

Authentic Local Experiences
PAGE 18

Meeting Tech Update
PAGE 30

Negotiating Critical Clauses
PAGE 42

New Orleans: Let the Good Times Roll
PAGE 48

Orlando: No. 1 Through Thick & Thin
PAGE 54

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THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING PLANNERS

Hilton Anatole Sales Coordinator Amber Evetts helps groups participate in the Meet With Purpose Puppies & Ice Cream meeting break.

Wellness Meetings

Healthy Strategies to Boost Attendee Engagement and Productivity
PAGE 36

Planning for Unexpected Weather Events

Stories From the Field
PAGE 24

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Credit: Hilton

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In This Issue

VOLUME 35 NO. 10

OCTOBER 2017

FEATURES

- 18 **Going Local, Staying Authentic**
How CVBs Set Their Destinations Apart
By Christine Loomis
- 24 **Planning for Unexpected Weather Events**
Stories From the Field and Lessons Learned
By Christine Loomis
- 30 **Meeting Tech Update**
Digital Innovations That Maximize ROI
and the Attendee Experience
By Maura Keller
- 36 **Bring Wellness to the Table**
Healthy, Happy Attendees Are More Engaged and Productive
By Shelley Seale
- 42 **Critical Clauses**
Force Majeure, as Recent Natural Disasters Have
Shown, Is Just One of Many Sticky Issues Planners
Face in Today's Contract Negotiation
By Patrick Simms

DESTINATIONS

- 48 **New Orleans**
Let the Good Times Roll — and Get Business Done
By John Buchanan
- 54 **Orlando**
The No. 1 Meetings Destination — Through Thick and Thin
By David Swanson

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 **Publisher's Message**
- 6 **News & Notes**
- 9 **Snapshots**
- 10 **Perspective**
The Costs and Benefits of
Managing Small Meetings
By GBTA Meetings
Committee
- 14 **Perspective**
How Incentive Travel
Motivates Millennials
By Steve Damerow
- 66 **People on
the Move**



Credit: Bo Brooks

Visit Baltimore can arrange themed crab feasts for groups meeting in this city on the Chesapeake Bay. **PAGE 18**



Flooding of meeting facilities is one side effect when unplanned weather events play havoc with event plans. **PAGE 24**



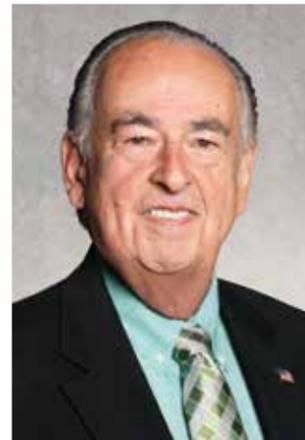
Credit: Visit Orlando

Microsoft Ignite successfully hosted 26,000 attendees in Orlando just two weeks after Hurricane Irma blew through. **PAGE 54**

Publisher's Message

Wellness and Weathering the Storm

Planning for unexpected weather events is a serious topic that we cover in depth in this issue, with important lessons to learn from the planners and experts who've been there and done that. Considering the monster storms that Texas, Florida and the Caribbean experienced in the past couple of months — and are still recovering from — it's no wonder that weather disruptions and attendee safety are top-of-mind.



But for our cover this month, we decided that we could all use a break from the bad news. And what better way to do that than to show the pure joy of making friends with an irresistibly cuddly canine? Hilton's Puppies & Ice Cream group activity — a "Wow Certified" event within Hilton's Meet With Purpose program — is just one way planners can help attendees decompress and de-stress. Scheduling healthful meals, yoga sessions and maybe even a puppy break not only brings a smile to the face but a boost to the brain through an improved sense of well-being that ultimately leads to greater productivity.

Results from a newly released IACC survey of its member venues reveals that nutrition and well-being are high priorities for meeting attendees, who are asking for menus that feature more "brain foods" such as quinoa, blueberries, spinach, kale and the like. The IACC venues surveyed also noted a demand for redesigned prefunction and public spaces conducive to attendee interaction and networking, as well as private spaces for quiet. The mind-body connection is powerful, and our feature "Bring Wellness to the Table" on page 36 offers many ways planners can support the physical and emotional well-being of attendees. It's needed advice, as Incentive Research Foundation's Wellness in Meetings and Incentive Travel Study shows: "Although 97 percent of incentive-house planners agree they are personally enthusiastic about wellness and almost three-quarters agree it's a critical focus of their clients, less than 50 percent connect their corporate wellness to meeting strategy."

Microsoft Ignite Event Director Vivian Eickhoff, CMM, sure could have used some weather-stress relief recently. Hurricane Irma landed in Orlando just two weeks before the 26,000-attendee Microsoft Ignite annual event was scheduled to begin at the Orange County Convention Center. Turn to page 54 and read how Vivian and her team managed to hold things together. "It was tense watching all the media reports, worrying about the wonderful people that we work with, along with the residents," she says. But like most intrepid meeting professionals, she weathered the storm just fine.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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News & Notes

Anaheim Convention Center Officially Opens ACC North Building



The recently completed ACC North.

ANAHEIM, CA — The Anaheim Convention Center (ACC) has unveiled the largest and most significant expansion in nearly two decades — ACC North. Its seventh expansion adds 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space, allowing for a variety of event uses under one roof in one of the nation's premier destinations.

The new building cements the Anaheim Convention Center as the largest convention center on the West Coast. The latest expansion enlarges the entire Anaheim Convention Center to 1.8 million sf, with more than 1 million sf of exhibit space. Meetings and events utilizing ACC North will yield approximately 1 million room nights for the destination, welcoming 1.1 million attendees (numbers are estimated) to Anaheim and Orange County. www.visitanaheim.org

Construction Begins on Hyatt Regency Portland



Rendering of the Hyatt Regency Portland at the Oregon Convention Center.

PORTLAND, OR — Portland dignitaries and officials gathered in August to kick off construction of the new, \$224 million Hyatt Regency Portland at the Oregon Convention Center. Slated to open in winter 2019, the 600-room hotel is expected to draw dozens of large events and conventions annually. Located north of the existing Oregon Convention Center, the 14-story property will include 32,000 sf of meeting venues, as well as a lobby, bar, restaurant, gym and gathering areas for guests.

According to a Metro survey, 79 percent of national meeting planners said they were more likely to book events at the Oregon Convention Center if there was an amenity-rich hotel next door. www.hyattregency.com

Meetings Industry Trends to Watch in 2018

AMSTERDAM — The overall cost per attendee per day for meetings and events around the globe increased in 2017 and is expected to continue rising next year, according to the 2018 Meetings and Events Future Trends report recently released by CWT Meetings & Events. The report shows the regional differences and cost projections as well as the latest industry trends and top destinations.

"Costs are rising in key M&E markets, globally," said Cindy Fisher, senior vice president and global head, CWT M&E. "With a 3.7 percent increase in hotels and 3.5 percent rise in airfares projected for the coming year, that trend is likely to continue."

This will have a significant impact on some of the top global destinations including London, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Also, certain popular venues in these cities may see dropoffs next year.

North America has seen the cost per attendee per day increase by 3 percent in 2017 with new supply growth slightly exceeding demand. In the U.S., hotel and air travel prices are both expected to increase by 2.5 percent in 2018, with expectations that new supply growth and increasing demand will be about evenly matched.

Hotel prices are expected to increase in 2018. On top of that, domestic leisure travel has been increasing, meaning some hotels and resorts may limit group blocks at peak times.

According to CWT booking data, the top 10 destinations for meetings & events in North America in 2017 are New York, Toronto, Cupertino/San Jose, Chicago, Indianapolis, San Francisco, Austin, Houston, Orlando, Las Vegas.

www.cwt-meetings-events.com

IRF 2018 Outlook Study: Industry Upbeat on Economy

WASHINGTON, DC — The Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) has released the IRF 2018 Outlook Study, an analysis of how incentive, rewards and recognition programs are being designed and budgeted for 2018. Both the incentive travel and rewards segments reported optimism for the economy and its impact on the industry.

Executed in the summer of 2017, nearly 230 industry representatives including suppliers, corporate end users and incentive-house representatives gave their feedback on the outlook for U.S. incentive travel and reward programs in 2018.

Insights from the IRF 2018 Outlook Study include:

- The incentive travel industry's Net Optimism Score for the economy is up from 26 percent in the fall of 2016 to 44 percent in the summer of 2017.
- Incentive travel budgets are up with an average per-person spend of \$3,915, an increase of 4 percent over last year.
- For gift card and merchandise programs, those with budgets from \$251 to \$5,000 per person have risen to 57 percent.
- The top five incentive travel destinations for respondents were the continental United States, Hawaii, the Caribbean, Mexico and Europe.
- Almost a third of respondents indicated an increase in individual travel packages (31 percent) and experiential rewards (37 percent).
- Regulations continue to be difficult to navigate with almost 75 percent of respondents saying it is difficult to stay informed about the federal, state and local regulations impacting programs. www.theirf.org

Tips & Trends

Q&A With Mark Cooper, CEO, IACC

What in your opinion are the biggest areas of change conference meeting planners and the meetings industry will face in 2018?

In my view, a big change ahead for all will be the further personalization of dining for delegates and the increasing nutrition considerations. Venues will need to be clearer with food labeling; and planners investing more time in getting this information and ensuring their delegates culinary needs are catered for. I believe gluten free will be like vegetarian options, where gluten-free food is available without special provision. *[For more, see page 8.]*

What are the most timely and relevant issues conference meeting planners are most concerned about?

Meeting planners know that there is increasing pressure to bring in new technologies that foster great collaboration, but with the pace of change, they can be uncertain which technologies they should introduce and what impact it will have on the delegate experience. There is a lot of new tech out there and not all of it will be making a positive difference. It is easy to get caught up in the momentum.

How is IACC helping planners deal with these challenges?

Our annual IACC Meeting Room of the Future survey and report was introduced just for this reason. In fact, to help both venue operators and planners understand the trends and changes affecting the industry and to help them choose what is relevant and what is not. We feel it is IACC's role to help everyone make the right changes, and not changes at the expense of the delegates' enjoyment in attending a meeting, conference or training course.

How has technology most changed conference center meetings?

Over the last two years it's been made clear through the response to the Meeting Rooms of the Future survey that internet capability is of growing importance for meeting organizers, 58 percent of whom said they wouldn't consider a venue that did not guarantee Wi-Fi capacity for their event. So it is important that venues not only provide detailed information on internet bandwidth, but also the network's infrastructure, and therefore its ability to sustain internet usage for large groups across a range of technologies.

What encouraging signs do you see ahead for the U.S. and the global conference meetings industry?

I think that the important investment in venue facilities that has been taking place globally over the last five years will hopefully stand us in good stead if we see any slowing down of the economy.

Where do you envision IACC in the next 10 years?

Hopefully doing what we have done for the past 36 years as well as growing our membership of quality conference and meeting venues in Central and South America.

Mark Cooper is the Chief Executive Officer of IACC. He was appointed into this newly created global role in October 2012. www.iacconline.org



MARK COOPER

News & Notes

Orlando's Rosen Centre to Renovate Guest Rooms

ORLANDO, FL — Rosen Centre in Orlando, Florida, recently announced an ultramodern renovation of all guest rooms. Slated for completion by the end of this year, the guest room updates include sleek and polished new furnishings, a calming color palette and tech-friendly integrations to keep business travelers and families rested and recharged. With renovations already underway, Rosen Centre's spacious guest rooms are being updated to reflect spa-like calm and serenity. The walls, painted a deep rich teal, provide a clean backdrop to horizontal-panel headboards, which feature a gray-blue ombre finish. An expansive dresser desk offers plenty of room to spread out and use with multiple laptops, electronic devices and more.

