Florida and 98 percent of our attendees are Florida based," Ricci says. "DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld offers a magnitude of positive amenities. It's easily accessible from the interstate, close to the theme parks and other exciting venues offered in Orlando. It's spaced out beautifully, which enables our meeting guests to remain separated from the hotel guests and vacationers. The resort also offers large, comfortable meeting spaces and a wonderful menu from which to choose for our guests."

But it's the resort's staff who have made the choice of hosting this event in Florida a good one. "Without them our event could not be a complete success, and for us that is very important and helps us to maintain retention of our repeated guests in attending the seminars we offer," Ricci says. "We can put together an amazing day of presenters, but if the venue where the event is held is not top-notch, then that is what will be remembered by our guests. The relationship we have with DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld makes for an event that gets constant positive feedback all the way around."

### Clubs, Rods and Clays

Of course, pairing golf with a meeting or event is always a draw for attendees, especially at one of Florida's many world-renowned golf courses. And it's just about to get a whole lot better. Streamsong Resort, home to two critically acclaimed golf courses, has announced plans to build a third course, which will open in fall 2017 on its 16,000-acre property in Central Florida. This is wonderful news for meeting planners like Therese Bottino at William Automotive Group.

Williams Automotive Group operates just north of Tampa, Florida, and Bottino recently organized an event at Streamsong Resort for a group of the company's top managers to get offsite and have meetings as well as provide some bonding time together.

"Streamsong was the perfect location for us," Bottino says. "We operate just north of Tampa so the resort was far enough away without my team having to spend a ton of time traveling. I was very pleased with the wide variety of activities offered to my group. The bass fishing and the clay shooting were highlights, and of course the golf and steakhouse were wonderful. Streamsong really has an exclusive resort feel while being conveniently located to us. We hope to see them again for another function in 2017."

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Credit: Streamsong Resort

Streamsong Resort has reclaimed land once mined for phosphate to create three of the state's most unique and interesting golf courses.

Streamsong features a 216-room lodge, with three acclaimed casual and fine dining restaurants, conference and event facilities, a spa and infinity pool. Streamsong's Clubhouse includes 12 guest rooms, a restaurant and bar, an award-winning golf shop and meeting space with breathtaking views. In addition to golf, guests can enjoy such activities as bass fishing, sporting clays, nature trails and tennis.

Streamsong Resort's newest course, Streamsong Black, will be designed by Gil Hanse, architect of the Olympic Golf Course in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and co-designer of Castle Stuart Golf Links in Scotland. With the addition of Streamsong Black, the resort will become the only location in the world where guests can enjoy three distinct courses designed by four legendary architects, including Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw of Coore & Crenshaw and Tom Doak of Renaissance Golf Design. And the resort plans to add a second practice facility, clubhouse and restaurant to serve guests playing Streamsong Black.

### Working With Planners

Many venues in Florida cater directly to corporate meeting professionals to make their meeting or event truly one to remember. The recently opened Hilton West Palm Beach, connected to the Palm Beach County Convention

Center, has worked diligently to provide unique meeting opportunities for planners and attendees alike. The property boasts more than 24,000 sf of meeting space, including the 13,350-sf Oceana Ballroom and the 5,800-sf Coral Ballroom, which can be utilized as one entity, or separated



**"We have tried to move the conference to another location and our folks don't want us to have the conference anywhere else. They are used to making a mini vacation each year."**

**Anita A. Frase**, Vice President Corporate Projects  
Crye-Leike Realtors, Memphis, TN

into five individual meeting spaces. The hotel exterior includes two 2,400-sf expansive lawn spaces for meetings or special events.

Of course, if planners need more space, the convention center is directly accessible via a covered walkway from the hotel. An architectural masterpiece with state-of-the-art amenities, the 350,000-sf center features a 100,000-sf exhibit hall, a 22,000-sf ballroom and 21,000 sf of flexible breakout space divisible into 19 rooms.



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Credits: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa's oceanfront location affords ample opportunities for outdoor events and activities.



### Standout Service

Superlative staff service has defined the Florida-based meetings experienced by Pike Enterprises. The company recently held their annual supervisor's meeting at Margaritaville Beach Resort in Hollywood, Florida. There were approximately 160 attendees from all over the U.S. at this event.

"This is a yearly meeting we have to gather all of our field supervisors along with management from our corporate office to do a recap, review and forecast of our business," says Sandy King, meeting planner and director of executive support at Pike Enterprises LLC. "We have meetings where the entire group is together, and then we also break out into different meetings."

As King explains, the most important aspect for her, as the meeting planner, was that every level of staff she encountered was very helpful and attentive to their needs.

"Each person, from the time we walked in, made it clear that they were there to help our meeting be a success," King says. "I was given a name and contact information from the beginning that I could reach out to for any need that arose. For example, if there was an attendee that showed up that was not on our rooming list, I could call this person who

would take care of getting a room. I could call this person if the temperature in the meeting room needed adjusting or to have boxes moved. It was such a convenience having one person to call for all the needs that always seem to arise during these meetings. The meeting spaces were awesome, the restroom facilities were immaculate, the food we had was the best 'hotel' food we have had in my 25 years of doing this."

Another main contributor to Pike Enterprises' decision to use this resort was that the attendees did not have to leave the facility. Once they arrived from the airport, they did not have to leave the resort until it was time to return to the airport.

"We know the majority of our attendees will try to find a bar to have drinks at the end of the evening and with this resort, there were plenty of bars within walking distance, and we did not have to worry about their safety or driving after drinking," King says. "Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort is a gorgeous facility. In all my years of planning these events, this by far has been the best we have ever utilized, and we will go there again."

### Florida Update

#### Southeast Florida

With more than 30,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting and

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Newly renovated guest rooms at Diplomat Beach Resort boast ocean or Intracoastal Waterway views

Credit: Diplomat Beach Resort

event space, the Forbes Five Star **Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa** accommodates groups from 10 to 1,000 and offers a wide variety of indoor and outdoor venues for private events. Eau Palm Beach Resort and Spa has four restaurants and is just minutes from the lively Palm Beach nightlife and shopping. As the preeminent “see and be seen” destination on the Palm Beach culinary scene, the Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa features Breeze Ocean Kitchen, a stunning, re-designed oceanfront restaurant concept led by executive chef Josh Thomsen. Awash in pale yellow and blue hues, the space is a subtle reflection of the recently reimagined guest room aesthetic. Airy and sophisticated furnishings seat up to 120 and are punctuated with striking design details such as a runway fire feature that lights up evening lounge areas. A “look out” bartop floats above the resort’s private beach to offer extraordinary views of the Atlantic Ocean. Situated on a private beach, the 309-room Eau Palm Beach’s spa also has earned a Forbes Five Star rating, making it a top pick for upscale meetings.

In Hollywood near Fort Lauderdale, the 1,000-room **Diplomat Beach Resort** is

a 50,000-sf Great Hall, outdoor special event areas including the pool deck and 33rd floor lounge space. The newly renovated guest rooms at the Diplomat, which feature ocean or Intracoastal views, fit one of two separate design schemes: Sunrise or Sunset. Sunrise rooms are modern, vibrant and refreshing with earthy tones that provide a soothing, calm atmosphere accented with blue ocean colors, with vintage artwork that harkens the region’s history. Sunset rooms reflect a more subtle, modern and organic design scheme.



Credit: Hilton Miami Downtown

The Hilton Miami Downtown towers over the Ziff Ballet Opera House (left) and Adrienne Arsht Center.

completing a \$100 million transformation with reimagined guest rooms, indoor/outdoor event spaces, spa and more than 10 dining concepts. Among the culinary offerings are The Diplomat Prime steakhouse; Monkitail, featuring Japanese-inspired fare crafted by famed chef and restaurateur Michael Schulson; Point Royal, showcasing celebrity chef Geoffrey Zakarian’s coastal-American fare with modern seafood dishes and raw bar; and Playa, a beachfront nuevo-Latina restaurant and bar with an extensive selection of rum and tequila. The largest hotel in Broward County, the Diplomat also offers 209,000 sf of meeting and event space including

Location, location, location is a hallmark of the **Hilton Miami Downtown**, situated in the vibrant heart of the Performing Arts District — a few minutes from The Adrienne Arsht Center for Performing Arts — and near trendy South Beach, three miles away. The hotel, which boasts views of Biscayne Bay and the Miami skyline, is next to the Metro Mover light rail system, 15 minutes from Miami International Airport and near the Port of Miami — the cruise capital of the world. For meetings, the hotel has 45,000 sf of flexible event space accommodating up to 2,000 attendees. There are 19 meeting rooms, including five boardrooms with floor-to-ceiling windows, and the largest ballroom in downtown Miami at 17,000 sf.

### Northwest Florida

Located along one of America’s top beaches and adjacent to a 208-acre environmentally protected state park, **The Henderson, a Salamander Beach & Spa Resort** on Northwest Florida’s Gulf Coast in Destin, opened last November. Reminiscent of a grand seaside manor, The Henderson features traditional coastal architecture. The resort features 170 spacious guest rooms and suites, a nature-inspired spa, Gulf-to-table cuisine, an octagonal bar with panoramic Gulf views, a rooftop terrace, two outdoor swimming pools, 30,000 sf of flexible indoor and outdoor event space, and private beach access.

“Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort is a gorgeous facility. In all my years of planning these events, this by far has been the best we have ever utilized, and we will go there again.”

**Sandy King**, Director of Executive Support  
Pike Enterprises, Mount Airy, NC

### Central Florida

Following a \$17 million renovation to its 146 guest rooms, the **Villas of Grand Cypress** has reconfigured its Mediterranean-style Executive Meeting Center, a standalone complex that houses 7,200 sf of flexible indoor/outdoor event space with four meeting rooms divisible into eight self-contained spaces. The four-star, four-diamond resort, which claims 1,500 acres in Lake Buena Vista, boasts 45 holes of Jack Nicklaus Signature-designed golf; a golf academy; an equestrian center with options for equestrian-themed shows to entertain reception or banquet guests; and the Nine 18 Restaurant, which doubles as a fully equipped meeting space for small groups.

**Loews Sapphire Falls Resort**, which opened at Universal



Sanibel Island’s premier meeting destination offers 12,000 sq. ft. of flexible meeting space overlooking the Gulf. Here, the line between business and pleasure blurs creating a new way to conduct business.



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Orlando last July, added 115,000 sf of meeting space last fall that includes a 41,000-sf ballroom, 30,000-sf hall and 16,000-sf outdoor event area. The space connects by air-conditioned bridge to Loews Royal Pacific Resort, providing a combined 247,000 sf of meeting space in the Loews Meeting Complex at Universal Orlando, which officially opened in October.

**DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld** is adding 40,000 sf of new indoor and outdoor conference and event space, scheduled to debut this summer. The hotel's existing 60,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting space also will be upgraded.

In December, the **Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel** completed a \$5 million renovation of its 329,000 sf of meeting space to refresh all the meeting rooms at both the Swan and Dolphin hotels. The renovation included updated carpet and paint, along with the installation of new technology in the meeting areas. The meeting space refresh is part of the hotel's multiphase, multiyear \$140 million redesign project, which also includes transformation of all 2,267 guest rooms. In 2015, the Swan guest rooms were completed; Dolphin Hotel guest room renovations will wrap up by the end of 2017. As the final stage of the largest makeover in the Orlando resort's history, the Dolphin lobby will undergo a \$12 million redesign beginning this spring and will be completed in the fall.

The former Buena Vista Palace Resort & Spa was recently reflagged as the **Hilton Orlando Buena Vista Palace**, located in the Disney Springs area. The 1,011-room hotel completed a major makeover featuring newly designed guest rooms, a new outside terrace and refreshed meeting spaces totaling 92,000 sf. As the hotel is an official Walt Disney World Hotel, groups are offered entertainment and event production services through the Disney Event Group as well as the Disney Institute's educational programs.

The three Rosen Hotels convention properties — **Rosen Plaza, Rosen Centre** and **Rosen Shingle Creek** — are undergoing major renovations from guest rooms to restaurants. Rosen Plaza recently completed refurbishments in all 800 of its guest rooms and suites, and now features expanded flexible indoor/outdoor event space with 3NINE, the hotel's 5,000-sf state-of-the-art entertainment venue. 3NINE can accommodate 500 people indoors or 1,500 guests when the event is extended to the patio and pool deck '39 Poolside Bar & Grill. The venue provides groups with a dedicated, on-site daytime or evening event space outfitted with all audio-visual needs and already fully decorated and themed.

#### Southwest Florida

The new 343-room **Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach** is celebrating its debut on January 18 with 22,000 sf of elegant, flexible function space including the area's largest ballroom.



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Credit: Sundial Resort

The event lawn at Sundial Resort on Sanibel Island.

Flexible function space includes seven meeting rooms divisible into 12 breakout rooms, plus the 10,632-sf Dunes Ballroom, which can host up to 800 guests and boasts among its many features, \$250,000 programmable chandeliers.