New, easy-to-access technological integrations include a multi-outlet connectivity bar below a new wall-mounted 50-inch flat-screen TV. The connectivity bar also contains one ethernet and two USB ports. Additional outlets and USB ports are located on the desk lamps, headboard panels and nightstand lamps. In addition to the renovation, Rosen Centre has upgraded 1,024 guest rooms to double-queens and has increased king guest rooms by 24. www.rosencentre.com



The Silver Muse, sister ship to the new Silver Moon.

MONTE CARLO — Silversea Cruises and Fincantieri have announced the signing of a contract worth approximately 310 million euros for the construction of a new ultra-luxury cruise ship. The ship is due to join the Silversea fleet in 2020.

The new ship, tentatively named Silver Moon, will be the sister ship of Silver Muse, which was delivered in April 2017 at the Fincantieri shipyard in Sestri Ponente (Genoa). At 40,700 gross tons and with a capacity to accommodate 596 passengers on-board, Silver Moon will maintain the small-ship intimacy and spacious all-suite accommodation which is the hallmark of the Silversea experience.

Among the highlights of the new ship, the "Green Star 3 Design" will be a standout feature. It is assigned to ships that are designed, built and equipped to prevent air and water pollution. Furthermore, the "COMF-NOISE A PAX" and "COMF-NOISE B CREW" are assigned on the basis of the noise levels measured on the ship. Results have shown that new-builds assigned these standards offer the very best levels of comfort to guests on board. www.silversea.com

IACC Survey Reveals Growing Priority of Wellness at Meetings

CHICAGO, IL — IACC's newly released "Trends in Nutrition & Delegate Wellbeing" survey report reveals that nutrition and well-being are high priorities for delegates, and food that improves mental clarity and concentration levels is growing in popularity. The survey asked venue respondents a series of questions regarding health choices available to delegates through menus and types of event spaces.

According to the report, venues are receiving more requests for foods that go beyond nutritional density. Delegates are demanding foods that deliver superior well-being benefits through increased nutrient or mineral content. Some 38 percent of venues said they already offer specific "brain foods" such as walnuts, avocado, quinoa, blueberries, spinach and kale on their menus. "Earlier this year, our Meeting Room of the Future research revealed that brain food is important to delegates," said IACC CEO Mark Cooper. "Now, through this new research report on delegate nutrition and well-being, we see the opportunity to help with delegate alertness and attention is being taken seriously by an increasing number of venues."

Additionally, 88 percent of respondents said they have made changes to their break menus based on health and wellness trends or feedback from clients. And when asked which food requests they receive more now than two years ago, 100 percent of respondents answered with gluten-free. Many commented that gluten-free has joined vegetarian as a standard menu choice.

The survey considered event spaces in relation to delegate health. All of the responders, who are operators of IACC venues, confirmed space outside the rooms is being taken into consideration for networking and relationship-building opportunities that are critical to event success. The full report is available at iacconline.worldsecuresystems.com/iacc-nutrition-trends

Snapshots



Credits: 1-6 SITE, 7 PATA, 8 WDW Swan and Dolphin, 9 Greater Miami CVB

1-6 Despite issues caused by hurricanes Harvey and Irma, an esteemed group of nearly 250 incentive buyers and industry sponsors attended SITE Classic September 13-16 at the Hilton Los Cabos Beach & Golf Resort in Los Cabos, Mexico, hosted by the SITE Foundation. **1 & 4** Attendees learned about some of the activities the region offers, including golf and a farm-to-table experience at Flora Farm. **2** Attendees donated 1,500 backpacks and supplies to a local school. **3** SITE Classic first-timers. **5** Keynote speaker Jonathan Grella, EVP public affairs, U.S. Travel Association. **6** More than \$130,000 was raised for industry research and education during the live auction held at Grand Velas Los Cabos. **7** PATA Travel Mart, hosted by the Macao Government Tourism Office, attracted 1,131 delegates from 66 global destinations. **8** (L to r) Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort Assistant Director of F&B Luciano Sperduto, General Manager Fred Sawyers and Director of F&B Tony Porcellini celebrate the completion of the largest renovation in the Orlando resort's history. **9** Communication Network attendees take a break from their annual meeting at Fontainebleau Miami Beach to volunteer at ZooMiami. The group helped clean up storm debris following Hurricane Irma. ZooMiami's Ron Magill gives a thumbs-up.

By GBTA Meetings Committee

The Costs and Benefits of Managing Small Meetings

Is it worth the effort and cost to manage small meetings? The answer, as in most things, is “It depends.” It depends on how you define small meetings, how much effort you expend in their management, what you mean by “manage,” what your tolerance for risk is, how you define “risk,” what industry vertical you are in, which countries the small meetings take place in, whether they are simple or complex, how much you spend on them, what the return on investment will be, who the attendees are, and on and on, ad infinitum.

But still, it is an important question. According to

ner meeting where government officials are in attendance, in a country with a very high Corruption Perception Index. This, too, is a complex meeting, given the strictures around the giving of anything of value to any foreign official, as laid out in the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA).

These might be small meetings, but they are not simple meetings and are potentially high risk. Factors that make small meetings complex include brand exposure (optics of a meeting), financial risk (a large attrition penalty), duty-of-care risks (a teambuilding exercise that includes jumping out of a plane), industry-specific regulatory risks (Sun-

“Ultimately, **not managing** even the **smallest** of meetings can lead to an increased organizational **risk profile**.”

Groupize, a small meeting technology provider, in their e-book entitled “Small Meetings are the Wild Wild West,” 66 percent of all meetings in the United States have fewer than 50 attendees, and by most measures would be considered small meetings. This represents \$124B in annual spend, at first glance a worthy target for management. In the following sections we will demystify small meetings and provide some guidance on whether they are worth the time and effort to manage.

Defining Small Meetings

There are a variety of ways to define small meetings, including size (e.g., 10–25 attendees), spend (e.g., under \$25K), meeting type (e.g., internal meetings), and so on. But this approach can lead to exactly the kinds of risks that meetings management programs are meant to guard against. The following two examples illustrate this nicely: 1) A small meeting of 12 senior executive attendees coming together to discuss the merger of their respective companies. This might be a small meeting, but it is also a very complex meeting, given the level of the attendees, their security concerns and the need for absolute privacy; 2) A small din-

shine Act or FINRA) and anti-bribery laws (FCPA and the UK Bribery Act). So, instead of addressing small meetings, this article will focus on simple meetings, with the understanding that complex meetings, even though small, should be managed through the regular channels of a meetings management program.

Return on Investment Considerations

Determining the return on investment for small meetings requires examining the same three aspects as we would for larger (strategic) meetings, i.e., cost, risk management and end-user experience. In other words, is it cost-effective to manage these meetings? Does the risk profile of these events raise red flags for the organization? And will the attendee experience be positively impacted by the management of these meetings?

Full management of small and simple meetings under the current Strategic Meetings Management model is not likely very cost-effective for simple meetings between 10 and 25 attendees. It is only when the number of attendees surpasses 25 that the management cost becomes more in line with the overall cost of the event.

All that being said, the specter of risk exposure increases without the help of professional sourcing managers to negotiate the contract, and to protect organizations from other risk factors, such as cancellation and attrition penalties, contractual liability risks, duty-of-care risks, regulatory violations, and brand and intellectual property risks. Ultimately, not managing even the smallest of meetings can lead to an increased organizational risk profile, and the decision to accept such a risk profile should be an informed decision based on a full understanding of the potential challenges, and the organization’s tolerance for risk. Each organization needs to conduct its own cost-benefit analysis to determine the appropriate tradeoff between the cost of managing meetings and the potential for risk.

The final aspect of ROI for simple meetings is to consider the attendee experience. Absent professional sourcing and planning staff, meeting owners, or more likely their administrative assistants, are left to their own devices to identify appropriate venues and plan the specific logistics of the event. They must find venues in cities with sufficient airlift to accommodate the attendees, and venues that have the right balance of amenities — not too few (no Wi-Fi) and not too many (a spa). They must plan meals for vegans, paleos and everyone in-between, and manage the logistics of meeting rooms and audio-visual requirements. Not managing these aspects of the meeting can lead to a significantly degraded experience for attendees. Here, too, organiza-

tions must conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether the risks associated with having nonprofessionals plan their events are worth the savings to be realized by not professionally managing these simple meetings.

The Pros and Cons of Managing

In the end, it all comes down to whether your organization deems it necessary to manage small, simple or a combination of small and simple meetings. The factors that should determine an organization’s approach to managing small meetings ultimately depends on its tolerance for risk, the cost versus expected Return on Investment it seeks from various small meeting types, and the end-user experience the organization wants its attendees to have. The lower the risk and greater the attendee experience an organization seeks from its small meetings, the more likely the event should be managed by professionals. On the other hand, if an organization is more willing to tolerate risk, or if its events are simple, and do not incur significant risk, the less likely they will need to be managed. **C&IT**



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By Steve Damerow

How Incentive Travel Motivates Millennials

Sometimes it can feel like different generations are more like different species. The values, tastes and preferences that differentiate millennials, Gen Xers and baby boomers are more apparent than ever, because these generations are working side-by-side in an unprecedented workforce generation mix. For this reason, it's important for managers and leaders to consider how generational differences factor into how to incentivize employees.

Consider travel incentives: do baby boomers prefer all-inclusive incentive trips to Hawaii, sipping mai tais and reading the latest James Patterson novel on the beach? Do millenni-

When factoring millennial attitudes into incentive strategies, these traits make incentive travel rewards extremely motivating. Here are some of the reasons why:

The Value of Experience

As the first generation to grow up with the internet and home computers, millennials live and breathe technology. But just because they're almost always on their smartphones doesn't mean they're not paying attention! More than any previous generation, millennials are embracing travel and exploration, always looking for something new. A Business

“For **millennials**, incentive travel isn't just jet-setting and sightseeing: More than anything, they crave **unique experiences**.”

als dream of exotic locales, undiscovered microbreweries and capturing every moment on Instagram? Of course, these are just stereotypes, but it's vital that corporate event planners and incentive trip coordinators take these fundamental differences to heart when planning incentive travel programs. It's not just about where different generations want to go — how they perceive travel incentives is important.

Let's focus on the most recent generation to join the ranks of the American workforce: millennials. According to the Pew Research Center, more than one-third of today's workers are millennials. They surpassed baby boomers in workforce population in 2013 and Gen Xers in 2015. That's why it's worth tapping into what makes them tick, now more than ever!

Millennials tend to get a bad rap. Headlines about them “killing” various industries are pervasive. Dubbed “The Selfie Generation,” they're often criticized for being self-absorbed and addicted to social media. But there's so much more to them. Millennials are the most open-minded and culturally aware generation today. Their “addiction” to social media can be seen as a desire for connection, communication and a sense of curiosity about the world at large.

Insider survey gauged millennials' feelings about experiences and found interesting results:

- 78 percent say that they prefer spending money on experiences rather than things.
- 77 percent remark that their best memories are tied to experiences.
- 72 percent say they want to spend more money on new experiences.
- 69 percent believe that experiences help to connect them to the world.

Clearly, the experience economy is alive and well among millennials! As the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) made note of in their 2017 Incentive Trends Study, “The focus for travel is not only on the destination and venue, but equally important are the authentic, unique, individualized experiences.” For millennials, incentive travel isn't just jet-setting and sightseeing: More than anything, they crave unique experiences. In keeping with their interconnectedness through social media, being able to share pictures of an exciting adventure or a hidden gem allows them to broadcast their experience and feel part of a greater global consciousness.

Uniqueness and Diversity

“Continual connection to others worldwide has produced the first truly global generation,” writes Donald Tapscott in his study of millennial culture, “Growing Up Digital.” He goes on to point out that high rates of immigration to the U.S. have made the American millennial population highly diverse and multiracial. As a result, millennials tend to be more tolerant and open to different backgrounds and lifestyles.