The Waldorf Astoria Naples on the Southwest Florida coast recently transitioned to the independently branded **Naples Grande Beach Resort** after completing \$18 million in renovations. New guest room décor offers a soothing, coastal-inspired design and a new signature restaurant, Catch of the Pelican, featuring fresh Florida seafood. The resort recently completed \$2 million worth of enhancements to the lobby lounge and Vista Ballroom, which received a décor refresh, modern fixtures, updated drapery, plush carpet and modern furniture. The lobby lounge and Spressi seating area feature new seating, lighting and a complete bar upgrade. The renovated spaces further enhance the property's 83,000 sf of fully customizable indoor and outdoor function space. The property, which also boasts five on-site restaurants and bars, three heated pools, fitness center, tennis facility and luxury spa, is surrounded by 200 acres of a protected mangrove estuary intertwined with a system of bridges and elevated walking paths that afford access to three miles of beachfront on the Gulf of Mexico.

Guests dining at the restaurants at **The Ritz-Carlton, Naples** enjoy greens so fresh they appear on plates within just hours of being harvested from the resort's onsite Grow House. The first of its kind in a resort setting, The Grow House is a repurposed shipping container with the capacity to grow one acre of produce.

Planners looking for fun, interactive activities for their

groups can cross the bridge from Fort Myers to Sanibel Island, where **Sundial Beach Resort & Spa** recently added 12 regulation pickleball courts to its lineup of resort amenities and public offerings. The Plexicushion system courts will provide the area with state-of-the-art tournament-grade facilities in a beautiful, lakefront setting. Construction is underway with an anticipated early spring 2017 opening. A combination of tennis, badminton and table tennis, pickleball now claims the title of the fastest growing sport in North America. Lessons, round robins, and clinics for all ages will be available to both resort guests, residents and visitors. Sundial offers 198 guest rooms and 12,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting and event spaces.

The **Keewaydin Express** is a new water taxi providing service from a variety of Marco Island locations to Keewaydin Island's expansive, deserted beaches, which are accessible only by boat.

Following an extensive \$320 million renovation, the Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa has converted to a JW Marriott luxury property. The **JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort** offers 100,000 sf of meeting space and 726 guest rooms. Scheduled to open at the resort in fall 2017 will be a 94-room, adults-only tower, with Gulf-view rooftop pool, restaurant and a 12,000-sf, state-of-the-art indoor entertainment center.



Credit: JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort & Spa

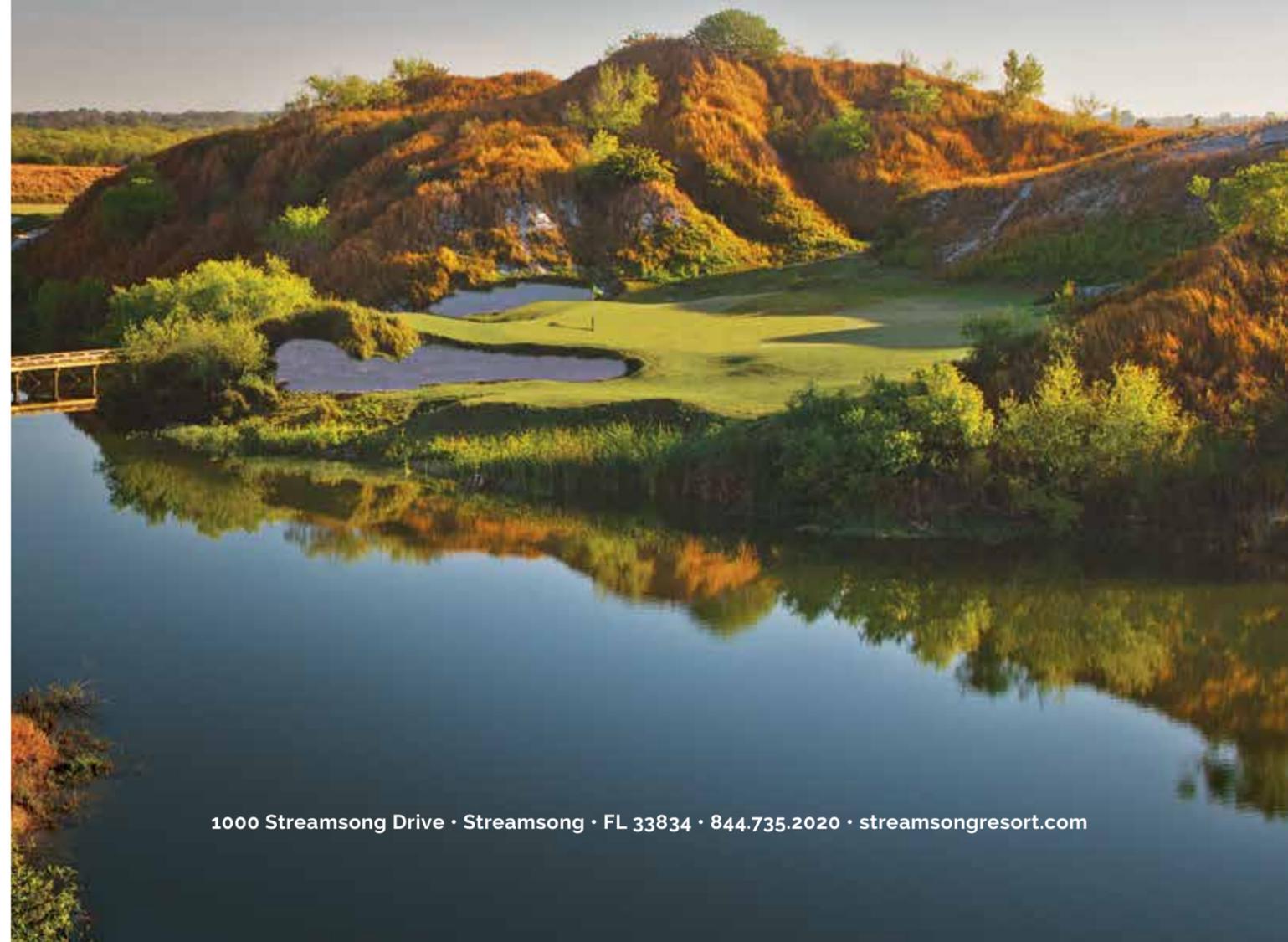
Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa has transitioned to the JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort.

The 310-room **Hilton Marco Island Beach Resort & Spa** will debut this month, after a \$40 million renovation, which features new luxury family suites, newly designed pool and the reimagined indoor/outdoor Deck at 560 Bar & Restaurant. A beachfront event lawn will make its appearance this fall as will a redesigned, 5,200-sf Grand Ballroom. **C&IT**



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# Loyal to a Flag?

## Planners Reveal Their Favorite Hotel Brands and Why

By Patrick Simms

Data management software company OSIsoft has held its annual OSIsoft Users Conference at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square for 12 years, most recently bringing in about 2,200 attendees in April 2016. That number has been increasing year-over-year, and the group has yet to outgrow the 1,919-room property, which houses 130,000 sf of meeting space. “The amount of meeting space and guest rooms as well as the location make it an ideal venue for us,” says Stefanie Ordoveza, global events manager. “And with our headquarters nearby in San Leandro, it is extremely convenient for us to have a venue so close to our home base in terms of both planning and execution.”



**Stefanie Ordoveza**  
Global Events Manager  
OSIsoft  
San Leandro, CA

**“What we value most is our relationship with the Hilton staff. They truly go above and beyond to make every event a success and adapt to our attendee needs.”**



Hilton San Francisco Union Square has hosted OSIsoft’s Users Conference for 12 years.

But the reasons for the long partnership have as much to do with the advantages of the particular hotel as with the Hilton brand itself. “In general, Hilton properties bring a wide range of offerings, from technology to F&B options, that make our attendees’ stay and experience high class,” Ordoveza explains. “However, what we value most is our relationship with the Hilton staff. They truly go above and beyond to make every event a success and adapt to our attendee needs as the event continues to grow.” Even when OSIsoft met at the faraway Hilton Prague, the experience was a familiar one, she adds. “The staff was great to work with and very service-oriented, just what you would expect from a Hilton property.”

### Predictability

While an individual property will always have its idiosyncrasies, a hotel will generally express its brand’s approach to group service, F&B, amenities, property design and so on. And it’s those recurring features that make planners brand loyalists. Dates, rates, space and location usually take precedence over brand in the process of site selection, but when two or more properties of different flags stack up similarly in those respects, brand preferences tend to weigh in. Eventually, such preferences lead to a history of usage with particular chains and more leverage in negotiations, lending further reason to continue partnering with that hotelier.

With the recent merger of Marriott and Starwood, planners who have a history with either company can now look forward to leveraging that business with a much broader scope of properties. “When we look at the overall (meetings)

spend of our company, we’ll have an even stronger total annual spend (with one company) after the merger, which sometimes helps when booking future programs,” notes Kim Baker, CMP, CPCE, senior manager, events with Clearwater, Florida-based Tech Data Corporation.

“I do more with Marriott,” says Beth Becker, global meeting services man-



**Colleen Bisconti**  
Vice President, Global Conferences and Events  
IBM  
Laguna Beach, CA

**“(MGM resorts) are willing to be very flexible with us in terms of what our needs are, and creative for us when we hit a challenge.”**

ager with Downers Grove, Illinois-based MicroTek, “but (the merger) gives me status with Starwood that I didn’t have before, because of my status with Marriott.”

### Sales Service

Additionally, Marriott’s acquisition will afford planners a “centralized resource when it comes to sales and sourcing,” Baker says, and one that ranges over 5,700 properties representing 30 brands in more than 110 countries. A planner’s experience with great service, begin-

ning at the sourcing stage, is indeed one of the main reasons a hotelier becomes preferred.

Tech Data’s top hotel partner in terms of usage is Marriott, with most of its nearly 300 annual offsite events being held at Marriott properties, from JW Marriotts to Autograph Collection hotels. “We’ve found that Marriott does a really nice job of everything customer service related. They’re great with follow-up. And I never feel like I’m inconveniencing them with questions,” Baker explains. “I have a corporate sales rep assigned to my company and then I also know my sales rep at each individual property. And I feel like they all work together. There is never an issue of going to one person over another to talk, whereas at other companies it can be a little confusing or almost like a little competition

between (sales reps) to be the primary contact. So Marriott does an especially nice job of ensuring we’re covered from a sales/customer service perspective.”

Ideal sales reps also are knowledgeable and proactive with regard to the client’s meetings business. Jane Belli, director, meetings and events

with Fort Worth, Texas-based Alcon, an eye care products developer, has found that Omni Hotels & Resorts’ sales reps exhibit this quality. “They have taken the time to understand our business,” says Belli. “We do national sales meetings every January, so if you’re a good partner you’re going to approach us and say, ‘I know in 2018, 2019 and 2020 you’re going to need to do these meetings, so how can we bundle and do a multiyear deal?’”

### Onsite Service

All of the top brands excel in onsite group service, but there are those cases of “going the extra mile” that truly impress planners and lead them to become brand devotees. Rebecca Byrne, CMP, HMCC, senior manager events and trade shows with Pleasanton, California-based Zeltiq, cites Westin as among her preferred chains, and the service and

**Rebecca Byrne, CMP**  
HMCC, Senior Manager  
Events and Tradeshow  
Zeltiq  
Pleasanton, CA



**"I know that across the board in the brand if I look at a Marriott hotel in Chicago or in New Orleans it's going to have the same look and feel."**

flexibility of The Westin San Francisco Airport reaffirmed that choice. "We did one of our sales meetings at the hotel and it was phenomenal. They let us put a tent on an employee parking lot for a teambuilding with 60 of our sales directors, helping to get permits from the city so it was a quick turnaround. We had a graffiti artist come in and show them how to create graffiti. It was pouring rain and freezing, but the hotel staff made it really nice for us, providing heaters and making us hot chocolate and churros," Byrne relates. That kind of special event coordination may be unsurprising at a resort, but for an airport hotel it's rather remarkable and exemplifies The Westin brand's commitment to group service.

On a much larger scale, MGM Resorts International offers groups a wealth of

resources for special events at its Las Vegas properties, and IBM is among the major clients who have capitalized on that infrastructure. Colleen Bisconti, IBM vice president, global conferences and events, plans the company's two largest client and business partner-facing events in

Las Vegas, one in the spring and one in the fall. Each brings in a worldwide audience of well over 20,000. Next March, IBM InterConnect 2017 and IBM Amplify 2017 will utilize 100 percent of the meeting space at both the MGM Grand and Mandalay Bay, and hold activities at the new T-Mobile Arena, which opened in April.

"They are willing to be very flexible with us in terms of what our needs are, and creative for us when we hit a challenge," Bisconti relates. "We have a very elaborate expo hall where we bring together business partners showcasing their solutions built on IBM, and then IBM itself coming in and showcasing our capabilities. In order to build this expo experience, because it's not just about a bunch of booths anymore, we often need more move-in time than we had planned for, and MGM is very good about working with us." She has one contact for MGM International and individual contacts at the properties. "On any given day I can call any one of them, and this (company unity) is something that (MGM Senior Vice President and Chief Sales Officer) Mike Dominguez has really driven. So as the client I have an expectation that if I'm doing something across two properties, we're all going to work together. We're one company, you're one company."

The opportunity to use T-Mobile Arena for a general session and concert was one of the motivations for partnering with MGM Resorts, Bisconti adds. "We've done many programs at the Grand Garden Arena and Events Center at Mandalay Bay. They're big arenas and definitely impressive, but to walk into T-Mobile was a completely different experience. We turned the outdoor plaza area (The Park) into a festival with food trucks and some of our tech products, so it didn't just feel



Caesars Entertainment has made a major commitment to sustainability for all of its North American hotel properties.

like you were walking into an arena, but into an experience."

Caesars Entertainment's Las Vegas properties also are supplemented by an outdoor district, The Linq. A multitude of venues are available for group functions, from the Brooklyn Bowl live music venue to the 550-foot High Roller's glass enclosed cabins. In November, Caesars reached a new height in another area that many planners look to when determining their preferred suppliers: sustainability. Ninety-seven percent of the company's owned or managed North American hotel properties have achieved a 4 Key rating or higher, a metric established by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Green Key. The program inspects hotels' operations and ranks them from 1-5 Keys based on their commitment to sustainability. Reportedly, Caesars Entertainment now has more properties rated 4 Keys or higher than any other casino-entertainment company in the world.

## F&B

Part of sustainability is a hotelier's practice of using organic, locally sourced ingredients in its food service. Some properties even use ingredients sourced at their own gardens, and Baker has found the JW Marriott to be ahead of the curve in this regard. "I've always thought that JW Marriott has a heavier emphasis on culinary. Every one of their properties I've ever been to has a specialty such as making honey from their own beehive or curing their own meats to make their own jerky," she relates. "They bring in guest chefs and go above and beyond with their menus." Similarly, Byrne cites Westin's menus as "very unique." "I've taken some of those ideas from the Westin and request them when I'm working on menus at other properties," she says. "For example, a green menu for breaks with broccoli, edamame, green shooters, etc. Using a different color scheme, you can do a yellow break or a red break. It makes the event memorable for attendees."

## Wellness

Both Byrne and Baker highlight Westin as among the industry leaders in not only healthful cuisine, but also guest wellness in general. The brand is known for its programs dubbed "Eat Well," "Sleep Well," "Move Well" and the like. Features include the Heavenly Bed, sleep balms with essential oils (introduced January 2017), RunWestin running routes with Run Concierge, Westin Gear Lending (workout gear delivered to guest rooms) and Westin Wellness Escapes (including fitness classes, healthy cooking courses, panel discussions), etc.

Omni Hotels & Resorts' Stay Well program for Select Guest members also includes a variety of amenities, given that wellness is a multifaceted initiative: Get Fit Kits, healthy morning menu selections, specialty pillows, sleep kits, noise machines and fitness options such as yoga and spin classes. "Wellness is a huge part of our culture," says Belli. "Omni properties have state-of-

the-art fitness facilities, and weights, exercise bands, etc. in your room. We also do 5K runs and group yoga, and they will absolutely facilitate those kinds of things. For example, they send somebody with your group to go for a jog if it's a city property."

## Wi-Fi

Sufficient bandwidth onsite is an ongoing concern for highly connected groups such as MicroTek's. "The ability to dedicate bandwidth is very important to us," says Becker. "It seems to vary property to property, but we have had some success with the DoubleTrees in that their bandwidth usually comes to be what they tell us it is; we have our tech people test it. But it really has more to do with the management company than the flag they're flying."

Nonetheless, many brands are ramping up bandwidth across their properties. Examples include IHG, whose



**Jane Belli**  
Director, Meetings  
and Events  
Alcon  
Fort Worth, TX

**"These days, experiential engagement is such a focus, and the great thing about Omni is that a lot of that is naturally built in."**

cloud-based IHG Connect program has recently expanded to 1,500 hotels in the Americas; Wyndham, which is offering free expanded premium Wi-Fi at Wingate by Wyndham properties



Many Omni Hotels & Resorts properties facilitate group fitness options including yoga, 5K runs and more.

by next summer (100 mbps minimum); and Hyatt Hotels, which has reportedly made investments in Wi-Fi across nearly 90 percent of its properties in the past three years.

## Style and Theme

The look and feel of a brand's properties can be important to a planner, as it can fit with a certain group demographic, corporate culture or event theme. For example, Kimpton hotels tend to have a "very boutique feeling, very hip and unusual," says Becker. "So if you have clients who like that, usually younger companies, they may work for you." On the other hand, some groups will prefer a more standardized, traditional atmosphere. According to Byrne, a Marriott devotee, "I know that across the board in the brand if I look at a Marriott hotel in Chicago or in New Orleans it's going to have the same look and feel: the same coffee pot, same bedding, etc. And I think (that makes attendees) feel comfortable who are on the road. I've seen that consistency with Starwood as well."

Some brands are less standardized across properties in an effort to express their locale, a common theme at Destination Hotels. "Diverse by Design," the brand's more than 40 properties each strives to incorporate the cuisine and cultural elements of its surroundings. Perhaps less recognized in this effort is Omni: "All their hotels take on the local flavor of the city they're in," says Belli. "These days, experiential engagement is such a focus, and the great thing about Omni is that a lot of that is naturally built in. So the Omni Fort Worth when you



A positive experience at The Westin San Francisco Airport confirmed one planner's preference for Westin properties.



Credit: Omni Hotels & Resorts

Omni Fort Worth Hotel's Western-themed decor is a good example of how the brand designs hotels to reflect the local culture.

walk in has that kind of upscale Western feel. They really research the city; for example, their new property in Louisville, Kentucky, will have a bourbon bar. The built-in experience takes some work off of me as a planner because I don't have to create that experience."

Similarly, Marriott's Autograph Collection hotels are thematically "tied to the area," Baker notes. For instance, the Epicurean Hotel, located in the Hyde Park historic district of South Tampa, Florida, "focuses on local bakers and wines and it's all integrated into their menus. Even the look of the hotel ties into Tampa's culture and history."

### Reward Programs

Most planners agree that gathering

points and perks via hotel reward programs is fairly low on the list of motivations for choosing a brand or individual property over another. But it can make a difference when other criteria are relatively comparable. "If two properties are perfectly similar sometimes the decision is based on points," says Becker. "I do have one client that's very much Marriott focused, and so if we have a Hilton and a Marriott that are head to head we certainly would take Marriott because of their points. But for the most part the points are not swaying the decision." And in this market of escalating room rates, perks such as a complimentary reception or discounted AV when booking a certain amount of business do mean something. "You may have two properties with availability and you want to be able to talk to your executives and say this is where we're getting the best value," says Belli.

For example, Wyndham's first formal rewards program catering to the meetings market — go meet — launched just over a year ago. The loyalty program allows members to earn one point for every dollar spent on qualifying revenue at participating hotels, regardless of billing method, with no minimum spend requirement and no maximum point limit.

Regarding the seller's market, it is worth noting that PwC's November 2016 Hospitality Directions U.S. report predicts that in 2017, supply growth will accelerate at a long-term average of 1.9 percent and, coupled with

weakened demand, will result in the U.S. lodging industry's first occupancy decline in eight years. This may improve negotiating conditions for planners, and what's more, the new supply will include new options within their preferred brands.

Wyndham loyalists, for instance, can look forward to notable openings this year, including the 450-room Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach in Florida (24,000 sf of meeting space) in January. Also this year, Dolce Hotels & Resorts, recently acquired by Wyndham, will open a 217-room Dolce hotel and conference center less than 10 miles from Cincinnati (offering 22,000 sf of function space). The Dolce Washington

**"I've always thought that JW Marriott has a heavier emphasis on culinary. ...They bring in guest chefs and go above and beyond with their menus."**

**Kim Baker, CMP, CPCE**  
Senior Manager, Events  
Tech Data  
Clearwater, FL

Dulles, a property ideal for training programs and executive retreats, will open in late 2018 with 243 guest rooms and more than 13,000 sf of meeting space.

Belli is anticipating the 612-room Omni Louisville's opening in spring 2018. Located just one block from the Kentucky International Convention Center, the LEED Silver-certified hotel will offer 70,000 sf of meeting and event space, two full-service restaurants and a 20,000-sf fresh market and grocery.

And Bisconti hopes to utilize Maryland's new MGM National Harbor for a future event. The 308-room resort includes 50,000 sf of meeting space, 3,000-seat Theater and open-air Potomac Plaza. "They already understand our brand," she says, "so we're not starting all over in terms of building a relationship." **C&IT**

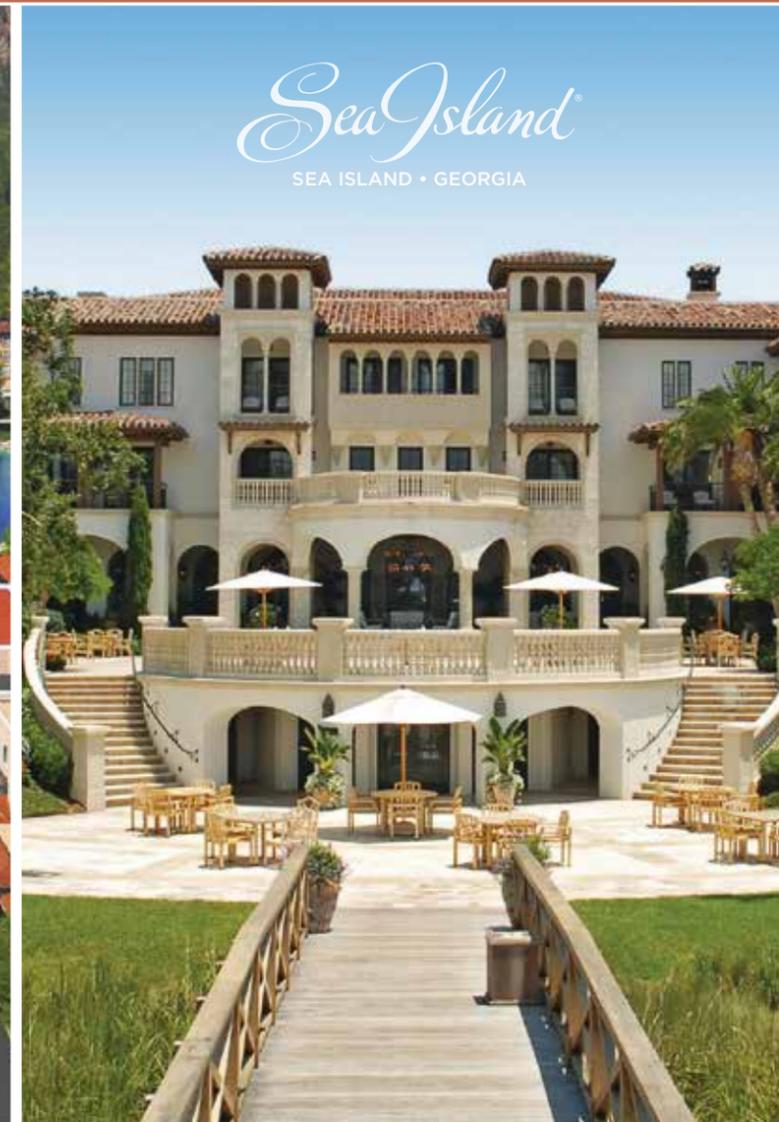
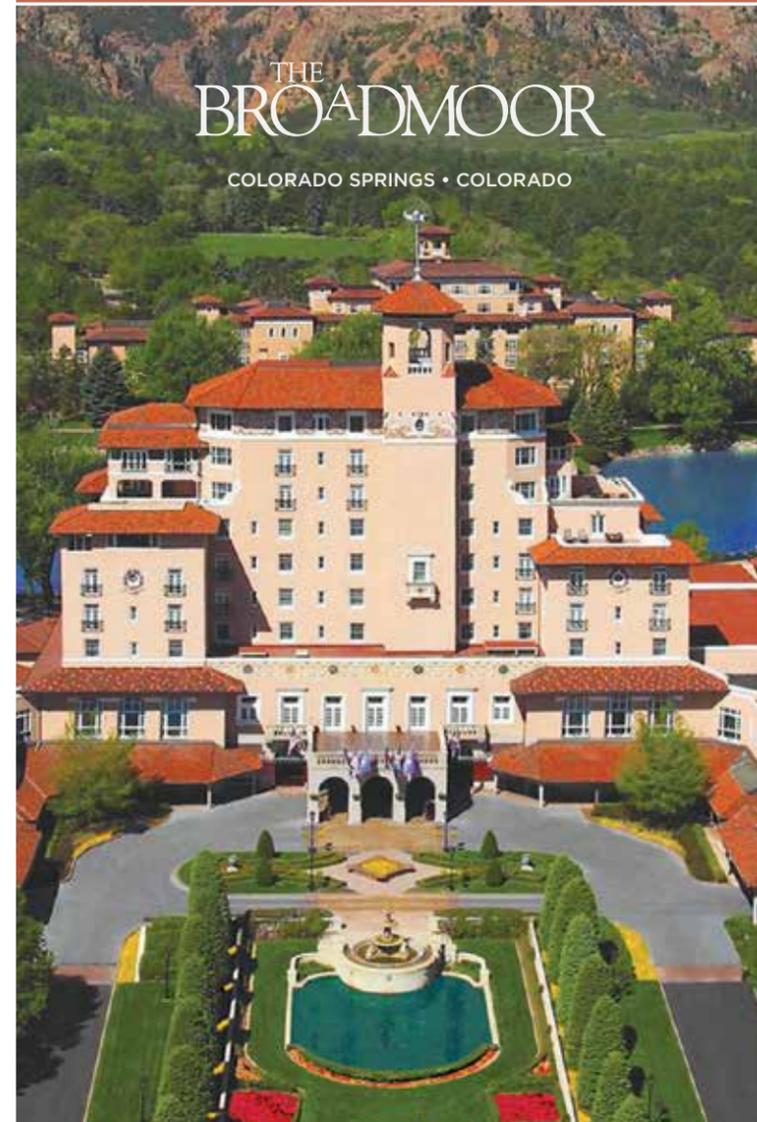
**"I do more with Marriott, but (the merger) gives me status with Starwood that I didn't have before, because of my status with Marriott."**