This openness means millennials are more likely to be motivated by travel opportunities that take them outside their comfort zone. They want to broaden their global perspectives by experiencing different customs, cultures and ways of life firsthand, and they want to share it with everyone on their social media feed. They pride themselves on being aware of the world around them and love opportunities to spread that awareness to others. According to ASTA's recent study on American travelers, “exploring other cultures” is millennials' most important reason for leisure traveling.



And all that touting of global awareness isn't just lip service. Millennials are more engaged with social justice and global welfare than their predecessors. They care deeply about the environment and the well-being of others, and are quick to fight injustices against minority groups and the underprivileged. In a survey reported in *Forbes*, “of 684 investors, mil-

lennials were found to make more ‘social impact investments’ than any other segment of America.”

The opportunity in incentive travel to combine luxury, experience and the potential to enact positive change makes it an absolute dream for millennials. Not only does it motivate them to achieve sales goals and initiatives, it also generates company loyalty and respect: growing up in a world of massive corporate conglomerates, a company that encourages its employees to “give back” appeals to millennial values.

A Real Vacation

Growing up in a time of economic prosperity as well as the rise of accessible technology (home computers, cell phones and an endless stream of video games and other tech toys) has given millennials a reputation for being spoiled, but this couldn't be further from the truth. With the majority of them joining the workforce at the darkest point of the Great Recession, many have struggled to establish careers and find stability. The average millennial graduated college with around \$40,000 of student loan debt — and the average salary for millennials is less than \$35,000.

Despite their collective wanderlust and desire for global interconnectedness, the sad truth is that travel is out of reach for the majority of millennial workers. Incentive travel rewards motivate millennials to work toward experiences they crave but may otherwise be unable to attain. In fact, the IRF's 2017 incentive trends study found that the market for incentive travel is continuing to grow after the setbacks and slashed budgets of the Great Recession, and nearly 40 percent of U.S. businesses are now offering incentive travel rewards to recognize their salespeople and channel partners.

As the market continues to see increasing demand for incentive travel programs and millennials rise through the workforce ranks, now is the time to push incentive travel! Tapping into their unique thirst for travel is one of the best ways to retain top millennial performers and see a lucrative return on your investment.

C&IT

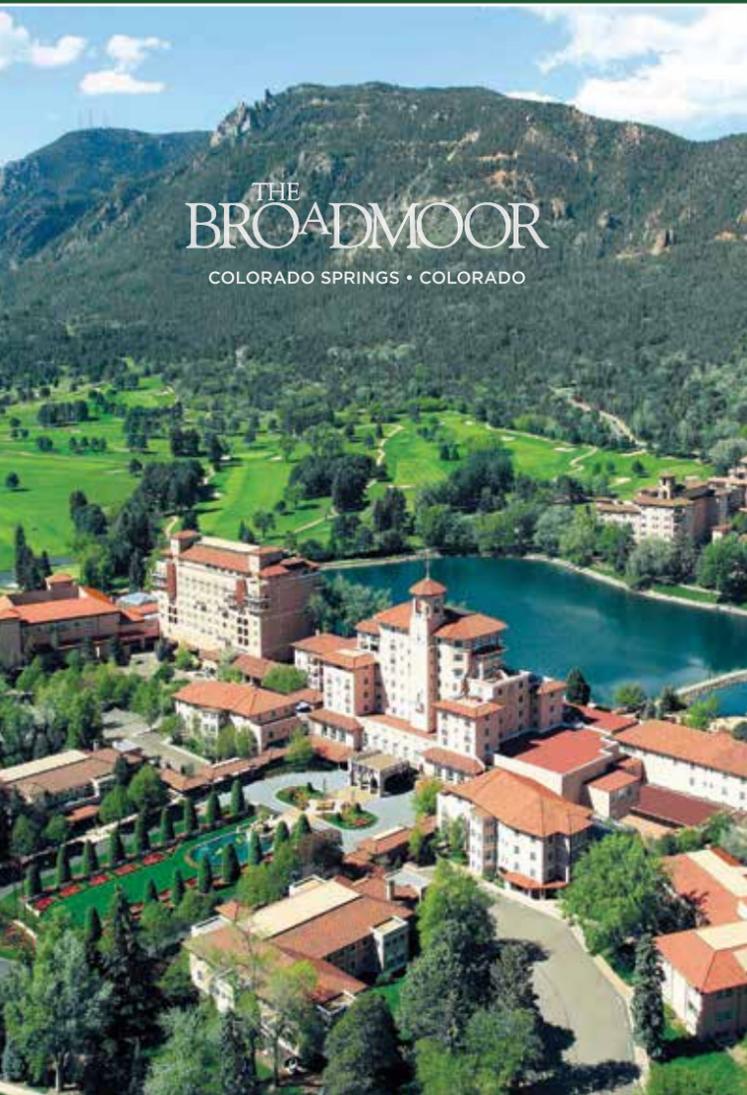


Steve Damerow

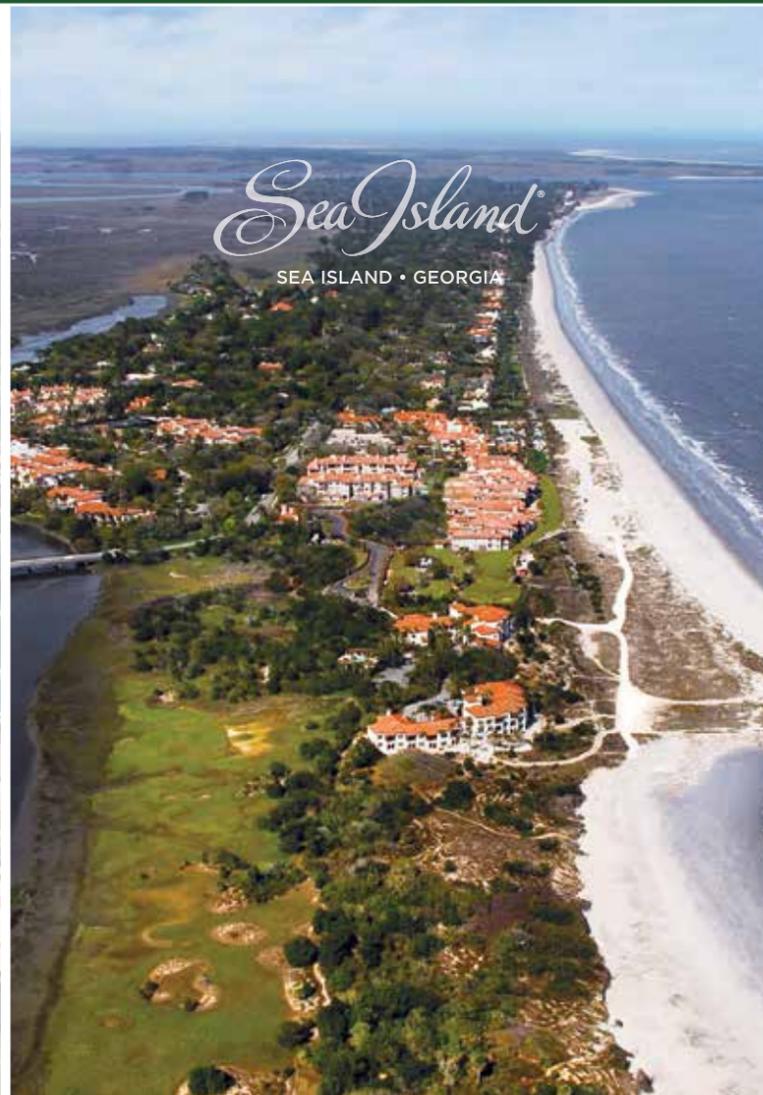
is CEO of Incentive Solutions. He is a recognized expert and published author, and hosts the national radio show “Business Matters.” Incentive Solutions currently manages hundreds of incentive programs in a variety of industries. Steve Damerow can be reached at: sdamerow@incentivesolutions.com, 678-514-0203, www.incentivesolutions.com.

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Going Local, Staying Authentic

How CVBs Set Their Destinations Apart

By Christine Loomis

An authentic N'awlins seafood boil is just part of a rich mélange of cultural experiences awaiting visitors to the Big Easy.

In recent years, increased importance has been placed on “experiential travel,” meaning immersive, local, authentic experiences.

The trend may be driven by millennials, whose dislike of old school, packaged experiences and preference for authentic community has moved the dial as to what tourism partners offer. (See “How Incentive Travel Motivates Millennials,” page 14.) Yet research shows that travelers and meeting goers of all ages want to experience destinations from a uniquely local perspective.

In addition to highlighting the destination itself, the right experiences give attendees a break from meetings, shake things up and more often than not send them back to the business at hand energized and able to think in new and creative ways.

A study commissioned by PCMA and IAEE found that destination is the No. 2 driver in attendees’ decision to register for a meeting. The study also found that about half of attendees are likely to combine a meeting with vacation, another half are likely to bring a guest, and three quarters take advantage of what destinations offer by getting out and about during, before and/or after meetings. If the experience is positive, three-quarters will consider returning to a destination on their own dime.

That translates into considerable potential economic impact, giving CVBs and tourism offices impetus to connect attendees with experiences that provide a deep dive into the local ethos — whatever it is.

Many CVBs and tourism offices have risen to the challenge of showcasing their cities and regions in ways that truly are local, authentic and engaging. Here are some examples.

NEW ORLEANS

Food, music and unabashed reverence for the art of celebration set New Orleans apart. Yes, food and music are everywhere but nowhere do they more wholly define a destination than in New Orleans.

“Our food, music, artists, writers, entertainers and culture of celebration is

a way of life with each of us who choose to make this our home, so we work hard to have it be part of what people experience when they come to New Orleans for special events,” says Cara Banasch, V.P. of convention sales and strategy with the New Orleans CVB.

Banasch says the team integrates culture early into the process. “Onsite tours, we try to schedule fun moments that demonstrate elements of our cultural traditions. That might be a walk through Mardi Gras World to see the handmade floats of Orpheus or a stop in the kitchen of Commander’s Palace to have Chef Tori McPhail do a special presentation of a local specialty dish.”

Not surprising for a city all about celebration, the CVB and its DMC partners have an extensive list of authentic experiences that engage all the senses and provide a true understanding of local culture.

“We host groups at crawfish boils, tailgate parties, our 143 annual festivals and cooking classes,” says Banasch. “We’ve had groups ride in Mardi Gras parades and cook red beans at a team member’s house. The key is that they immediately understand that none of this is a gimmick. We actually do these things here, and they bring people together. As a result, we talk more, we have new ideas and we understand one another. That’s what most people want for their meetings, and in New Orleans we don’t create it specially; it lives within our traditions and our community all day every day.” (Also see “New Orleans” on page 48.)

MIAMI

Patricia Bayona, director of meeting services for the Miami CVB, points to two evocative experiences that showcase the city.

“Little Havana used to be mostly Cuban,” Bayona says. “Today it is Latin American. The experience is about 2½ hours and offers lunch at a homestyle Cuban restaurant, a stop at a local fruit vendor and at an ice cream shop specializing in tropical fruit flavors or maybe a typical Cuban coffee place.”

The group also visits Domino Park, where older Cuban men and women still



A veteran cigar roller keeps the trademark Cuban tradition going in Little Havana.

play dominos, and galleries along Calle Ocho featuring Cuban and Latin artists.

A highlight is the tiny cigar factory. “These are traditional rollers. One is a woman who used to roll cigars for Fidel Castro. She has a black and white image of herself in the cigar factory in Cuba where she rolled for Castro. She’s one of the best in the world and now rolls for VIP clients across the globe. All rollers are identified and tour participants can purchase cigars on the spot.”