**Beth Becker**  
Global Meeting  
Services Manager  
MicroTek  
Downers Grove, IL

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# The Millennial Mystique

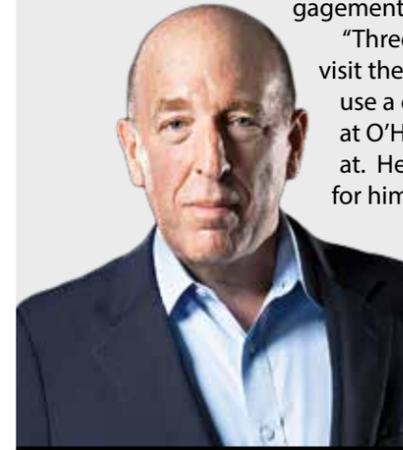
How to Understand and Make the Most of the Differences Among the Ages

By Mark Rowh

Sometimes the differences among generations are exaggerated. Obviously everyone in the greatest generation wasn't great, and all millennials don't expect instant recognition of their abilities. But at the same time, some very real differences are apparent when it comes to getting the job done.

## Not Your Grandfather's Style

Steve Goldstein, author of "Why Are There Snowblowers in Miami? Transform Your Business Using the Five Principles of Engagement," shares this story that may reveal the millennial mindset.



**Steven D. Goldstein**  
Advisor, Author, Speaker  
New York City, NY

"Three years ago, I was leading a team on an advisory project when we learned at noon that we had to visit the clients' factory the next morning and needed to fly out immediately. While our firm had a policy to use a corporate travel service, I was busy and emailed my assistant to make my reservations. After arriving at O'Hare, with four of us packed in a taxi, I asked Ben, the most junior person, what hotel he was staying at. He responded by saying "Oops," then took out his phone and booked a room on Airbnb. I was anxious for him, but he was neither apprehensive, worried or anything else. It was not an issue for him." — MR

"I was anxious for him, but he was neither apprehensive, worried or anything else. It was not an issue for him."

Experts from management consultants to sociologists agree that understanding such differences is an important ingredient in successful collaboration. For many planners, this has implications for both achieving best results within the events team and in dealing with all the people involved in executing successful meetings. And with more and more millennials taking on key roles, a focus on this group seems unavoidable.

### Just What Is a Millennial?

Just who fits under this label? According to generational expert Chuck Underwood, founder and principal of The Generational Imperative Inc. in Miamisburg, Ohio, millennials were born from 1982 through 1999, meaning essentially those currently aged 18 to 35. Underwood says that as a group, millennials hold promise to be

an excellent career generation, citing descriptors such as idealistic, ethical, compassionate, team player, tech-savvy, a desire to save the world and strong self-esteem.

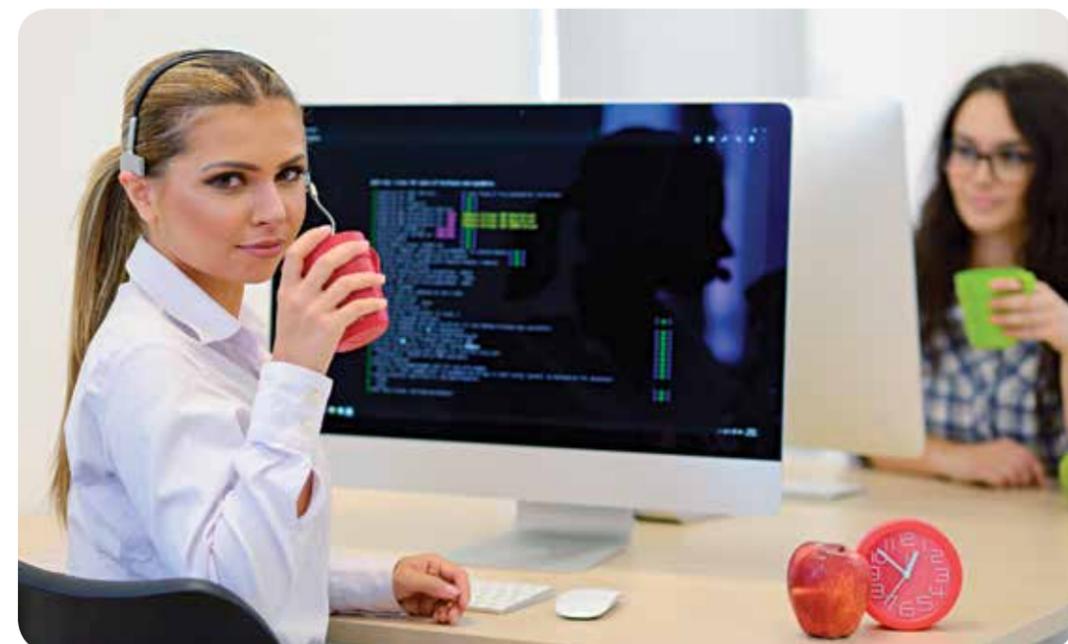
"But they've gotten off to a very rocky start with employers," he says, noting that employers tend to list shortcomings such as a flawed sense of entitlement, unrealistic expectations, weak work ethic, constant job-hopping, lack of accountability and as much damaged by technology as they are helped by it.

"The bottom line is that just like every prior generation of Americans, millennials bring to work each day unique core values that emerged from unique formative years' times and teachings, most of which were beyond their control," Underwood says. He advocates millennial-specific training for employers in order to recruit the best from



**Chuck Underwood**  
Founder and Principal  
Generational Imperative Inc.  
Miamisburg, Ohio

"To the surprise of many, the world's first full-blown technology generation actually craves human, eye-to-eye interaction and group dynamics."



# 7 Management Strategies

Phyllis Weiss Haserot, president of Practice Development Counsel, a New York City business consulting firm, says these seven strategies can be effective in managing millennials:

- Inviting their input to how things are done — and listening. Don't automatically negate them. Try out some of their potentially good ideas.
- Being clear upfront about expectations and why they need to meet those expectations.
- Giving reasons for "why" when making requests or assigning tasks that are new and not obvious.
- Giving them the big picture.
- Explaining how what they are asked to do is important and helps clients/customers and is important to fulfilling the purpose and mission of the company.
- Recognizing and praising them for good work (not with trophies for just showing up).
- Giving them new challenges as often as possible so they can stretch and learn and make use of their talents and skills.

— MR



**Phyllis Weiss Haserot**  
President  
Practice Development Counsel  
New York, NY

“Giving reasons for ‘why’ when making requests or assigning tasks that are new and not obvious.”



**Kathy Miller**  
CEO  
Total Event Resources  
Chicago, IL

“The days of hiring the younger generation and having them stay with your organization for five to 10-plus years are gone.”

their generation, onboard them smoothly, train them appropriately, manage and inspire them, and retain them.

Kathy Miller, CEO of Total Event Resources, a Chicago meeting and event planning company, says that on the whole these workers are eager for advancement. Yet they are not especially open to being closely managed, a combination that may be difficult for managers to reconcile. At the same time, their ambitions can often be harnessed to the benefit of the organization.

“One of the biggest challenges in managing millennials is their desire to get ahead quickly,” she says. “Don’t get me wrong — this can be a huge advantage when you are a growing organization and are looking for talent that has the potential to do the job yet not necessarily the experience. You can put them into situations where they are eager to learn and to advance their career by giving them the opportunity to prove themselves.”

Miller cautions against generalizing too much about this group, noting as an example that those on the older side of the millennial age range can be more patient than younger counterparts. She also cites their interest in giving back to the community and in making a difference in the world.

“If you are looking to attract this generation, it’s important that you can show them what you do to give back,” she says. A light supervisory hand can also be beneficial.

“They are also a generation that does not want to be micromanaged,” she says. “I find that it’s important to give them enough information to manage the task or project at hand and then let them run with it. They want to do it their way, so

allow them to think for themselves and show you a different way.”

Miller, herself a baby boomer, adds that recognizing her own generation’s approach isn’t the only valid one also is essential.

“We have these strong work ethics and beliefs that we had to prove ourselves by long hours and doing things a certain way,” she says. “That doesn’t mean that it’s the way for them.”

Sometimes this means letting different generations do things differently within the same overall group, an approach that can be applied to clients as well as employees. She recalls a corporate holiday event that her firm produced where there was a cross of millennials and older generations.

“We had to establish an event that would serve all,” she says. The owners, who were hosting the event, wanted an evening that was more on the formal side. The millennials, on the other hand, were looking for something less formal and wanted to continue the event long after the dinner was done.

“We accomplished both by having the formal dinner and then throwing an after-party for those who wanted to hang out,” Miller says.

Another reality is higher turnover than might be expected with previous generations.

“The days of hiring the younger generation and having them stay with your organization for five to 10-plus years are gone,” Miller says. She advises keeping this point in perspective and adjusting by creating training efficiencies that will help in responding to the higher turnover that may occur due to millennials’ desire to advance their career. “Having these processes and procedures in place

allows you to be able to train new employees easily,” she says.

## ‘Work to Live’ Focus

Jill Anonson, events solution manager for ITA Group, an event management firm in West Des Moines, Iowa, says it’s important to realize that millennials view work as an extension of their lives.

“For them, it’s not about work-life balance,” she says. “It’s just life. They’re looking for flexible work schedules, and they want the ability to work from where it makes sense for them. Some people work better from home or from Starbucks, so why not let them?”

She adds that wellness of all forms — physical, financial, spiritual and emotional — is important for millennials and they want an employer that cherishes those values. This includes wanting to be part of designing solutions to the problems they face, whether that means taking time to do volunteer work or providing input on the trajectory of the company.

Anonson says that from the meeting planner’s perspective, a different style of supervision than is typical with older workers may be more effective.

“Millennials aren’t looking for a boss,” she says. “They want a coach. If you’re managing members of a planning team who are millennials, this is an important distinction to make.”

One element of this approach is encouraging face-to-face or phone conversations to avoid confusion or misunderstanding.

“Many millennials would rather shoot an email

or text to avoid a phone conversation, but a lot of nuance can be lost in these mediums,” she says.

She notes that it’s also important to reaffirm to millennials the importance of balance.

“Many millennials favor a relaxed schedule and value flexibility in their work, but they can’t miss out on crucial meetings and planning components,” she says. “Enforce the fact that the client’s schedule and needs come before their own.”

Each year, ITA Group holds a week-long conference for its sales team, which is capped off by an afternoon meeting for all team members. As a new strategy this past year, a focus group was held with the goal of making the event more appealing to attendees. While an array of ages and tenures was represented, about 60 percent of those in the group were millennials.

“What we learned from them helped us create one of the most impactful conferences in recent memory,” Anonson says. “They didn’t want a typical annual meeting where executives discussed slide after slide of financial numbers, so we trimmed the financial talk to just one slide of a two-hour presentation.”

The millennials let it be known that they preferred variety in the way content was delivered. They encouraged mixing speaker panels and videos along with the traditional keynotes, as well as including some humor in the presentations. They also asked for a larger, long-term vision and wanted uplifting news about the path the company was taking.

At the same time, Anonson advises against



**Jill Anonson**  
Events Solution Manager  
ITA Group  
West Des Moines, IA

“Millennials aren’t looking for a boss. They want a coach. If you’re managing members of a planning team who are millennials, this is an important distinction to make.”





**Chris Cavanaugh**  
CMO  
Freeman  
Dallas, TX

making overly broad generalizations about any age group. This applies not just to supervising staff members, but also designing engaging conference programs and activities.

"There are 60-year-olds who want to go rock climbing, just as there are 20-somethings who want to tour an art museum. From local arts to neighborhood restaurants, millennials and baby boomers alike want more choices, individualized experiences and noteworthy, shareable adventures they couldn't get anywhere else."

At the International School of Hospitality in Las Vegas, administrators have identified some basic preferences shown by students from this generation who enroll in a conference management and event planning program.

"We have found that millennial students tend to favor the creative elements, where they can express themselves and do projects their own way, as they see fit, in their own order," says Donnell G. Bayot, Ph.D., the school's director of academic affairs. "It is okay with our instructors as we want to make projects as realistic as possible. It is not okay, however, in that millennials find pragmatic details less important and have this general belief that it will fall in line, eventually."

He notes that certain key elements in meeting planning, such as budgeting, are not as flexible as millennials might prefer and that educators have to take this into account.

"Millennials like to strike out on their own and take the future in their own hands," Bayot adds. "They prefer their own way, finding their own an-

swers and don't like routine. Managing millennial employees requires employers to understand their thought process."

### The Importance of Technology

Chris Cavanaugh, CMO of Freeman, an event logistics company with 90 worldwide locations including Dallas, Texas, says efforts to foster collaboration can pay off with this age group.

"Millennials enjoy and appreciate being a part of a group and managers should keep that in mind as they plan office spaces and assignments," he says. "This generation enjoys open and collaborative office spaces where they can bounce ideas and brainstorm. Managers should be easily accessible as well."

He adds that they tend to care deeply about the world around them and "work to live" versus "living to work," as is typical of their parents.

"They are open and interested in world travel and care more about experience than climbing the corporate ladder," he says. "Work-life balance is a top priority and ample vacation time is important to them."

One point that may be misunderstood is the importance that technology plays.

"Millennials have been misrepresented as technologically savvy," Cavanaugh says. "The reality is they are technology dependent. Technology helps enable their highly connected and, dare we say, social lives."

In managing this group, it's important to keep in mind that technology is essential to their con-

"This generation enjoys open and collaborative office spaces where they can bounce ideas and brainstorm. Managers should be easily accessible as well."



## An Alternate Point of View

Leadership coach and consultant Colin T. McLetchie, president of Five Ways Forward offers an alternative view on managing different generations:



**Colin T. McLetchie**  
President  
Five Ways Forward  
Arlington, VA

"You cannot successfully manage or lead a person by focusing on their generation. The only way to be in deep partnership, coaching, mentoring, leading, managing someone is to get to know them as a person. A millennial is not a millennial is not a millennial. While there are broad generalizations you can make about any generation, any one person's experience and world view and needs and wants will be uniquely theirs. My advice is to be aware of generational differences and focus on each person and their unique gifts, strengths and opportunities." —MR

"The only way to be in deep partnership, coaching, mentoring, leading, managing someone is to get to know them as a person."

nection with the world," he says. "Leverage this and ask them for their opinions. They want to be consulted, they want to be heard. And they have a unique and valuable point of view."

Cavanaugh recalls a recent incident when his company launched a new corporate website and developed a comprehensive plan for training their team. A young woman in the group didn't wait for the training but dove right in and became proficient on her own quickly, working on her own time.

"This to me was indicative of the type of self-directed, technology-proficient and interest-led attitude from millennials," he says. "She didn't do this work to gain points or get a promotion — she was genuinely interested, motivated and took matters into her own hands."

Underwood advises making adjustments that take advantage of positive traits as well as addressing attitudes that older generations may find annoying.

"They're a big-thinking, big-dreaming generation that wants a genuine stake in the outcome of the planning team's work," he says. "Managers should give them that voice." He notes that unlike older Generation X (ages 36 to 52 in 2017) whose members are excellent self-starters and work effectively without a great deal of supervision, millennials actually want guidance and reinforcement. So it's advisable to give them clear parameters and structure. He also recommends giving them opportunities to work within groups.

"To the surprise of many, the world's first full-blown technology generation actually craves human, eye-to-eye interaction and group dynamics," he says. "So don't assume all they want is to work in an isolated cubicle, alone."

At the same time, there can be problems with specific expectations.

"Their track record thus far is one of not hitting deadlines," Underwood says. "So emphasize deadlines, make it clear they're responsible for hitting them and enforce your directive. Elders constantly bent the rules for this generation during their youth, so many 'mils' have come to believe there are no hard boundaries to anything."

Jennifer Folsom, chief of corporate development for Summit Consulting, a Washington, DC, data analytics firm where the average age of staff members is 28, suggests that over-communication can be a successful strategy.

"We've found that our millennials demand flexible schedules and telecommuting just as much if not more than our Generation X parents, she says. "Whether it's walking their dog or training for an ultra-marathon, life outside of the office is a priority."

Frequent feedback is also in order.

"These are people who get 100 likes for posting a cat video on Twitter — they demand constant input and feedback," she says. "Previous professional generations are happy with year-end reviews or monthly check-ins with a manager, but we find that millennials need near-constant feedback, both good and bad, on their work product and professional behavior." Folsom adds that this isn't necessarily a bad thing, as it prompts managers to provide more feedback that in turn improves the organization.

Of course dealing with generational differences is a never-ending challenge, and it won't stop with millennials.

"Millennials have been in the work force for a while," Anonson says. "A whole new generation, Generation Z, is coming in. It's very important to start looking at and preparing for this group, as they'll surpass baby boomers and millennials in numbers very quickly." C&IT



**Jennifer Folsom**  
Chief of Corporate  
Development  
Summit Consulting  
Washington, DC

"We find that millennials need near-constant feedback, both good and bad, on their work product and professional behavior."

## On the Road Alone

Solo Women Business Travelers Face Special Risks — Here's How to Mitigate Them



Women have fought long and hard for equality — deservedly so. But women are not equal in some critical ways, including size and strength typically, making them more vulnerable to certain crimes and other safety concerns during travel, here and abroad.

“I wish travel safety was gender neutral but it is not,” says Erin L. Wilk, global travel safety and security program manager for Facebook, where she is developing and implementing a comprehensive travel risk management program. “There are major differences between the risks a male traveler faces and those faced by women travelers.”

At the 2016 GBTA convention in Denver, a panel of experts tackled this issue in an education session, emphasizing that there are gender differences related to risk that corporate travel programs should address.

“Travel managers need to be aware

“There are major differences between the risks a male traveler faces and those faced by women travelers.”

**Erin L. Wilk**, Global Travel Safety and Security Manager  
Facebook, Menlo Park, CA

of risks that women face and book their travel accordingly,” says Wilk, part of the GBTA session panel. “Arriving during daylight hours, ensuring pre-arranged ground transportation and providing travelers with pre-trip information, both security and medical, are all best practices.”

### Know Before You Go

Krissy Herman, another GBTA panel-

ist and vice president, program management, at KesselRun Corporate Travel Solutions where she consults with clients on the strategic framework of their travel programs, vendor sourcing and more, stresses education of travel managers and employees.

“Education plays a major role in this process,” she says. “Work with your TMC to encourage agents to not book flights that arrive late in higher-risk areas. Set alerts to receive itineraries when employees are traveling to certain cities or regions so you can reach out and provide guidance. Encourage the use of scheduled, reputable ground transportation that doesn't use traveler first names on signs at the airport.”

While scheduling arrivals only during daylight hours might add to flight costs, Wilk and Herman agree it makes no sense to compromise safety for cost. “In my professional opinion,” Wilk says, “the price paid if something bad happens will far outweigh the cost of any preventive measure.”

Benefits come in other ways, too. “If employees don't feel safe when they're on the road,” Herman says, “there's more chance they won't be as productive as you'd like them to be. By contrast, if they know they're being looked after and that the company cares about their well-being while on the road, they'll be able to focus on the work they need to do on behalf of their company.”

The task of understanding how and when risks differ for male and female travelers and how to mitigate those risks falls on the shoulders not just of corporate travel managers, but also of meeting planners and employees themselves.

So what types of risks are at issue? Sophie Harwood, specialist in travel risk mitigation strategies for women and LGBT travelers for beTravelwise, creator of online and face-to-face courses to educate corporations and individuals about the risks travelers may face and how to avoid them, says petty crime is the primary risk for male and female

travelers, but perception changes the odds.

### Soft Target

“Women are often perceived as an easier target for petty crime and are therefore at more risk of incidents such as pick-pocketing, handbag theft or mobile-phone theft,” Harwood says. “Women are also more likely than men to be victims of sexual harassment or violent sexual crimes, and men may be more likely to be involved in more violent crimes such as GBH (grievous bodily harm) or carjacking. These more violent incidents are quite rare and infrequent compared to petty crime.”

In addition to theft and sexual assault, Herman says, “Women are also targets of harassment, cultural discrimination, local regulations and bias in business settings.”

Sometimes, Wilk points out, an asset also can be a detriment. “Women are great at multitasking, yet when traveling this can make them a ‘soft target.’ Being unaware and unfamiliar with surroundings, being distracted (or focused on a mobile device), burdened with multiple bags, not speaking the local language, not looking confident and not blending in can create situations where women are at higher risk,” she says.

Joan Morgan, director of analytic



“Taking a physical safety class could help allay the potential to panic. Keeping one's wits about them in the event of an emergency is key; training is always beneficial.”

**Joan Morgan**, Director of Analytic Personnel  
iJet, Annapolis, MD

personnel at iJET, which provides intelligence-driven, integrated risk-management solutions aimed at helping multinational organizations operate globally with confidence, also notes that petty crime is the greatest risk for travelers globally, but says, “Truly, the greatest risk begins before travel: being unprepared.”

According to Morgan, researching a destination before departure is the single most important thing a woman can do to mitigate risks. “Female travelers should know: What are the primary security risks in the country/city I will be visiting (petty crime, scams, kidnapping, sexual harassment/assault)? Are the police and security responders trustworthy? What are the health risks associated with the destination? What areas of the city should I avoid? Is my hotel in a safe location? Do I have safe transportation arranged in advance?”

### Conferences and Conventions

When it comes to conventions and

conferences, meeting planners have a role in mitigating safety risks for attendees. In addition to travel arrangements, there are issues related to the destination, convention facilities and host hotels that should be addressed on site visits and in hotel RFPs.

“Meeting planners should consider such things as where restrooms are located in relation to the conference facility, e.g. are they in a secluded area?” Herman says. “How frequently does security patrol the conference area, inside and out? If there's an offsite contracted meeting hotel, are there free shuttles to and from the conference/meeting location and how often/late do they run? If the conference is held in the same hotel as guest stays, are guest floors only accessible via room key?”

Wilk, like Morgan, emphasizes pre-trip education. “For any large event, pre-trip education is critical. Event organizers need to understand known risks in the destination area (areas to avoid, com-

## Be Prepared, Be Proactive

Women traveling solo have a range of actions they can take to help mitigate risks.

- Research your destination so you know what to expect in terms of culture, climate, customs, etc.
- Dress to fit in. Sometimes this may mean more conservatively but not necessarily. It also may mean dressing more casually, including avoiding designer labels and expensive fabrics in favor of more low-key outfits that won't attract attention.
- Learn some key local phrases, including please and thank you.
- Keep jewelry and other accessories, and often makeup, to a minimum
- Be discreet with high-value items such as laptops, smartphones, tablets, ebook readers, wallets and passports. Keep them in a zipped compartment of your bag and take them out only in safe, secure places such as hotels, banks, offices and restaurants — never on the street or in public transport terminals.
- Make it appear you're not traveling alone. At restaurants, ask for a table for two and put a coat over the other chair and leave the place setting. Make it appear that your companion is in the bathroom or you're waiting for them to arrive.
- In a taxi, make a call to someone “expecting you” at your destination, even if it's a fake call and nobody is there. Don't advertise that you're alone.
- Consider wearing a simple wedding ring if you don't already; it can help
- Keep sunglasses and/or a brimmed hat with you. If you're the target of unwanted stares or other attention, wearing sunglasses or a hat can help avoid unwanted eye contact, which in some destinations is seen as an invitation
- Carry a personal attack alarm with you, preferably in a visible place, which can deter potential assailants from targeting you in the first place. Activating an alarm has been shown to prevent 97 percent of potential attacks.

— CL

**“In certain countries...reporting sexual assault to the police can actually make you guilty of a crime yourself.”**



**Sophie Harwood**, Specialist in Travel Risk Mitigation  
beTravelwise, London, England

mon crimes, cultural sensitivities) and adequately communicate advice and guidance to ALL attendees.”

Wilk also advises bringing women into the safety and security conversations “so they can provide specific observations and ask tailored questions pertaining to women’s safety concerns.”

While being part of a large conference group may offer some risk mitigation itself — the “safety in numbers” theory — it also can be a problem. “Large crowds are a challenge,” Morgan says. “Maintaining situational awareness is essential.”