Wynwood Arts District is where graffiti is celebrated as a true art form. The best graffiti artists in the world have been commissioned to create works on walls in this area that was once an abandoned warehouse wasteland. Today, tech companies are moving in, there are restaurants helmed by top chefs and galleries feature art from renowned artists in many genres.

Angela Abate, sourcing supervisor, venue sourcing solutions, CTW Meetings & Events, calls Wynwood vibrant and energizing. “Driving up to it, my first thought was, ‘Where are they taking us?’ As we entered the first restaurant on our food and art tour, we were immediately welcomed. We then took golf carts around to see amazing, beautiful works of art as well as delight in a delicious culinary experience.”

Most groups sign up for a walking-and-culinary tour. But the CVB also connects groups to DMCs that provide a hands-on experience.

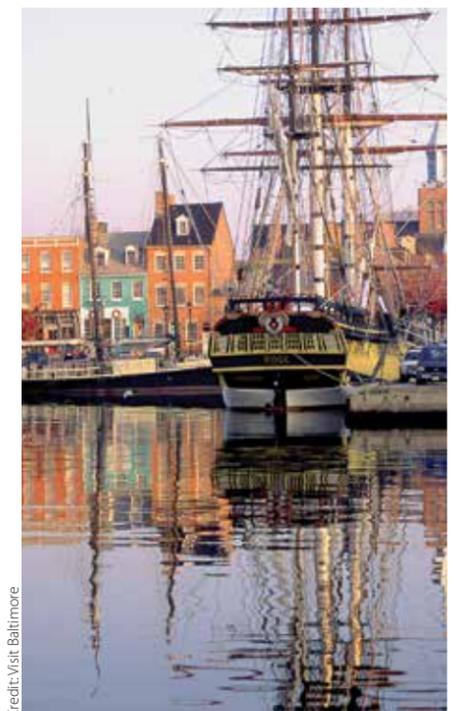
Adolfo Solórzano Z., national sales manager for AlliedPRA South Florida, says of Wynwood, “It is a neighborhood that has morphed quickly into a happening location and is taking the space of more iconic Miami neighborhoods like South Beach on many Google image feeds.”

The AlliedPRA team offers several Wynwood experiences focused on creativity and local immersion. “This includes a hands-on collaborative art project where attendees are taught techniques in street art by local artists then given spray paint and a 20-foot, dual-sided canvas on which to release their own brand of creativity. There’s also a new form of dine-around experience using eco-friendly transportation that incorporates both the artistic and culinary creativity of the neighborhood,” Solórzano Z says.

He notes that Wynwood may not be for every group, “But it is for those that crave creativity and immersion in the evolution of art and a city. The raw art of Wynwood is how we convey that.”

BALTIMORE

Local here means Chesapeake Bay crabs, craft beer, literature, makers and



Edgar Allen Poe’s ghost may or may not still roam Baltimore’s Fell’s Point neighborhood.



The hot culinary scene in Portland includes the Departure restaurant and its rooftop venue.

history. The city also has the uniquely Baltimore "hon culture."

The hon culture arose between the 1950s and 1970s, when working-class local women often dressed in bright, printed dresses with outdated glasses and beehive hairdos. Slang for honey, hon is almost always used at the end of a sentence, e.g., "How bout dem O's, Hon?" The hon culture was made famous by Baltimore filmmaker John Waters. Baltimore Hon impersonators provide an authentically local welcome to attendees at meetings and conventions.

Edgar Allen Poe impersonators also can be booked. The poet lived and wrote here for a time and died in Baltimore in 1849. His ghost may or may not still roam the Fell's Point neighborhood, but his legend lives on in historic sites and the Baltimore Ravens, named for Poe's famously haunting poem.

The CVB helps groups experience authenticity in multiple ways. "We have set up block parties or dine-around experiences in Baltimore's Little Italy for attendees to immerse themselves in the neighborhood while trying the many Italian restaurants in one evening," says Al Hutchinson, president and CEO of Visit Baltimore. "Our services team has worked with groups to host themed crab feasts or suggest locations and ideas for crab feasts, such as at Phillips Crab Deck in the Inner Harbor. And we've held a cookout reception for an international scientific group at one of Baltimore's

most popular craft breweries, Union Craft Brewing, which allowed attendees to experience the city's brewing culture."

Groups also have embraced the increasingly popular maker's culture. At Treason Toting Co., attendees can customize their own Treason bags. The shop's owners, born and raised in Baltimore, pay tribute to the city's craftsmen heritage and to the spirited notion that "It's noble to betray social and group expectations and to shatter the status quo."

CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA

Murder, revenge, betrayal, romance



Red Rocks in Denver has been the setting for spectacular receptions and networking nights.

— the infamous feud between the Hatfields and McCoys is one of the bloodiest in U.S. history. It caused such havoc that litigation eventually reached the U.S. Supreme Court. Today, groups are transported back to the 1800s on a tour through the area not far from West Virginia's capital where it all unfolded.

Another quintessentially West Virginia experience is Exhibition Coal Mine, an hour from Charleston, where visitors ride through the passages of the vintage mine, at times in the dark. Veteran miners act as guides, providing authentic accounts of the life and work of West Virginia coal miners. Planners can learn more through the Charleston CVB.

PORTLAND, OREGON

Food and beer contribute mightily to Portland's allure.

"Travel Portland strives to make meetings in Portland memorable for attendees," says Jeff Miller, president and CEO of Travel Portland. "Portland has one of the hottest culinary scenes in the world, in part because our talented chefs and makers enjoy collaborating with each other and being involved in their community. Travel Portland works year-round to keep up with the latest trends and cultivate relationships with local talent. This way, we can help groups create custom experiences for their attendees that demonstrate the true spirit of Portland."

A recent example, Miller says, is a group of medical professionals that participated in a cooking class and intimate dining experience with Gregory Gourdet, executive chef at Debar-

ture and runner-up on Bravo's "Top Chef" season 12.

Jim Rumsey, COO of the Society for Investigative Dermatology, says the group wanted a teambuilding format in which existing leadership and identified future leaders could get to know each other better. "Operating in small groups

and working hand-in-hand with chef, they prepared starter dishes, appetizers and desserts for that evening's dinner. All attendees came away with a greater appreciation of one another and a newfound respect for collaborative cooking with one of Portland's finest chefs."

Intimate experiences like this, Miller says, "give attendees a chance to learn about Portland from the people who make the city so special."

DENVER

The Mile High City is a place where urban sophistication and rural adventure meet. Mountain recreation is certainly one way to experience authentic Denver — but not the only way. In 2017, Travelocity and The American Distilling Institute named Denver the No. 3 Craft Spirit Tourism Destination in the Country. It's also one of the top craft brew cities and a culinary hotbed. Planners can provide authentic experiences via whiskey tastings featuring the city's top distillers, including Laws Whiskey House, Leopold Brothers and Stranahan's; on craft brewery tours; and at acclaimed restaurants.

Red Rocks, however, is the crown jewel of the city's only-here experiences. It's the only naturally occurring, acoustically perfect amphitheater in the world. Part of Denver's Mountain Parks system, Red Rocks has been the setting for spectacular receptions, networking nights and even group fitness classes.

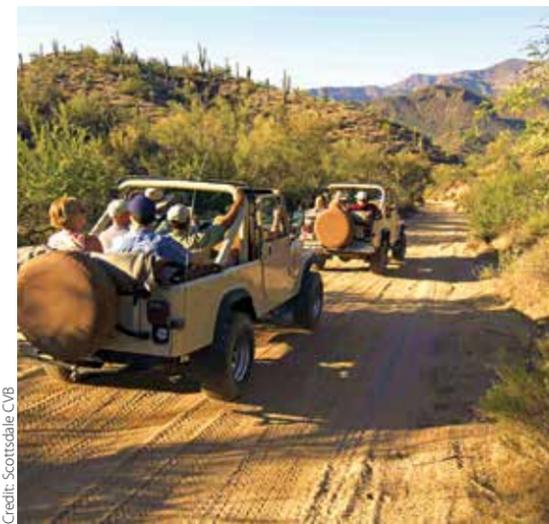
Vicki Kelly, CMP, convention services director with Visit Denver, says her team recently arranged a tour in RiNo, Lo-Hi and LoDo, three of the city's trending neighborhoods, which included stops at chef-driven restaurants, a very local ice cream shop and a new multi-vendor market. The group also boarded Denver-made e-Tuks for a pub-crawl, and ended their visit with a tour at Red Rocks.

With IPW in Denver next spring, ideas for immersing attendees in authentic Denver abound. Kelly says possibilities include a culturally driven event at the highly regarded Denver Performing Arts Complex and a function at the

Denver Bronco's stadium focused on sports, recreation and local beer culture that would likely include virtual kayaking, zip lining, pop-up craft beer gardens and appearances by Denver pro athletes. The final night is slated for Red Rocks.

PHOENIX

Phoenix has long shown off its cowboy and Native American roots. But the city also has a rich Mexican heritage.



A jeep tour through the desert landscape of Scottsdale.

"After many years of promoting Native American and cowboy themes," says James Lammy of Southwest Conference Planners, "planners have discovered an equally important culture of the Southwest, the traditions and influence of Mexico and its people, from the colorful celebratory outfits used in their traditional Charreada, to the authentic south-of-the-border spices in their delicious dishes. There's a facility in Phoenix where you can experience all of that and more called Corona Ranch."

Visit Phoenix recently hosted a group at the ranch to showcase authentic Phoenix culture. The group was greeted with margaritas and mariachi before enjoying the Charreada, a traditional Mexican rodeo.

Downtown, the CVB has given planners a real feel for the city via bike tours that take participants past striking murals by local artists to tastings at local restaurants and beer samplings from Arizona craft brewers. The group also hiked South Mountain at sunrise, a distinctly Phoenix experience embraced by locals and visitors alike.

SCOTTSDALE

The surrounding Sonoran Desert is one of Scottsdale's most powerful local elements.

"Our authentic story can be found in our lush desert setting. With its remarkable clarity of light and exotic cactus blossoms, the Sonoran Desert leaves meeting goers feeling inspired," says Rachel Sacco, president & CEO of Experience Scottsdale.

The CVB partners with tour companies and venues that allow groups to tap into the Sonoran Desert, including Arizona Outback Adventures, which leads adventures in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, 30,000 acres of pristine, protected desert. "As groups hit the trails," Sacco says, "tour guides expand on the depth and breadth of the Sonoran's diverse ecosystem."

Event Team Inc. leads a teambuilding exercise highlighting the city's Native American culture, during which teams form tribes and work together to create a tribal name and chant and design and construct a teepee.

Desert Botanical Garden provides a



Groups visiting Phoenix can experience authentic Mexican and Southwestern cultural programs and activities at Corona Ranch.



Credit: San Francisco Travel

San Francisco's uniqueness extends from Alcatraz to Chinatown.

stunning Sonoran backdrop for events and functions, and Desert Foothills' indoor and outdoor settings for groups of 50 to 1,000 make the natural landscape a compelling design element.

Sacco notes that attendees also can experience indigenous culture through Native-inspired spa treatments. "Centuries ago, American Indians used local plants, cacti and herbs in their healing practices. Today, Scottsdale spas incorporate such ingredients into their treatments, from jojoba body butter to red adobe clay masks."

Last year the Meeting & Incentive Americas Forum, attended by 200 domestic and international planners, also learned about Scottsdale's evocative natural environment via a jeep tour through the Sonoran and rafting on the Lower Salt River.

SAN FRANCISCO

Alcatraz, Summer of Love, Haight Ashbury, The San Francisco Giants — just a few of the quintessential San Francisco opportunities for planners.

Among the most powerful experiences is a Hornblower Cruises program on Alcatraz. Groups cruise to the prison, tour, then sit with former guards, inmates and children of prison workers who lived on the island to hear firsthand accounts of life inside and out when Alcatraz housed some of America's most notorious criminals.

Don't remember the Summer of Love? It's still fun to be transported back to 1967 via Magic Bus on a colorful tour that takes in Haight Ashbury, Fillmore West and other landmarks of that era and beyond.

Groups can arrange batting practice

with the Giants and buyouts of the city's famously irreverent, ever-evolving production, Beach Blanket Babylon.

Deirdre Lewis, senior director, convention services and events for San Francisco Travel, and her team are currently working on a program for 400 that

brings the city's Chinese culture front and center. "We're planning to have the group do a quick walk through Chinatown, then close a street and serve Chinese food and have dragon dancers, fire crackers, etc."

Groups also have access to top chefs and wine makers, San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge. By partnering with top tour operators, vendors and venues, San Francisco Travel gives planners reasons to return again and again.

INTERNATIONAL DESTINATIONS

Many countries also connect planners to experiences that immerse attendees in local history and culture. Great Britain, with a history rife with murders and intrigue, not surprisingly



Credit: Tourism Australia

From the Outback to the Great Barrier Reef, bucket-list experiences abound in Australia.

offers places where attendees might encounter ghosts, including London's Hampton Court, where two of Henry VIII's wives are said to haunt the halls. Attendees can follow in Jack the Ripper's bloody footprints on tours through Lon-

don's alleyways, the serial killer's identity still obscured by history. Planners can learn more from Visit Britain.

The island of Barbados offers much for groups. "As a safe and hospitable destination, we know that the people of Barbados are the primary reason visitors say they develop a love affair with the island. Hence in curating experiences, we know that our people have to be where it starts and finishes," says Petra Roach, director of the U.S. for Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc.

One local experience Roach recommends: "Oistins on Friday or Saturday night, a happening fish fry that brings out hundreds of locals and visitors alike who sit together feasting on some of the best freshly caught seafood and Bajan fare the island has to offer."

Barbados is the only place outside the United States that George Washington visited, and the house he stayed in is now a museum and available for events. As for activities, Barbados has polo, cricket, and Bushy Park, which Roach calls "the best race circuit in the Caribbean and ideal for teambuilding experiences."

Few places offer the diversity of experiences Australia does. Paul Griffin, business events manager, Americas for Business Events Australia, points to a recent incentive program in the Great Barrier Region for an American technology company.

The program, created by Australian DMC ID Events, included exclusive access to the Great Barrier Reef with Quicksilver Cruises, Australian wildlife encounters during an exclusive guided tour of Hartley's Crocodile Adventures and discovery of Aboriginal culture with a private Mossman Gorge Dreamtime Walk.

"It exceeded all expectations and had guests commenting for weeks about how amazing their Australian experience was," Griffin says.

Authentic and local may be current industry buzzwords, but that doesn't make them any less compelling. Sharing a destination's authentic culture is one sure path to creating memorable, inspiring, meaningful experiences with the power to elevate groups and CVBs alike. **C&IT**

VisitNorfolk

Named one of 50 Best Places to Travel in 2017 by a well-known travel publication, Norfolk is a city with vibrant entertainment and culture, delicious cuisine and 144 miles of beautiful shoreline. Groups staying in Norfolk are accommodated in a wide variety of hotels, most of which are located within walking distance of the city's downtown meeting venues, shops, restaurants, attractions, and nightlife options.

Planning Assistance

VisitNorfolk has an award-winning staff who are ready to ensure that your meeting is the best it can be. Staff can assist with conference registration, housing, event planning, photographers, caterers, requests to the mayor's office and other local dignitaries, and much more. VisitNorfolk also provides meeting planner guides and promotional materials for groups as well as assistance with coordinating press releases

and media coverage.

Norfolk recently welcomed the new Waterside District, a dining and entertainment district located on the Elizabeth River. Waterside houses eateries such as Guy Fieri's Smokehouse, Rappahannock Oyster Company, Cogan's Pizza, Blue Moon Taphouse and more. The city also offers retail outlet shopping and more dining at the newly opened Norfolk Premium Outlets.

Dine at one of Norfolk's 80 chef-owned restaurants or sign up for a pub crawl and taste Norfolk's craft beers. Navy buffs can engage in lively tours of Naval Station Norfolk, the world's largest naval station and home to more than 100 ships in the Atlantic Fleet.

Norfolk is also home to Battleship Wisconsin, one of the largest battleships in the world. And history enthusiasts can tour the Douglas MacArthur Memorial, the final resting place for General Douglas MacArthur and his wife. **C&IT**

CVB UPDATE

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Planning for Unexpected Weather Events

From hurricanes and floods to earthquakes, an unprecedented onslaught of natural disasters in August and September dealt devastating blows to destinations in Florida, the Caribbean, Texas and Mexico. Disruptions like these can put the resourcefulness of meeting planners to the test, as they must anticipate and adapt to rapidly changing conditions and circumstances to salvage current and future programs.

According to the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) 2016 Event Disruption Study, planners estimated they now spend up to 25 percent of their time planning for potential disruptions, and nearly 40 percent expect that their time and effort will increase in the next two years. In addition, 68 percent

Stories From the Field and Lessons Learned

By Christine Loomis

of planners said that they had changed venues at least once within the last two years because of disruption.

Kip Lambert, chief culture officer

for Destinations Inc., relates a curious superstition in Mexico: If weather reports indicate rain, many Mexican planners take kitchen knives and stab them into the ground near the event space. "They swear by it," Lambert says. "And I can only think of one time it hasn't worked — that's about an 80 percent accuracy rate!"

That's impressive. But just in case that other 20 percent comes into play, it's probably best to be prepared in more substantial ways. Weather can be disastrous and deadly on rare occasions, and it's frequently more than a mere inconvenience.

Irma and Harvey

Jill Anonson, events solution manager

er for ITA Group, relates her experiences dealing with the impacts of hurricanes Irma and Harvey this year.

"From a big-picture perspective, we maintained communication with a variety of customers regarding their upcoming site inspections and program operations, looking ahead for the next two years. We remained in constant contact with hoteliers and DMCS throughout the impacted areas."

On Hurricane Irma: "We had multiple programs scheduled to operate during/immediately following the expected arrival of Irma to Florida. Our team coordinated with local and national resources to obtain the latest information on the storm tracker, airline impacts, etc. ITA Group recommended postponing those programs for the safety of all attendees. All ended up being force majeure situations (see "Critical Clauses" on page 42). Two were immediately re-sourced in other locations; one for the same dates and one for a week later.

"We had an additional program impacted by the aftermath of Irma, making the contracted hotel unable to honor its contract due to damage. The program was re-sourced, for the original September dates, and contracted elsewhere. The entire program was re-worked, with team members departing for the new location four days later."

On Hurricane Harvey: "A client contacted us about supporting their disaster recovery efforts in Houston," Anonson continues. "We began sourcing hotels, planning meals, transportation, communication protocols. Within 36 hours we had travel directors in Houston supporting the rooming and meals for 1,200 attendees, based in eight hotels, arriving to support their fellow employees, businesses and the community of Houston. Internally, the team managed weekly rooming lists and multiple hotels, as well as the continually changing scope of the recovery efforts. Daily executive summaries were provided to client leadership. This initiative operated for four weeks."

New Delhi Disaster

Angela Baer, CMP, corporate meet-

See related stories in this issue:

- Page 42: "Critical Clauses," with ever-important force majeure considerations.
- Page 54: "Orlando," in which Microsoft Ignite Event Director Vivian Eickhoff describes how Hurricane Irma impacted her event.

ing planner with Caterpillar Inc., had to work around flooding in India during Digging Deep 2015. She remembers, "We had an event that was supposed to have our group of 50 in New Delhi the first part of the week and in Chennai the second part. I had arranged everything in both locations including flights between the two cities to optimize our timeline, which was jam-packed."

Logistics were complex. The group was visiting dealerships, doing community work, and guest speakers were scheduled in and out at both locations. "We were to finish the first part of our

"People will be looking to you for reassurance. Just remember (in any emergency) your best friend is your contact at your venue."

Angela Baer, CMP
Corporate Meeting Planner
Caterpillar Inc.
Peoria, IL

event Wednesday afternoon, fly from New Delhi to Chennai and start again at 8 a.m. Thursday. We heard on Monday that flooding had become serious, including in Chennai, but information wasn't cohesive. The hotel said that it was not affected. The dealership said it was bad. Our corporate security said to 'hold tight.'"

Baer immediately started working with the New Delhi hotel to get additional guest rooms and meeting space if necessary. "On Tuesday, corporate security said we could not fly to Chennai, so I had to officially get everyone a place to sleep, and meet and change everyone's flights home within less than 24 hours. Ultimately we were able to accommodate almost everyone thanks to the hotel working hard to rearrange

things. We also were able to get meeting space for the rest of the week and did our best to change it up from the start of the week by having meals outside on the lawn."

There wasn't really a plan B, but Baer says when she looks back, she doesn't think that would have been viable. "For a plan B to actually work, I'd have had to book rooms and meeting space 'just in case,'" she says. "That's a double charge that wasn't in the budget, and isn't in most budgets. We don't always get the luxury of a plan B."

But that doesn't mean not being prepared. "I always make a binder of safety information, which includes evacuation plans, take-cover plans and crisis plans," Baer says. "Additionally, our contracts always include meeting-disruption and force majeure clauses. I also have information as to which staff members are attending and in what capacity, along with cell numbers. I include maps of the hotel, agendas and attendee information — including emergency contact info — so I can track down anyone attending anything at any time in the hotel and convention spaces."

For full preparedness, Baer advises the following: "First, at your chosen location, have safety information for all attendees. This could be in the form of a safety briefing each day or info downloaded onto an app or provided manually at registration. Have designated staff to coordinate different aspects of the emergency plan. That might be one person to be in communication with the venue; one to be responsible for attendee communication and instructions via text, app alert, email or phone; and one responsible for checking attendee lists to make sure all are present and accounted for."

Baer says there are many ways to break it down but the goal is to have a team in place so it doesn't all fall on the shoulders of one meeting planner.

“Finally,” she adds, “breathe and be calm. You can’t control everything and people will be looking to you for reassurance. Just remember that your best friend is your contact at your venue. He or she will be able to best assist in an emergency.”

That definitely held true in New Delhi. “The hotel staff worked with us to make sure we had rooms and meeting space. They offered to do outside events even though that took more work, without any increase in charges, so our attendees would have a change of pace. It’s so important to work with professional places and people so this type of thing, when it happens, can have a happy ending.”

Florida and Its Hurricanes

Joost de Meyer, CIS, CITE, CMM, ACC, MCC, chairman and CEO of First Incentive Travel, says living in Orlando for 19 years has made him well aware of the June-to-November hurricane season, prime time for many group programs.

“Fortunately,” he says, “with forecasts improving every year, we have the necessary information to make plans. When we organize an event in Florida at that time of year, we have a weather backup. We discuss the weather with our CSM or other contact in the hotel or venue, and they make the final call if we have to move the event inside.”

He says clients often wonder why an event has to be moved when the sky is blue and hardly any clouds are to be seen. “In Florida with the sea breezes from the west coast and east coast colliding, storms with heavy rain and thunder can develop quickly. At that time, the client is happy the event has moved.”

In 2004, planners in Florida were definitely put to the test. “We had three major hurricanes coming to Orlando,” de Meyer says, “so we had to pay attention to the weather.”

That meant following the local news and watching what local businesses were doing, especially the attraction parks. “When they announce that they’re closing the parks, it’s really bad,” he says.

“We always discuss with our clients

what we will do in such an event to ensure everyone’s safety. If, for example, the program is almost finished and guests are flying home the next day, we discuss if it is better to fly the guests out earlier. Airports often close during hurricanes and it could take days before all participants can get home to their destinations.”

(See “Orlando” on page 54 for a Micro-soft planner’s experience dealing with a Hurricane Irma event disruption.)