Harwood says the makeup of the group matters. “If those you are with are all known and trusted colleagues, there is an additional layer of safety as you are able to look out for each other. However,” she adds, “if they are unknown to you, then there is still risk in terms of safety; instances of petty crime are known to occur at conventions and conferences, especially as delegates often carry high-

worth items such as laptops and smart-phones. Sexual harassment or assault can still happen at such events.”

Herman suggests having a conference buddy. “While there is generally safety in numbers, incidents can occur anywhere — when you’re alone or when you’re one of hundreds, especially if you’re just an anonymous face in the crowd,” she says. “If you’re at a convention, have a buddy or two whom you hang with. Make sure you have awareness of where that person is, and vice versa, and check in with each other throughout the day when you’re not physically together.”

Sometimes, Wilk says, the characteristics of a convention and the activities around it can add to risks. “At a convention with a large number of attendees, and where socializing, alcohol and late nights may be involved, it’s even more prudent for women to be aware of their surroundings and take appropriate precautions.”

### Hotel Security

Nowhere is that more true than in hotels. “Top-tier managed travel programs will address both physical safety/security and fire safety/security in hotel RFPs,” Wilk says. “The current challenge with hotel security is that no industry-wide standard exists. Great progress has been made in a collaborative effort by the Overseas Advisory Council (OSAC) and the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA), yet there is still much work to accomplish. I am seeing a shift in the industry where companies are requiring more attention to this topic of hotel security, and hotel properties are adjusting their security offerings and standards accordingly.”

In the meantime, all parties should be aware of the options. Herman says hotel RFPs should address such things as:

- Are all parking areas patrolled?
- Is there video surveillance in all public areas?
- Do all the guest room entry doors have viewports?
- Is Identification or validation required for replacing a guest room key?
- Does your hotel have a secure floor only accessible via guest room key?
- Do health club facilities (pool/gym) require key access for entrance?

Morgan adds that security should be

visible at the hotel door and in the lobby; hallways, elevators and parking areas should be well lit; and there should be concierge services to arrange for safe transportation and dining for travelers who don’t know the area.

### Women-Only Floors

Some hotels offer women-only floors, which experts agree can provide added security — but don’t always. “Too often the execution needs improvement,” Herman says. “Rather than female-focused amenities or ‘touches,’ hotels should focus on the security aspect. Does that floor require key-access in the elevator? Is it always a female-only floor or just when the hotel isn’t at full capacity? Are doors, windows and locks strong? Perception is reality, and I’ve stayed in four- and five-star hotels where the doors seemed pretty flimsy.”

Harwood points out that some hotels, for example those in countries with high Muslim populations, have women-only floors not for additional security but for women who may be uncomfortable or unable to be in the presence of men alone. At other hotels the focus is security. “These floors may include enhanced safety and security features such as CCTV cameras, better locks on the doors and windows, and 24-hour security presence.” She advises travelers to check with individual hotels to learn details about women-only floors and what security measures are in place.

While Wilk believes the jury is still out on women-only floors, she says, “An increased industry-wide focus on hotel safety and security for all guests is encouraging.”

### Taking Responsibility

When it comes to personal safety, the onus is to a large extent on female travelers themselves. One option is to take a safety or martial arts type course — not necessarily because it will turn students into Bruce Lee equivalents.

“It probably won’t make them less vulnerable to being targeted in the first place,” Harwood says, “but it may give them more options for dealing with a potential assailant. It may make them

## Thwart Identity Theft

Because women are more often victims of purse snatching and drink spiking, they’re more vulnerable to identity theft. Generali Global Assistance (GGA), which provides comprehensive identity theft services, including a \$1 million policy for reimbursement of expenses through global insurance giant Generali Group, offers these tips:

- Carry purses that zip, and keep your wallet and phone well inside the bag.
- Don’t hang your bag on restaurant chairs; put it on your lap or between your feet.
- Carry credit cards, passport and plane tickets in a concealed money belt.
- Don’t accept drinks from anyone you don’t know and trust.
- Exercise caution when using public or unsecured internet connections; these can give hackers access to your personal information.
- Visit ATMs only when accompanied by a colleague. Look around; if anything makes you suspicious, leave. Shield the screen when entering your information, request a receipt, pocket the receipt and cash — don’t examine either in open view.

— CL

feel more confident in themselves, and this confidence may be transmitted in such a way as to make them appear less of an easy target.”

Morgan cautions that in most cases women should not fight back and should simply hand over their property. However, she adds, “Taking a physical safety class could help allay the potential to panic. Keeping one’s wits about them in the event of an emergency is key; training is always beneficial.”

Wilk believes in travel safety education and training. “I have seen the positive impact of travel safety training for our employees and have experienced it myself, most recently on a trip overseas when I was able to apply recent training to an unplanned situation that could have escalated quickly to be unsafe. Preparation pays for itself, and as my grandmother used to say, ‘An ounce of prevention equals a pound of cure.’”

**“If you’re at a convention, have a buddy or two whom you hang with...and check in with each other throughout the day.”**

**Krissy Herman**

Vice President, Program Management  
KesselRun Corporate Travel Solutions  
Atlanta, GA

### Training on Cultural Norms

In the end, it comes down being well prepared before ever leaving home. “Female travelers need to know what the cultural norms are, especially if traveling for business,” Morgan says. “Is it appropriate to shake a man’s hand? Should she look a business contact in the eye? What hand do you eat with? These are all things that should be researched ahead of time to make the most of the business relationship.”

Harwood would like to see companies provide guidance for employees on local customs and the business environment, such as in pre-travel training sessions. “For example, are there specific dress requirements: do knees, shoulders, arms or hair have to be covered? Are there restrictions around working or interacting with members of the opposite sex, such as shaking hands or being alone in a car? Who can the employee contact in case of emergency or incident? In certain countries, for example, reporting sexual assault to the police can actually make you guilty of a crime yourself.”

Wilk advises making sure mobile phone and data plans are activated for international coverage, and pre-programming company resources for security and emergency medical assistance into mobile devices. “Over 50 percent of travelers will experience some type of illness or injury on an international business trip,” she notes. “Knowing in advance who to call for help is critical.”

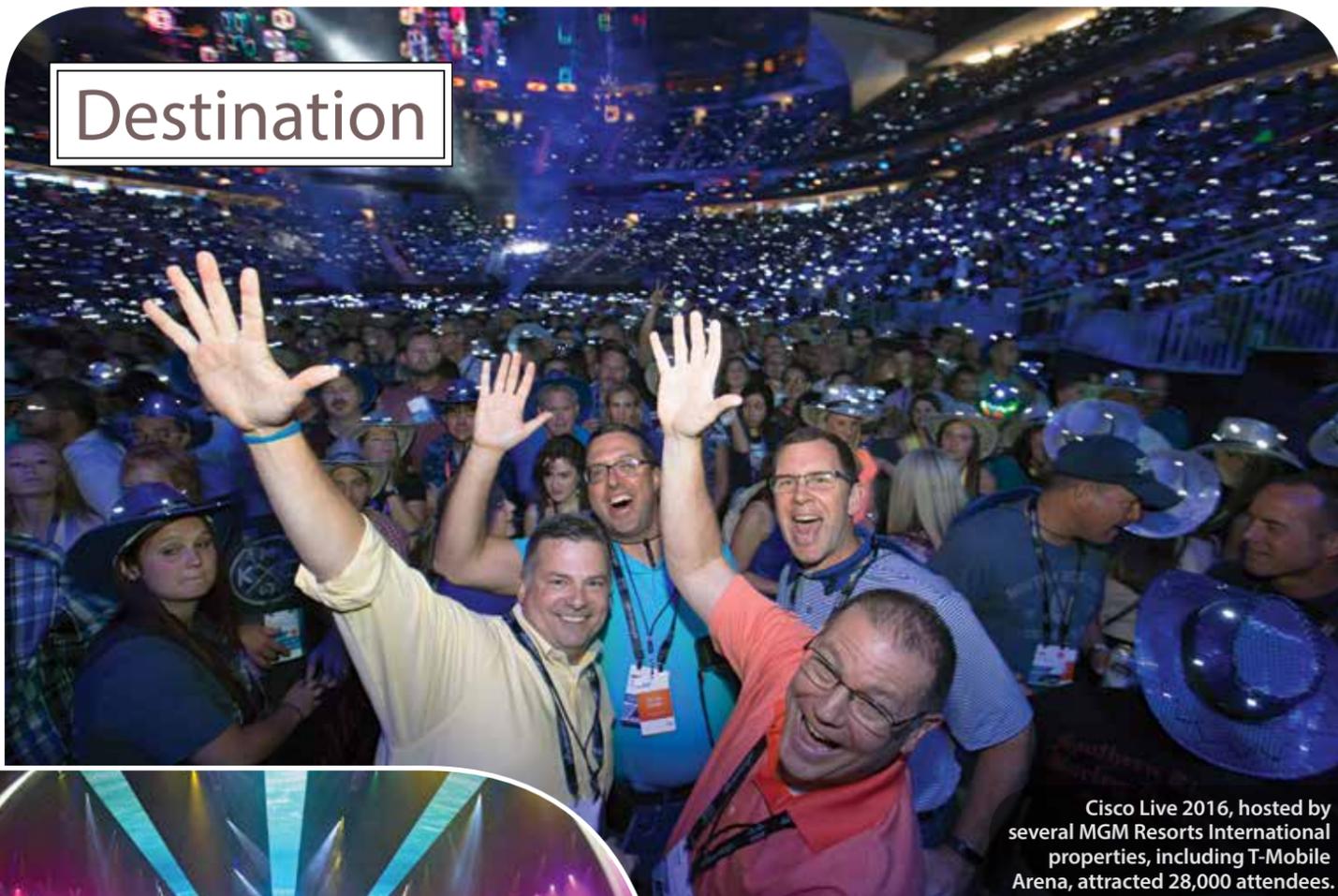
C&IT

## Be Hotel Savvy

Here’s a compilation of what security experts recommend for women travelers in hotels. While these strategies won’t completely eliminate risk, they help reduce the chances of it occurring:

- Stay in hotels with interior corridors and with 24-hour visible reception and security.
- Request a room on a middle floor (not the ground floor due to risk of intruders, not above the 5th floor for easier evacuation in the event of an emergency).
- Do not accept a room with a door to an adjoining room.
- If a front desk agent reads your room number out loud, ask for a new room.
- Make sure windows and sliding doors lock from the inside.
- Make sure the room door has a peep hole (in working condition), a dead bolt and security chain.
- If someone gets off the elevator with you on your floor, step to the side and let that person go ahead of you to their room.
- Travel with a rubber doorstop for added security.
- Leave out an item of men’s clothing, such as a dress shirt, to give the impression that there is more than one person in the room.
- Ask hotel personnel to assist you out to your car at night.
- Ask hotel personnel to make certain that the phone and lights work properly when you arrive in your room.
- Make sure the hotel does not allow individuals to loiter in the lobby.
- Always put your “Do Not Disturb” sign on your door, lock both locks when inside, and leave the TV on with volume up when leaving your room.
- If someone comes to the door unsolicited, including room service and housekeeping, call reception to check that they were actually sent to your room. Don’t answer the door for anyone you’re not expecting or who lacks appropriate credentials. — CL

Destination



Cisco Live 2016, hosted by several MGM Resorts International properties, including T-Mobile Arena, attracted 28,000 attendees. Credits: Cisco Live



# Las Vegas and Reno-Tahoe

## From the Entertainment Capital of the World to the Biggest Little City In the World, Nevada Has It All

By David Swanson

Catering to almost 22,000 meetings annually that draw anywhere from a few dozen attendees to the more than 165,000 that attend the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), it probably comes as no surprise that Las Vegas was recently named the World's Leading Meetings & Conference Destination for 2016 by the World Travel Awards — for the fourth year in a row.

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A banquet setup in Muse Hall at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas. The hotel boasts a total of 110,000 sf of meeting space.

What's more, for the third consecutive year, Las Vegas continued historic visitation growth, setting a new all-time record of 42.9 million visitors in 2016, surpassing 2015's record-setting 42.3 million.

"Las Vegas continues to see increased interest in the destination, and we are excited to announce that once again we are celebrating record visitation," said Rossi Ralenkotter, president/CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority in a statement. "Together with our resort partners, we look forward to aggressively marketing the destination around the world to continue attracting more visitors and break the record again this year."

In 2017, the LVCVA is projecting another record, surpassing 43 million visitors for the first time.

Home to three of the country's 10 largest convention venues, the city is built to host, offering almost 150,000 hotel rooms, and with 236,000 employees dedicated to the resort industry.

### The Entertainment Capital of the World

But it's also designed to entertain, and that's one big reason Cisco Live, an education and training event for IT, networking and communications professionals, hosts its annual event in Las Vegas.