Cruise Disruptions

First Incentive Travel also books many cruises in combination with Miami, another city frequently impacted by hurricanes. “Ships may not be able to get into Miami in bad weather and could be diverted to another port, such as Cape Canaveral. In that case, when the city is safe again, we arrange to get

“When we organize an event in Florida (during hurricane season), we have a weather backup” plan.

Joost de Meyer, CIS
Chairman & CEO
First Incentive Travel
Orlando, FL

guests back to Miami by coach in order to continue the original program.”

Weather-related itinerary changes can happen mid-cruise, too. “I had a site inspection with a client for a cruise in the Mediterranean,” de Meyer recalls. “We left Civitavecchia and the next harbor scheduled was Livorno for excursions to Florence. Because of strong winds, the captain decided to skip Livorno, stay at sea and continue to the next harbor. My client was so upset he asked for a meeting with the captain. He wanted to know why the ship couldn’t wait for better weather so he could go to Livorno the next day and visit Florence.”

Not surprising, the captain explained that safety and security of guests and crew are his first priority and altering

the itinerary of the entire rest of the week so the client could go to Florence wasn’t an option.

More Common Disruptors

While hurricanes, floods and other major weather disasters can and do cause disruptions to programs, research shows that major events are not the most frequent culprits.

“In a white paper on the Incentive Research Foundation’s 2016 Event Disruption Study,” de Meyer says, “one of the 10 critical findings on the causes and impacts of disruptions was that, according to planners, disruption is not always the result of those major events covered in media. In fact, the research found that the two most frequently occurring disruptions are weather-related events (38 percent) and vendor failures (28 percent). In general, of the business partners, airlines present the most frequent cause of disruptions through cancellations, delays and overbooking (61 percent).”

“My advice,” de Meyer says, “is to always be prepared, have a plan B, follow the news on weather channels and give your client constant updates. Communication with all parties involved is key!”

Winter Whammy

Heather Brown, DMCP, CMP, and Kellie Walker, DMCP with AlliedPRA Chicago can attest to the fact that even moderate weather changes can impact an event — especially in Chicago in winter.

Brown, the group’s senior national sales manager, and Walker, event producer, worked together on an event for an East Coast pharmaceutical company in January 2016.

“With any January program in Chicago, the weather can be tricky,” Walker says. “In this case, the company wanted its 300 guests to be free to walk or take transfers from their hotel to Soldier Field, about 2.5 miles away. In addition, the planner wanted the guests to take a group photo at Soldier Field.”

Brown notes that communication related to routing and weather began at the start of the sales process. “Then we carefully watched the weather as it

got close to time, and we had a plan in place. We arranged for extra staffing in the venue if it snowed. It did, and we utilized that extra staff to clear the seating and field for the photo.”

Walker says they also arranged extra motor coaches for transport from the hotel to the field. “That helped ease the stress of people walking two-plus miles in the snow (we had always planned on transporting guests, not having them walk),” she says. “And the additional staff at Soldier Field was also prepared to gather guests at a different location within the venue for the group photo if necessary.”

In addition to specific plans desired by a client for an event, Walker and Brown say they always have an evacuation and crisis-communication plan. “Our team and our venue supplier partners meet about this prior to each program operating,” Brown says.

Contracts also include force majeure and disruption-protection clauses, and there’s always an emergency-preparedness document that the entire team uses. “We have a yearly field-staff training that includes the critical touch points,” Walker notes.

When it comes to working effectively during a crisis, including changes in weather, Walker and Brown say it’s all about planning, preparation and safety. “Early on, discuss alternative options for weather,” they say. “Get your DMC or supplier contact’s emergency preparedness plans. In the weeks and days leading up to an event, keep an eye on the weather and know your contract’s terms and the dates when you need to pull the lever and make decisions. Finally, communication is key when onsite and guest safety is always the first priority.”

What the Experts Say

Brian D. Avery, managing member of Florida-based Event Safety Services, is an events, tourism and attractions operational safety expert witness, public speaker, trainer and consultant. He also notes the importance of good planning, monitoring and communication.

“Weather can have an adverse im-

pact on outdoor and indoor events,” he says. “Event planners and attraction/venue operators have an obligation to monitor the weather and manage the event, attraction or venue based on what is known and reasonably foreseeable. When planning an event, the process of monitoring and alerting of weather-related conditions needs to be proactive and continuous.”



Kellie Walker, DMCP
Event Producer
AlliedPRA Chicago
Chicago, IL

“With any January program in Chicago, the weather can be tricky. In this case...the planner wanted the guests to take a group photo at Soldier Field.”

A good example is a well-publicized Virgin Galactic event in Mojave that required the use of temporary structures. “I was not involved with it,” Avery notes, “however it covers numerous elements of planning correctly and provides insight into what could have been a catastrophic and deadly matter. They started monitoring for weather about 10 days out and appropriately planned for a possible evacuation. Considering the remoteness of the event, that required some creative thinking. They opted to have buses available to evacuate guests. It was an expensive solution, but considering the alternative it was a brilliant solution.”

On the day of the event, wind exceeded the recommended rating of the tent, and an evacuation to the buses was ordered. “The tent collapsed but the people were safe,” Avery says.

The event continued after the weather calmed down. “This is an ex-

ample of understanding the environment, the capabilities of the equipment and structures, planning for what is possible — sometimes probable — and valuing and having the resources to protect the event-goers,” he says.

Unfortunately, Avery often sees the disastrous results of improper planning. “I have over 25 years of experience in the events, tourism and attractions industry,” he says. “My background is comprised of three areas of expertise: risk and safety management, event design/execution and education. I develop policies and procedures and provide training on numerous risk-management-related considerations, including weather matters.

“However, I am typically involved with the negative and costly impact of a failure to plan. Many planners and venues fail to address these concerns discussed, often believing incorrectly that someone else in the process has addressed them. As a result, I am engaged as an expert witness assisting in both plaintiff and defense matters regarding a failure to plan or adhere to readily available standards and practices.”

Contingency Planning

Avery cautions that contingency planning is a vital part of event success and should always be a priority. “Established policies and procedures need to be in place to address the monitoring of weather, announcements, movement of people (shelters or closure), cessation of activities/attractions, removal of equipment and more. You need an organized and managed system to effectively address emergencies and minimize disruptions. Planners and venue operators should use readily available policies and procedures to address situations that are likely to impact an event. Additionally, they need to obtain site-specific information in order to address concerns that are relevant to that location. It’s very important to familiarize staff, ven-

dors and attendees of concerns, especially if they are not familiar with them or the location.”

Avery provides a free 219-page emergency disaster guidebook that addresses many of the major considerations an event planner or venue operator will encounter. You can get it by going to eventsafety.com/emergency-planning-guide.

While most planners do coordinate with venues and use venues’ emergency plans, Avery says that’s not enough. “Planners must ensure that these plans address the necessary fundamentals established by planners themselves, a checklist of sorts such as tornados in the Midwest and South, earthquakes in the West, wind and lightning, temporary structures everywhere, hurricanes from June to November near coastal cities, etc.”

Communication is critical. “Event planners and/or venue operators need to have a clearly defined process on how to alert and inform people,” he

sees numerous situations where exemptions excluded aspects that prevented coverage from kicking in and resulted in a loss of premiums and damages.”

Avery says the bottom line is that planners must know what they are buying. “For example, a hurricane policy for the beginning of June in Florida statistically is a not a good purchase. Even though hurricane season starts in June, I recall only one named storm in the last 50-plus years hitting the U.S. in June. But September? That’s another story.”

“Beyond the finances,” he continues, “it’s crucial to know what is covered and what is not. Insurance companies can be artful at crafting complicated documents, including contracts. My advice is to hire an attorney familiar with your business goals to make sure you’re covered for what you need. I’ve



Brian D. Avery
Managing Member
Event Safety Services
Maitland, FL

“Event planners and/or venue operators need to have a clearly defined process on how to alert and inform people.”

says. And although it’s a great idea to have force majeure clauses in contracts, that also isn’t necessarily enough.

“Make sure your contracts are evaluated by qualified people in the field to ensure you are covered for what you think you are covered for.”

Insurance Considerations

The same goes for insurance. “You are buying insurance to cover a poten-



Diane Drey
Manager, Travel Direction
ITA Group
West Des Moines, IA

“Always have an evacuation plan to ensure details are in place before a high-stress situation occurs.”

tingency and backup plans prior to arrival at the destination, and crisis management procedures and framework.

She recalls a program in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico cancelled due to a hurricane and one in Tokyo for which all stateside flights were cancelled due to weather just hours before departure. In addition to the complex logistics of getting attendees out of a hurricane zone and making alternate travel arrangements in the middle of the night to move Tokyo-bound attendees at 4 a.m. to another airport so they could depart on time, she says mitigating risk comes down to having emergency plans in place and constant communication.

“Always have an evacuation plan to ensure details are in place before a high-stress situation occurs. Always have a crisis communication plan in place and always include force majeure and needed protection clauses in contracts. In addition,” she adds, “there should be an existing Travel Incident Response Team that is not onsite to provide guidance, direction and oversight for all crisis-management situations.”

Having all of this is in place prior to programs, Drey says, “allows teams to focus on the situation, not overarching procedures.”

In the end, meeting professionals all agree on this point: Successful crisis management is reliant on three critical elements: Planning, planning, planning. **C&IT**



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Meeting Tech Update

Digital Innovations That Maximize ROI and the Attendee Experience



Through a partnership with Mediasite Events, Citrix was able to offer a keynote address at its Citrix Synergy conference in various live formats and for rebroadcast, leading to 100,000 views.

Meri Summers, senior manager of corporate events at Citrix Synergy, understands the impact technology can have on the satisfaction and engagement of participants at a meeting or event.

Each year the Citrix Synergy team plans their annual Citrix Synergy conference, which draws 5,500 customers, prospects and partners for three days of learning and networking. To extend the life of the hundreds of hours of content presented every year at Citrix Synergy, conference planners recently teamed up with Mediasite Events to power Citrix Synergy TV.

The Mediasite Events team captured more than 100 conference sessions from 10 different rooms, and helped Citrix customize the online experience with a registration portal, live chat, a custom video portal and project management. Sessions were streamed live and then updated to be available on demand, often the same day. By livestreaming the keynotes and breakout sessions, they

turned the in-person event into an online, live and on-demand destination that lives beyond the conference. Thanks to this innovative use of technology, in 2016 the content had more than 100,000 views.

Citrix's efforts are just one example of ways companies are working hard at engaging their audience at meetings using such things as mobile apps, virtual reality, and interactive portals for presentations and viewing.

"Livestreaming and video capture for on-demand viewing is vital to our events to extend the life of the hundreds of hours of content presented

every year at Citrix Synergy and turns the in-person event into an online, live and on-demand destination that lives beyond the physical conference," Summers says. "A big reason for streaming is because we offer a lot of breakout sessions, and you can only attend so many each day. Even if you're attending in person, it's beneficial for you to visit Citrix Synergy TV to find all of the sessions your schedule didn't allow you to attend."

Citrix promotes Citrix Synergy TV very heavily on social media and blogs about it, and approximately a week prior to the event, the corporate events team

Working with Mediasite, "We get a lot of viewership of keynotes and breakout sessions, which is very valuable to us as our content is relevant beyond the actual show."



Meri Summers, Senior Manager Corporate Events
Citrix, Fort Lauderdale, FL

sends an email to customers who aren't registered to inform them that Citrix will be livestreaming.

"We also reach out to industry influencers who are not attending," Summer says. "This year we sent invitations for the keynotes, including a link to the sessions we're livestreaming, so they could add it to their Outlook calendars. We get a lot of viewership of keynotes and breakout sessions, which is very valuable to us as our content is relevant beyond the actual show."