"No one does 'over the top' like Vegas — and they do this all the time," says Heather Henderson Thomas, CSEP, senior manager, strategic operations for Cisco Live. While Las Vegas' vast hotel inventory at various price points and ease of air travel were important factors for the July 2016 event, Thomas notes that the city is home to an extensive theatrical labor pool, which helps make big show/keynote productions easier to manage.

"Nobody puts on a show quite like Vegas," explains Thomas. "There are limitless amounts of entertainment and resources in the area, and our partnership with MGM Resorts International allows us to showcase Cisco technology at

work — not only in the Mandalay Bay Convention Center but also at the MGM Grand as well as the T-Mobile Arena. Plus, MGM has their own in-house events company with a stellar inventory of props and services. An in-house program can be very self-contained and offers pretty much one-stop shopping for all event services."

Cisco Live has used Mandalay Bay Convention Center as its host venue since 2010. With 28,000 attending, the event uses six properties to house attendees — Mandalay Bay, Delano, Luxor, MGM Grand, Bellagio and the Cosmopolitan. But the venue is large enough to be able to handle a majority of the program. Thomas says this makes for a different attendee experience than in other cities where Cisco is required to create more of a campus atmosphere.

"The unique thing about Vegas is having large hotel blocks literally under the same roof as the convention space," explains Thomas. "The upside is ease of access for those staying at the host properties. There's hotel-caliber food and the efficiency of working with just one or two venues vs. multiple. The downside is you don't really get to take people outside or be a part of a city takeover. In Vegas, we do take over two mega properties, but not the entire city center as we might in other destinations.

"I love the solution-finding approach that our venue team brings to the table. As I often say to my own internal and supplier partner teams, 'there are no challenges in what we do, only opportunities to prove how darn good we are at our jobs.' I think our local Mandalay Bay and MGM team epitomizes that. We've had the same POC in the 11-plus years I've been on the project. That consistency, dedication to our collective success, and an all-around spirit of hospitality is what sets them apart. Pretty much anything is possible in Vegas — when you need VIP experiences, they are the pros."

Thomas cites two main hurdles she faces when setting her event in Las Vegas. "The main challenge we experience is in relation to fees. Vegas is a resort town and charges re-

**"The unique thing about Vegas is having large hotel blocks literally under the same roof as the convention space. The upside is ease of access for those staying at the host properties. There's hotel-caliber food and the efficiency of working with just one or two venues vs. multiple."**

**Heather Henderson Thomas, CSEP**  
Senior Manager, Strategic Operations  
Cisco Live, San Jose, CA



sort pricing. While it's inexpensive for the attendees to travel there, it's not the least expensive from a show management perspective due to the caliber of the food, exclusive providers in certain spaces for labor, exclusives on electrical, etc. It varies from venue to venue, but it's something to be aware of.

"Another challenge is creating a community feeling in such a large environment. Typically, Cisco Live takes over an urban setting in our other host cities. In Vegas, we are one of many things happening at any given time, and there are also multiple entertainment options to distract attendees. It's a balance.

"But overall Vegas is a preferred destination for our customers and that's what matters most," adds Thomas.

Banking on happy clients like Cisco, the city is laying the groundwork for continued tourism growth, particularly for

the meetings and convention industry. The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) says initial numbers show trade show attendance up 8.7 percent for 2016, and in October the Nevada legislature authorized a \$1.4 billion expansion and improvement project for the Las Vegas Convention Center. An early 2018 groundbreaking for the new hall is anticipated, to add 600,000 sf of additional exhibit space.

But this year will see plenty of action as well. In December, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas added almost 18,000 sf of meeting and convention space, bringing the venue to nearly 110,000 sf total. The fully functional Business Center has been relocated, and the Artist Ballroom has been expanded to 28,000 sf with ceiling heights up to 22 feet, allowing for eight separate configurations. The resort has maximized its flexibility for meeting planners to custom-

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ize events — from large, premium trade shows and corporate gatherings to intimate executive meetings and incentive experiences.

Hard Rock has just finished the first phase of a \$13 million refresh inside its 640-room Casino Tower. Standard rooms were first in line for the facelift, while 65 luxury suites will get their due during a second phase of the remodel, which includes sleek new furnishings, quartz countertops, oversized bathrooms with marble flooring, lighted makeup mirrors and USB ports throughout. Standard amenities include a mini bar, 55-inch high-def TVs and exclusive bath products. Each room is also equipped with French doors that open to pool or city views.

Also in December, W Hotels Worldwide launched its first flag in Sin City, taking one tower of the three-year-old SLS Las Vegas to create a hotel-within-a-hotel experience, the W Las Vegas. The brand's signature Living Room greets visitors with a nod to both the desert setting and the location's historic original incarnation as the Sahara Hotel and Casino, while the 289 guest rooms received a refresh by Philippe Starck in collaboration with designer Gensler.

Of note for meeting planners, in March 15,000 sf of new, state-of-the-art meeting and event space will open at the W Las Vegas, supplementing the 80,000 sf of flexible meeting space at the adjacent SLS Las Vegas. Guests at the W Las Vegas will enjoy full room charging privileges throughout the SLS property, which includes the casino, three nightclubs, and seven restaurants, including Bazaar Meat by José Andrés, an avant-garde interpretation of the classic Las Vegas steakhouse.

### The Complete Package

For Mindy Fielman, vice president of trade shows and special events for diamond brand Hearts on Fire, Las Vegas is "all about the energy. Today, there is not another destination that offers the 'complete' package we are looking for."

The package Fielman seeks includes an experienced staff, state-of-the-art meeting space, well-appointed guest rooms with current technology, amazing culinary options and a wide variety of entertainment options. And it was the Wynn/

Encore complex that has delivered the sophisticated environment Hearts on Fire University seeks for its biennial corporate educational conference that draws up to 800 attendees. The company used Wynn/Encore for its October 2015 event and is set to return in 2017.

"We chose them because of the facility, staff, previous experience and the on-property options," Fielman explains. "The ability to keep the group cohesive and on-property is a key factor for selecting a venue for this conference. Wynn/Encore offers a significant number of outstanding options for special events; the food (both banquet and restaurant) quality is top-notch. The property is elegant, well designed for good event flow."

She has high praise for the sales and conference service team. "They treat you and your business with the utmost importance, and each site, each event or meeting as if they are earning that business every time you're there. They are very collaborative."

Fielman also cites the longevity and expertise of the Wynn team. "So many of the staff have been with the hotel since the opening — many have been with Mr. Wynn since the beginning. This commitment, background, training, etc.



The opening general session of Hearts on Fire University's corporate educational conference was held in the Encore Ballroom.

Credit: Hearts on Fire / Media Direct Production



**THE EXPANSION IS COMPLETE.**

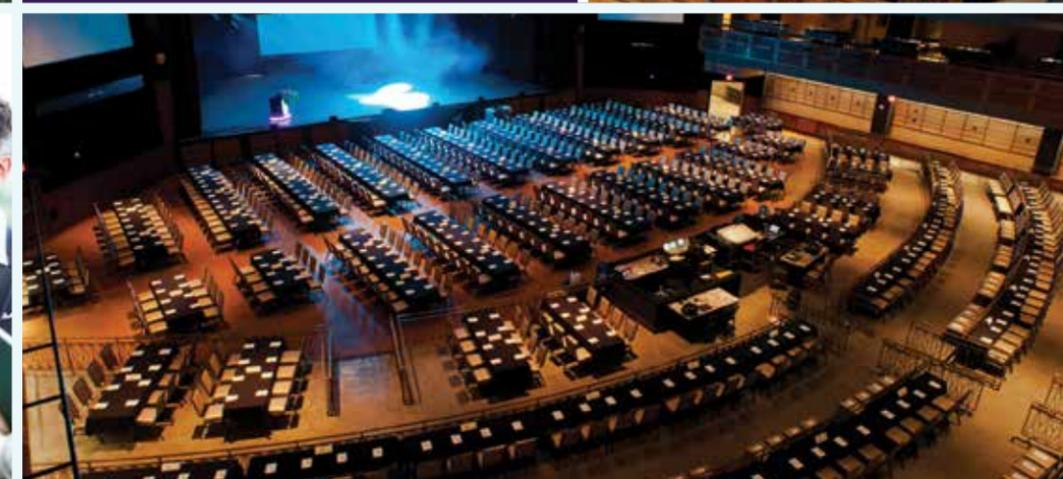
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makes a big difference in the level of service. All of the teams and departments receive the same customer service and property training, and it clearly shows in their work product — they are interconnected and work for your success as an event or meeting planner.”

She provided several examples of management’s attention to detail, including a food issue that was swiftly ironed out. “Our banquet captain noticed that our vegetarian meals looked like they were potentially wrong for an important group of clients from India. By the time I was informed, the issue was already brought to the attention of the catering manager and the chef. Not only was it resolved in a minimal amount of time, but the management team was made aware and they came to follow up.”

Fielman notes that, in Las Vegas, there is competition among high-end properties where she can base a sophisticated meeting.

“But as a meeting planner, the things I consider important and unique to Wynn Las Vegas are how attendees can access the meeting and conference space without meandering through the casino or long shopping promenades. The guest room elevators are closely located to conference access, and the conference space is contiguous and easy for attendees to navigate.

“I love that each meeting room at Wynn has a patio with natural light and fresh air — this is unique for Vegas,” Fielman continues. “The larger meeting rooms have butlers’ pantries to facilitate food service. And the catering menus are unique and fun; food quality and presentation are excellent. Their

menus offer quite a bit of flexibility as well as cost-effective pricing options such as Thai Thursdays or Falafel Fridays (certain menus come with a lower price on select days).”

### North by Northwest

Affectionately called “the biggest little city in the world,” Reno, Nevada, is better known today for the region encompassing the peerless, alpine Lake Tahoe, which straddles the border of Nevada and California. Combined, Reno and Tahoe offer a one-two punch for meetings aiming to incorporate spectacular natural surroundings as a backdrop. Within a one-hour drive of Reno you’ll find 18 ski resorts, fishing and boating, mountain biking and hiking trails, and the Truckee River runs right through downtown Reno.

Plus, with 20,000 hotel rooms competing for your business, meeting costs average 30 percent below that of comparable destinations (one key to savings: complimentary airport shuttles serve many downtown Reno properties).

These were among the reasons Anastasia DeFrancesco, global account executive for ConferenceDirect, set her sights on Reno for a 370-person gathering of Lush Fresh Handmade Cosmetics in May. The meeting will be held at Peppermill Resort Spa Casino, a 1,623-room hotel that celebrated its 45th anniversary in 2016 with a redesign of its Edge Nightclub; other areas of the hotel also received a facelift, including its convention space.

“Reno is not Las Vegas’ baby sister but its own big brother in Nevada, with lots of Western culture and gold rush history,” says DeFrancesco. “It has a western Nevada feel with unique

restaurants — we didn’t notice any chain restaurants, which we loved. Lush Fresh Handmade Cosmetics is looking for experiences and fun destinations that offer a great hotel but also activities for them to enjoy after each day of meetings. Plus, Lake Tahoe is 45 minutes away, offering a completely different landscape with even more culture and history. It’s a great option for attendee pre or post trips.”

Although DeFrancesco notes that airlift will be more challenging for those on the East Coast, this hassle is mitigated in part by the savings gained by holding the meeting during shoulder season.

“Guest room costs were very attractive. If you can go in an ‘off’ season, which is still warm, you will show tremendous cost savings on the guest room rate, which just allows more to be spent on experiences and food and beverage.”

Reno’s 1,635-room Peppermill Resort Spa Casino has 100,000 sf of meeting space and 36 meeting rooms, including a 62,000-sf ballroom and this executive boardroom.

Credits: Peppermill Resort Spa Casino



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Credits: Wynn/Encore

The Wynn/Encore complex offers 260,000 sf of meeting and event space. (Right) Encore's inviting European pool area.

Some groups head directly to Lake Tahoe, where additional meeting options are found, such as the 422-room Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe Resort, Spa and Casino. Here, the American Boiler Manufacturer's Association (ABMA) held their annual meeting for 200 last June. It was a return visit for the group, which held a meeting here in 2012.

"We quickly knew we needed to rebook," says Cheryl Jamall, director of meetings for the group. "Reno-Tahoe is one of the most beautiful places you will ever see. Our attendees are world travelers, and they are still talking about it. It's an easy drive from the airport up to the lake and the scenic views will take your breath away."

Jamall says the Hyatt Regency location — on the lake, with its own beach — is a big part of the attraction, but so is the creativity and teamwork of the staff at the resort. "The convention service staff felt like a part of the ABMA staff, providing flawless execution, and the AV went off without a hitch," she adds. The conference center encompasses 65,000 sf of meeting space, almost a third of which is indoors, and the resort has a 55-foot catamaran, the Sierra Cloud — perfect for smaller groups.

"The food was just great every day, and they provided us real variety, even in the catered menus," she adds. "On very short notice, the chef worked with us to design a variety of meal options for our vegan and gluten-free attendees who were last-minute registrants. And the pastry chef and their team did a bang-up job with our annual Dessert Social — so much so that I am full just thinking about it!"