Another provider planners can tap to produce hybrid events that extend the life and reach of onsite meetings and conventions for a global audience is INXPO. The turnkey, virtual events platform is designed to seamlessly integrate the physical event's content and experience so it can be promoted and experienced as a single entity for both online and in-person attendees. The online platform drives attendee engagement with interactive tools such as chat, polls, Q&A and social media sharing, and cap-

tures and measures real-time analytics to immediately measure event ROI. Planners have found that rather than cannibalizing attendance at face-to-face events, a digital version can stoke interest in attending the next meeting or convention in person.

A Transformational Time

Corbin Ball, CSP, CMP, DES at Corbin Ball & Co., understands the key role technology, including mobile apps and virtual reality, plays in engaging audiences. As Ball has seen, just about every component of corporate and incentive travel and events management is being transformed by technology.

"Venue sourcing, promotion, registration, participant engagement, analytics, project management, speaker management, exhibition management and much more all have technology tools to make the process faster, more reliable, more effective and less expensive," Ball says.



As Ball explains, mobile technology, and specifically event apps, are providing attendees a "Swiss army knife" of tools for information, networking, polling, surveys, wayfinding, notes/brochure downloads and more, which provides better attendee services at a lower cost to the meeting planner.

"It all started when the paper calendar and planner went digital and meeting invitations were able to be sent digitally," says Kathryn Kosmides, director of marketing and growth at SummitSync. "Then, CRM (Customer Relationship Management) and MATs (marketing automation tools) started creeping into the space to



SummitSync's event intelligence platform helps meeting planners seamlessly identify event attendees and sponsors to help calculate ROI.

Credit: SummitSync

help drive registrations or book more meetings. Now, we're at the precipice of technology — tying all of the disparate pieces in event marketing together to help teams more efficiently host, attend and sponsor events. Meeting planners need to adopt the ever-advancing technology in order to stay relevant, maximize ROI and provide great experiences for attendees."

SummitSync's event intelligence platform helps teams identify which events their prospects, leads and clients are attending and schedule a meeting with them. The company integrates into top CRMs and MATs so teams can seamlessly follow up after events and measure the return on event (ROE).

"Teams use our technology to discover who is attending an event, to schedule meetings with other attendees, automatically attribute offline meetings into their CRMs, and to measure their ROE without hours of work," Kosmidis says. "Without attendees and sponsors, events wouldn't exist. That's why we've made it our mission to help them make the most out of every event they attend by eliminating the signal versus noise problem that happens so often at events. Teams need to know what events they should invest in and who to meet with at those events. If attendees and sponsors boost their ROI at an event, they're more likely to return the next year."

Tools to Consider

Today, we live in a rapidly changing,

digital environment but we are still in the early stages of its adoption. As a result, there is a plethora of products and ideas to make meetings more engaging that have been explored for years. For example, when the internet became popular, meeting planners began the adoption of online registration for events; PowerPoint and laptops made meeting presentations more visual; and more recently, with the growth in mobile devices and Wi-Fi, event apps are rapidly being adopted by planners.

"The best meeting environments create energy," says Tom Brandt, president and founder of etech, located in Las Vegas, Nevada, and Orlando, Florida. Brandt



"When planned and executed correctly, technology dramatically impacts the effectiveness, communications flow, engagement and success of a meetings program."

Tom Brandt, President & Founder
etech, Orlando, FL

and his team provide event technology solutions for B2B conferences. "When planned and executed correctly, technology dramatically impacts the effectiveness, communications flow, engagement and success of a meetings program. It facilitates success on both the planner and attendee side, and is most effective when it's used to address the specific needs of that particular program."

Etech's innovations focus on building processes, tools and products that enhance the live meeting experience — from the needs of meeting planners as well as the sponsors and attendees. To that end, they have designed a platform called ShowCommand, which reflects the Internet of Things (IOT) model. This platform consists of a network of technology software tools and devices that can be centrally managed to help simplify how meeting planners distribute information and content in the meeting space.

As Brandt explains, there has always been a disconnection between realizing what event attendees feel and what meeting and event organizers know.

"As event organizers, we have historically tried to communicate and listen to our attendees with meeting surveys," Brandt says. But these surveys often don't capture the most vital feedback of attendees — until now.

For one of etech's client events, the Gartner ITXpo Symposium, they introduced an alternative way to live-survey attendees and feed the information back to planners. Gartner Symposium, attended by thousands of people annually, is an industry-leading conference where the world's top CIOs gain a strategic view of the emerging trends shaping IT and business.

"We implemented live surveys, with

digital kiosks placed in high-traffic areas around the meeting venue for attendees to provide feedback on what they were experiencing at that moment," Brandt says. "We networked the information on a dashboard in the meeting planners' office, which updated as the survey was taken."

This gave the planners information to respond to immediate issues versus having to wait to learn until after the event.

"Meeting planners need to adopt the ever-advancing technology in order to stay relevant, maximize ROI and provide great experiences for attendees."

Kathryn Kosmidis, Director, Marketing + Growth
SummitSync, New York, NY

"It's a simple solution to an age-old process, but it put the planners in a better position to enhance the meeting experience for attendees real-time versus the next time," Brandt says.

As an independent meetings technology analyst, Ball does not publicly endorse any meetings technology product. Rather, he tracks more than 100 mobile event apps. Some of the major players include Quickmobile, DoubleDutch, CrowdCompass, EventMobi, CoreApps, ATIV Event Pilot.



At the Gartner ITXpo Symposium, etech introduced live attendee surveys via strategically placed digital kiosks.

Credit: etech

"There many more not mentioned that provide excellent options as well," Ball says. "In addition, wearables, specifically wearable beacons, can provide a goldmine of data on the attendee journey for the attendee, the exhibitor and the meeting planner."

Making It Virtual

For meeting planners and other executives orchestrating meetings, incorporating a virtual reality (VR) experience allows them to take their attendees into a different world and make their points not only by outlining them, but showing them firsthand.

Planners who select a venue by way of a VR or 360-degree experience are ensuring satisfaction because they have a much clearer vision of what the venue will be like after viewing it virtually.

While the full, practical application of

augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality is still to be realized, the major tech companies (Facebook, Apple, Google, Microsoft) have invested billions in development, and the industry is waiting to see the major fruits of their labor.

"In VR, on a limited, neonatal basis, we are already seeing virtual site inspections, virtual exhibit booth design, booth engagement technology, meeting room design technology, and attendance at events — such as the NBA's streaming to China," Ball says. "AR will have major impacts. This will, at first, be through mobile phones. For example, look for a significant development with the release of the new iPhone, but eventually with AR glasses — an unobtrusive, stylish version of Google Glass."

For CMPs, it's all about peace of mind — knowing what they'll be walking into even if they've never been able to visit in person. Attendees who take part in a demonstration will benefit from that added excitement that comes with full immersion.

Gordon Meyer, director of marketing at YouVisit, an immersive technology company powered by Aria, a leading enterprise platform that enables brands and organizations to engage and convert audiences through interactive 360-degree experiences, says the technologies that most impact meetings are the ones that make them better. Virtual reality is no different. VR and interactive technologies are opening the door for better, more memorable experiences.

"Meeting planners are using VR to make better venue choices," Meyer says. "And meeting runners are using it to better convey content and ideas."

The VR and interactive experiences are changing meetings in two ways:

First, for venues, 360-degree experi-

ences showcase their spaces in ways they never could before. Meeting planners, after having taken virtual tours, can perfectly visualize what the experience will be like when they arrive on-site. It takes the guesswork out of planning and raises the comfort level for everyone involved.

Second, some of YouVisit's corporate clients are using VR experiences as central tools in their meetings and presentations. They enable a much more vivid and memorable presentation than PowerPoints.

"Some clients hand out headsets in their meetings and guide participants through a VR experience," Meyer says. "This works great for smaller meetings as well as huge events like trade shows."

The biggest mistake Meyer sees is when companies invest in shooting 360-degree video without opting to build in enough interactivity.

"Interactivity is the key to immersive technology. It's not just a matter of letting viewers look all around them, you have to give them things to do and explore if you want to keep their attention," Meyer says. "The more interactivity you build in, the better your conversion rates, plain and simple."

Embracing Technology

Meeting planners need to consider using technology to improve attendee engagement and satisfaction because technology, when used properly, saves time and money, improves efficiency, improves attendee services and satisfac-



The potential uses of virtual reality were introduced to attendees at PATA Travel Mart 2017 in Macao.

Credit: Pacific Asia Travel Association

tion, and provides much better analytics. Quite simply, it helps all parties involved.

As with any new innovation, there are inherent problems that arise with each proposed technology being used. The most common problem that Ball is seeing these days is a lack of adoption by the attendees — often due to a lack of promotion.

“For mobile apps, for example, meeting hosts should promote the app in advance, and encourage use onsite with signage and announcements, especially noting the benefits for the attendee,” Ball says. “Also, for widespread adoption, good quality Wi-Fi must be provided — especially for encouraging the interactive components of the apps.”

And the larger the event, the greater need and use of a wide range of event planning and attendee engagement technologies. That said, even small meetings can be improved with the proper use of technologies including an event app.

“In this smartphone-centric world, it is faster and more convenient to interact with the app than to deal with printing, shipping and distributing paper,” Ball says. “Mobile polling can be of great help for small meetings. Social media tools, surveys, message tools, social Q&A all come at cost-effective prices even for small events.”

We are all enamored by technology



“Interactivity is the key to immersive technology. The more interactivity you build in, the better your conversion rates, plain and simple.”

Gordon Meyer, Director of Marketing
YouVisit, Brooklyn, NY

and the impact it has had on our lives, especially within the meeting and event industry, where there are hundreds of products and applications from which to choose. The top things Brandt recommends to planners eager to create the right technology strategy for their events include:

- Make sure your “trusted technology advisor” has visited and understands your event’s purpose, your vendors and culture, and the way things are currently done.
- Technology partners should be part of the overall strategic planning process (along with all of your key partners) from the very beginning. Do not wait to pull them into planning at the end of your process. Relationships and handoffs with your team and other vendors are critical.
- Planners should make sure their technology partners provide adequate training and onboarding to their team, as well as attendees, with regard to the technology they are using.
- Meeting organizers must be willing to change the way things have always been done. This means changing vendors, your team’s roles, and responsibilities and taking risks.

Down the Road

As Kosmides stresses, if attendees are engaged, CMPs are doing their job right. Does event technology have to be the only way CMPs can drive attendee engagement? Of course not, but utilizing technology can provide unique experiences to the attendees, provide deeper learning, and create stronger connections between attendees which, in return, will make them want to return to the event next year.

One of the most important things

to remember when using technology to drive engagement is adoption rate. “Some people are early adopters and might love the technology and be really engaged, but if you as a CMP can’t spread that feeling across the majority of attendees, then it could be a waste of time and resources,” Kosmides says.

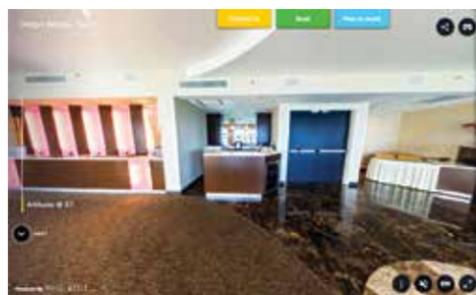
And remember, events likely will change more in the next five years, than in the past 15 due to technology.

“Meetings incorporating VR are only going to improve,” Meyer says. “Almost anything you can think of will soon be possible. It’s a very exciting time.”

Companies will be able to integrate VR elements more seamlessly into their events or hold entire meetings in virtual reality. Members of YouVisit’s internal development team already do this, and as the technology improves it will scale dramatically.

Ball predicts that AR and VR will blossom; analytics tools will help improve future events; integration among software products will improve — making it easy to mix and match your event tech deck; wearables will increase in all types (including beacons, bands and AR glasses); onsite registration will be automated; and networking will become much easier and more effective.