Jamall provided a couple of minor cautions about planning a meeting at Lake Tahoe, starting with the Tahoe's 6,224-foot elevation ("water is your best friend" for conquering the altitude). She also noted that there was no FedEx/Kinko's at Tahoe, but Reno was just a 40-minute drive away. Nonetheless, Jamall provided perhaps the best kind of endorsement a meeting planner could ever share.



"If your attendees love being outdoors, Tahoe is the place for you. I'm thinking about vacationing here next summer so that I can fully enjoy it without working."

### New and Noteworthy Las Vegas

Wynn Las Vegas announced plans to equip all 4,748 hotel rooms with Echo, Amazon's hands-free, voice-controlled speaker. The resort says installation of the technology, which began with suites in December, is a worldwide industry first, allowing guests to control various hotel room features with a series of voice commands via Alexa, the brain behind Echo. Alexa will be fully operational in all guest rooms by summer 2017, and will initially control room lights, room temperature, drapery and the television. Wynn expects to add features such as personal assistant functions in the future.

Rí Rá Las Vegas, the Irish pub inside The Shoppes at Mandalay Place, has unveiled The Bordello, a new event space located at the back of the pub behind a secluded hallway. The space expands Rí Rá's overall size to 11,000 sf and provides guests with a new option for private parties and events. The Bordello is suitably decorated with plush velvet curtains, chandeliers, Victorian red and gold interiors, lounge-style furniture and dim lighting. The room spans more than 1,400

**"Reno is not Las Vegas' baby sister but its own big brother in Nevada, with lots of Western culture and gold rush history. ...Plus, Lake Tahoe is 45 minutes away, offering a completely different landscape with even more culture and history."**

**Anastasia DeFrancesco**, Global Account Executive  
ConferenceDirect  
Whitby, ON



sf, allowing seating for up to 64 guests dining or up to 100 reception-style, and catering options such as plated dinners, buffets and cocktail receptions are available.

While Las Vegas does its best to keep things fresh, the city is a return destination for many meeting attendees. Given the abundance of culinary hot spots, why not spice things up with a progressive dinner by Lip Smacking Foodie Tours? Groups of up to 100 are escorted on a custom tour to visit five of the top restaurants along The Strip or downtown. Three or four signature dishes are offered at each, leavened by a guided sightseeing tour on foot. It's an evening away from the usual distractions of a convention setting, and the mix-and-mingle environment helps foster multiple interactions. Rates start at \$125 per person; more information: [www.vegasfoodietour.com](http://www.vegasfoodietour.com).

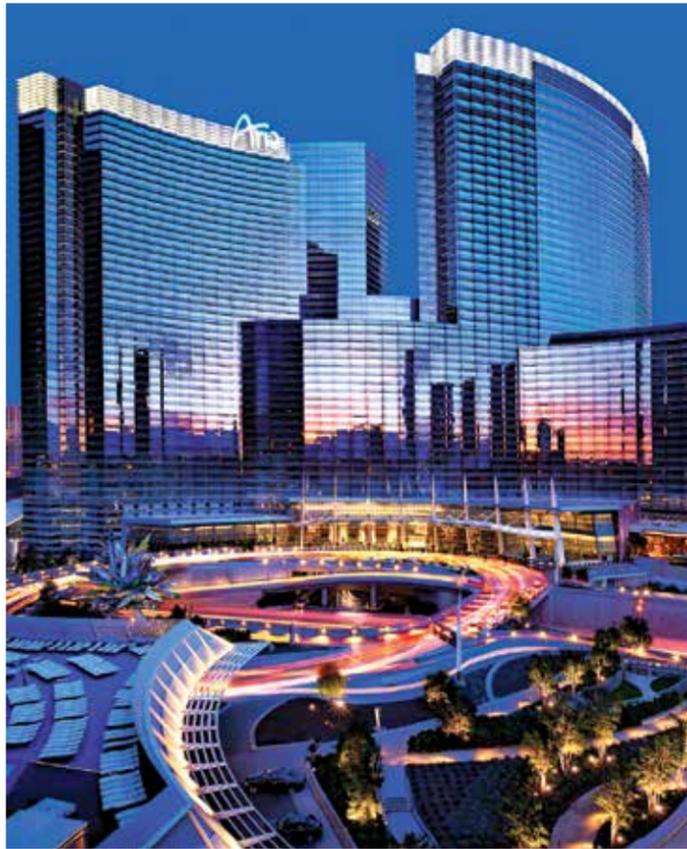
Aria Resort & Casino is in the midst of a major expansion of its LEED Gold-certified convention center. The \$154 million project will deliver an additional 200,000 sf of technologically advanced, flexible meeting space across four stories, highlighted by indoor/open-air spaces and a glass-enclosed venue with views of The Park and the new T-Mobile Arena. With the completion of the expansion, Aria will feature more than 500,000 sf of meeting space. Construction began in May 2016 with anticipated completion in February 2018. The resort also opened Burger Lounge, an eco-conscious burger chain from Southern California offering an elevated, fast-casual concept to the resort's culinary portfolio. Jewel Nightclub, a 24,000-sf nightlife destination by global hospitality company Hakkasan Group, opened in May. The nightclub merges the intimate, exclusive atmo-

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Credit: Aria Resort & Casino

Aria Resort & Casino is in the midst of a major expansion of its LEED Gold-certified convention center.

sphere of the physical environment with state-of-the-art LED technology to deliver an immersive, dynamic and celebratory experience.

Topgolf International Inc. opened its state-of-the-art flagship location in May at MGM Grand on the Las Vegas Strip. Topgolf offering competitive golfing games for all ages and skill levels and advanced technology to track the accuracy and distance of players' shots. The four-level, 105,000-sf Topgolf Las Vegas sits on eight acres and overlooks a 215-yard outfield.

Masaharu Morimoto, renowned Japanese chef and star of Food Network's "Iron Chef America," recently opened his contemporary Japanese restaurant at MGM Grand in fall 2016. Morimoto Las Vegas is only the second Morimoto in the world to offer Teppanyaki style dining (also known as Hibachi), a style of Japanese cuisine where guests are able to experience the chef create a tantalizing meal before their eyes on a hot iron plate.

Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino completed in April the final phase of its resort-wide remodel of more than 3,000 guest rooms and suites. Created by the MGM Resorts International Design Group, the redesigned rooms and suites feature refreshing color palettes and modern designs in three distinct collections: the Resort Collection, the Suite Collection and the Luxury Collection. This marks the conclusion of an approximately \$100 million remodel that began in 2015.

Mandalay Bay last January expanded its convention cen-

ter with the addition of more than 350,000 sf of exhibit space to the existing 1.7 million sf of space.

The Venetian, The Palazzo and Sands Expo, in partnership with Zappos, debuted a first-of-its-kind coworking space in the heart of The Venetian/The Palazzo Congress Center. The 1,170-sf pop-up lounge will offer space to recharge, huddle areas for collaboration and a conference room for small meetings. The space is enclosed for noise management, but also is transparent to invite guests to come inside and take advantage of the amenities. Amenities in the pop-up lounge include Wi-Fi, charging stations, four private phone rooms and a private conference room that seats six.

Sir Rod Stewart's hit Las Vegas residency at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, added seven more performances scheduled March 15 through April 1, 2017 due to popular demand. Since its debut in 2011, "Rod Stewart: The Hits" has been experienced by a half million fans and continues to be one of the best reviewed and must-see shows on the Las Vegas Strip.

Speedvegas is the new 100-acre motorsports complex in Las Vegas. Guests at Speedvegas experience the world's most sought-after muscle cars and exotic supercars from Porsche, Ferrari, Lamborghini, Audi, Corvette and more. The \$30 million Speedvegas experience features an impressive 1.5 mile (2.4 km) Formula One-inspired racetrack comparable to top circuits in the world and includes 12 sweeping turns, 20-degree banked turns, 60 feet of total elevation change and a half-mile straightaway. In addition, the 20,000-sf, two-story welcome center features indoor and outdoor observation decks, food and beverage selections at a café, meetings and event space, and much more.

The Mob Museum, The National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement, will mark its fifth anniversary with a series of celebratory events in February. The Mob Museum welcomed more than 1.3 million visitors from all 50 states and 36 countries, injected more than \$20.5 million annually into the downtown economy — all while accumulating numerous awards and accolades. The museum will unveil a new, permanent St. Valentine's Day massacre exhibit that includes bullets removed from the bodies of the seven victims, bullet fragments and cartridge cases retrieved from the garage floor as well as test bullets fired from the Tommy guns, which later proved to have been used in the massacre. In addition, the display features original coroner's documents concerning the victims and reports prepared by Dr. Calvin Goddard, a forensic scientist specializing in ballistics, who used pioneering ballistics testing techniques to identify the weapons used in the crime.

MEET Las Vegas, a one-of-a-kind venue for hosting dynamic events, features easy plug-and-work connectivity, color-changing lighting systems and gigabit-speed network capability with wireless connectivity for more than 2,000 devices, based on configuration. The unique venue is a 40,000-sf, three-story event and exhibition space in the



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Credit: Caesars Palace

Caesars Palace offers 3,960 guest rooms and 300,000 sf of meeting and event space.

heart of historic downtown Las Vegas, and is an ideal space for fully customized branding opportunities.

The technology includes AV TeleData tieline connectivity plates every 10 feet on the first floor and multiple plates in every other meeting space as well as universal plug-and-work capability, from computer to iPods to high-definition media to DVD and beyond. Fiber optics technology also is wired into the building and between floors, and customizable digital signage opportunities are available throughout the interior space. Custom lighting and much more is available.

### New and Noteworthy in Reno-Tahoe

In Reno, the former Siena Hotel is being transformed into the 214-room Renaissance Reno Hotel, scheduled to open March 2017. Renaissance Reno will be the first non-gaming, branded full-service luxury hotel in Reno's history. Following an extensive renovation inside and out, the hotel will be "classically styled with touches of whimsy in warm, vibrant colors," and will feature upscale restaurants showcasing



7,000-sf indoor bouldering park that is home to the world's tallest exterior climbing wall.

Impact Experiences are the latest addition to the meeting agenda at The Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe. Designed as a way for groups to give back to the local community, the activities are social and environmental in nature — ideal for groups that want to support efforts in child well-being or environmental responsibility. Among the on-property activities that can be incorporated during lunch breaks or receptions are partnering with the resort's culinary team to prepare a regional dish for a local hunger relief organization, or assembling school supplies in backpacks for donation to students threatened by poverty. Additionally, offsite Signature Impact Experiences are available for outdoor teambuilding, such as assisting in the reforestation of Lake Tahoe's native sugar pine trees or helping to preserve the lake's famed deep blue waters through invasive-species monitoring and trail restorations, and water-quality improvements. **C&IT**



Credits: MEET Las Vegas

MEET Las Vegas is a 40,000-sf event venue in the heart of historic downtown Las Vegas.

local flavors. Set alongside the Truckee River, the Renaissance Reno will offer 13,198 sf of event space, composed of eight rooms (the largest will have a capacity of 650). A full-service spa, fitness center and pool will round out the facilities, targeting both business and leisure guests.

Following an expansion which doubled its room inventory, Reno's Whitney Peak Hotel has now doubled its meeting space. The renovation project, which encompasses the entire third floor of the hotel, created nearly 12,000 sf of new event and meeting space, with air walls to subdivide the space into eight separate areas, ranging from 350 sf to a ballroom that is just under 5,000 sf. Whitney Peak also features Cargo Concert Hall, a state-of-the-art live music venue; and BaseCamp, a



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Sonesta Fort Lauderdale Beach has named **Russell Jenkins** as senior sales manager. He was the senior sales manager for Hilton Fort Lauderdale Beach.

Grand Hyatt New York has named **Joe Gaeta** as director of sales and marketing. A 25-year hospitality industry veteran, he was most recently director of sales and marketing at The InterContinental New York Barclay Hotel.

**SiuYin Ko** was appointed corporate director of sales for Rosewood Hotels & Resorts' North American regional sales

organization. She formerly served as regional director of sales for Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts.

**Jason Kycek** was named vice president of sales and marketing for Casa de Campo Resort & Villas in La Romana, Dominican Republic. He was vice president of sales and marketing for the Edgewater Hotel Spa in Madison, Wisconsin.

The Henderson, A Salamander Beach & Spa Resort has named **Gary Griggs** as director of sales and marketing; **Greg Whitacre** as director of groups sales;

and **Kelly M. Galloway** and **Cathy Jones** as senior sales managers. Griggs was multi-property director of sales and marketing for Remington Hotels; Whitacre was area vice president of sales for Marriott International Inc.; Galloway was director of sales for St. Joe Club & Resorts; and Jones was national sales manager for Renaissance World Golf Village in St. Augustine, Florida.

**Georg Garnitschnig** was named vice president of sales and marketing for Trump National Doral. He was regional director of sales and marketing for Fairmont Hotels & Resorts. **C&IT**

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