“Really incorporating technology into an event marketing strategy is a different beast. Knowing when and where to invest time and resources is proving challenging for teams of all sizes,” Kosmides says. “Whether you host, attend or sponsor events, investing in your event marketing stack is crucial, and there is new technology coming out every day it feels like. Use resources like G2Crowd and other software review sites to make sure you’re getting what you need to make your team successful.” **C&IT**



Virtual reality used for impact in meeting spaces designed by immersive tech company YouVisit.

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Healthy, Happy Attendees Are More Engaged and Productive

By Shelley Seale

Companies, insurance providers and other organizations are taking steps to improve employee productivity, health, resilience and satisfaction. This not only results in healthier employees, but also happier ones — both of which are extremely beneficial to the organization.

The *American Journal of Health Promotion* conducted a review in 2012, which found that companies with wellness benefits had 25 percent lower sick leave, workers compensation claims, and health and disability insurance costs. Still, fewer than 10 percent of companies nationwide offer a formal, comprehensive wellness program.

A study by the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) found that with extra budgeting available, meeting planners are optimistic about their ability to transform meetings to be “very healthy”

A chance for relaxation: Hilton’s Meet with Purpose Puppies & Ice Cream event at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas, Texas.





Credits: Hilton

Hilton's Meet With Purpose Program, offered at 275 of its properties, provides meeting attendees options such as Puppies & Ice Cream for relaxation during breaks.

or “mostly healthy” — a considerable shift from their standard meetings. But while most companies report being invested in wellness and sustainability, with wellness programs in place for employees, that foundation is not translating to a similarly strong focus when it comes to meetings — either in design, policy or budgets.

While it might seem like a no-brainer to offer benefits that are a win-win situation for both employee and company, many firms simply don't know where to begin, or feel it is too complex or overwhelming to undertake.

A corporate retreat, team meeting or other offsite organizational event can be the perfect setting in which to incorporate such activities, and begin introducing employees to the overall human resources program. And, they are also a great way to break the ice among team members who work in silos; encourage relationship-building; ease the stress of a convention environment or sitting in presentations all day; and work to increase alertness, concentration and retention of the business at hand.

Part of the Corporate Culture

Fitbit is a brand closely identified with staying fit these days, so it's no surprise that the company itself incorporates wellness habits into every aspect of its culture — including team events.

“Wellness plays a part of Fitbit employees' everyday life,” says Amy McDonough, Fitbit's SVP of strategy and

operations. “So while wellness activities have of course been included in specific retreats and events, that is an extension of what we do every day.”

Some of the team events organized by Fitbit Health Solutions for its employees include fun runs and sports leagues. Staff members also are invited to help develop new products; for example, employees tested a new, guided breathing device called Relax prior to its launch.

Staying Fit on the Road

In fact, most people who attend meetings for work consider themselves active and healthy in their daily lives. Yet, all that changes when their normal routine goes out the window. According to a recent global survey by Hilton, more than half of meeting attendees admit that they don't maintain their exercise regimen or healthy eating habits when on the road for work events.

“The typical meeting attendee is eating healthier and exercising more frequently, and wants to maintain this lifestyle while traveling for business,” says Andrew Flack, vice president regional marketing and eCommerce Americas at Hilton.

To that end, more and more hotels, event spaces and meeting planners are incorporating these needs into the programs. At Hilton, for example, the “Meet With Purpose” program offers balanced meal menus for events at many of their hotels, paired with instructor-led exercise and activity breaks to spark

creativity, encourage attendee networking and give attendees that much-desired workout.

Some of these pairings include Yoga & Yogurt (an energizing morning yoga session followed by a yogurt breakfast); Flex Power (a 25-minute, gentle instructor-led workout routine with a healthful breakfast or midmorning snack); and Meditative Moment (a 10-minute meditation session focused on stress relief, with a lean protein meal and veggie or fruit smoothie).

“Expanding Meet With Purpose and offering health and wellness menus to 40-plus of our U.S. hotels reiterates our commitment to partnering with meeting professionals, to improving attendee satisfaction and making a real impact in the industry,” Flack added.

Resort Getaways

Retreats provide the perfect setting for companies to build in health-focused activities. One nonprofit organization booked The Ranch, a healthy lifestyle company operating two acclaimed fitness resorts in California, for back-to-back events for their team and top donors.

The nonprofit was a client of Ovation Travel, which planned the retreat. “They bonded over long hikes and strenuous workouts, to build stronger relationships and raise over \$1 million in additional donations,” says president Jack Ezon. He measures the positive impact of such experiences with the fact that

every group he has ever booked at the Ranch has rebooked the following year.

The two Ranch resorts, The Ranch Malibu and The Ranch 4.0 at Four Seasons Westlake Village, are sometimes billed as “luxury boot camps.” Their signature program, which includes hiking, rest, strength conditioning, massages and yoga, is customized for each corporate group. These are carefully designed to not only promote wellness and health, but also to build strong relationships between employees and their employers.

“I believe we have seen a marked interest from corporate and private groups because we offer a unique experience that naturally lends itself to teambuilding, camaraderie, and mental and physical detoxification,” says Alex Glasscock, CEO and founder of The Ranch Malibu. “We designed three custom group packages with the intention of promoting a healthy and balanced lifestyle on an individual level, along with supporting a positive group dynamic both during and after the program.”

Depending on the destination of a corporate retreat, teams also can build local cultural offerings into their activities for a refreshing, unique experience.

On the island of Maui, the Travaasa Hana resort organizes some truly Hawaiian experiences for corporate groups, such as outrigger canoeing, spear throwing, lei making, or fishing with nets and bamboo poles. When colleagues are learning something new — along with the laughs that usually come with picking up such different, out-of-the-box skills — they have a greater opportunity for bonding in a completely different way than they do in the office.

More hotels nowadays are injecting wellness into meeting breaks. Just to name a few:

Hyatt Regency St. Louis at The Arch just introduced a new yoga break option for meetings and groups. Meeting planners can choose to add a yoga session to their program to refresh their minds and elevate their experience.

The Ritz-Carlton, Cleveland's Apple a Day Break takes advantage of the nutritional profile of Ohio apples, full of

Hotel Brand Programs

MGM and Marriott: Stay Well Meetings

With support from world-renowned wellness guru Deepak Chopra and nutritional direction from Cleveland Clinic, Stay Well Meetings offer a comprehensive wellness meetings experience featuring premier meeting spaces, state-of-the-art air purification, energizing lighting, nutritious menu options, soothing aromatherapy and other wellness features to help enhance productivity. <http://staywellrooms.com/meetings>

Hilton's Meet With Purpose

Mindful Meeting, Mindful Eating and Mindful Being are the components that make up the Meet With Purpose program, which aims to provide social, responsible and healthier options for meetings and events. Mindful Meeting centers on a waste and resource tracking system; Mindful Eating, balanced menus and light activities; and Mindful Being, uplifting meeting activities. There are two Wow Certified events — Yoga & Yogurt and Puppies & Ice Cream. The Meet With Purpose program is offered at 275 Hilton hotels. Hilton also recently launched Five Feet to Fitness, an in-room wellness concept that brings more than 11 different fitness equipment and accessory options into the hotel room. www.meetwithpurpose.com

Hyatt's Be Well

Hyatt and Be Well by Dr. Frank Lipman, an internationally recognized pioneer in integrative and functional medicine, have collaborated to help make it easier for guests to continue their health routines, or try new ones, on the road. Guests at participating hotels will experience healthy refreshments at arrival, curated in-room amenities, increased fitness offerings, expanded menu options and nutritious to-go alternatives. <https://meetings.hyatt.com>

phytonutrients and antioxidants, and it then adds an element of fun for guests experiencing conference fatigue.

The Hyatt Regency Indian Wells Resort & Spa's Agua Serena Spa offers mini-aromatherapy treatments during meeting breaks customized to the individual needs such as stress relief and clarity.

Physical and Psychological Well-being

As Glasscock pointed out, keeping employees healthy not only affects their physical wellness, but their emotional well-being as well — and has become a high priority for many meet-



Credit: Hilton Worldwide

Yoga & Yogurt at New York Hilton Midtown.



Fitbit employees ran the San Francisco Marathon. Credit: Fitbit

Their programs include yoga and daily meditation sessions, as well as a wide variety of workshops and spa treatments — combining the healing arts of the East with the best in modern Western medicine.

Mindfulness

According to the American Psychological Association, mindfulness can improve cognition, increase focus and boost productivity. With world-renowned holistic physicians Deepak Chopra and David Simon behind The Chopra Center, the retreats offered at Omni La Costa have drawn global law firms, national restaurant and retail brands, and entertainment/talent agencies.

The intimate sanctuary, named the top luxury spa in San Diego by *Discover SD* magazine, draws on cutting-edge research from top health experts and physicians in behavioral health, nutrition and fitness.

“Beyond the 110,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meetings and event space, companies bring their teams to Omni La Costa because of the resources and amenities we offer to help them enrich their employees’ lives outside of a corporate environment,” says Patsy Bock, director of sales and marketing at the resort. “The teams that encourage partici-

pation in the vast array of wellness activities provided by our award-winning spa, championship golf courses and the world-renowned Chopra Center located at the resort, all leave with something tangible they can incorporate into their everyday lives. While golf and spa treatments remain popular options, attendees are starting look for a broader approach to recreation and wellness.”

IMEX recognizes this tilt in favor of holistic wellness at its industry trade shows, offering a Be Well Lounge sponsored by Hilton Worldwide. Mindfulness trainer Lee Papa and her expert team, who believe that business and mindfulness go hand in hand, offer regular sessions in the lounge on yoga, mindfulness and meditation.

Puppy Love

Research studies have shown that people with pets have lower rates of stress, obesity, cholesterol and high blood pressure — and they are just a lot of fun. At its last annual educational conference for clients and partners in Texas, consulting firm Travois partnered with local nonprofit Austin Pets Alive to bring rescue puppies into the agenda.

“Attendees hear instruction on highly complex and detailed tax credit programs, which involve Excel spreadsheets,

legal jargon and flow charts,” says Eden Rensing, who plans the Travois events. “We wanted to provide them with a real break. Not just a snack and phone call break, but one that would allow them to smile and laugh and recharge for the next sessions. There were lots of hugs, puppy kisses, and photos and videos.”

When asked if they would do the puppy program again, Rensing says, “I think our clients will be mad if we don’t!”

Rensing also has incorporated other unique activities into the conferences, including a wake-up morning mile walk with Olympic Gold Medalist Billy Mills; afternoon conference room stretches; and welcome reception dance lessons. While the walk and dance lessons were hits, the stretch sessions didn’t go over so well. “Stretching in business casual attire isn’t the easiest. We learned.”

Hilton’s Meet With Purpose offers The Puppies & Ice Cream group activity, which has the dual benefit of reducing stress while helping out the community. This guaranteed feel-good, meeting break for attendees works in conjunction with local no-kill animal shelters that provide the pups and volunteer handlers. Groups have fun interacting with the animals while enjoying a special ice cream menu courtesy of the hotel catering department. Participating hotels ideally provide an outside space with a nearby entrance for pets to encounter their newfound friends. Groups can present a check to the shelter during the event in exchange for their time. Toni Zoblotsky, director of B-to-B marketing at Hilton Worldwide, who helped launch the Meeting With Purpose Program, notes that this activity sparks a spontaneous enthusiasm unlike any other. “There’s a wow factor with it,” she says and has observed that the irresistible allure of happy, wagging dogs fully engages attendees. “They’re not on their phones — except to take pictures. It’s really something to see.”

Volunteering as a Healthy Team Habit

As with having pets, studies have shown that people who do volunteer work are likely to be happier and health-

ier than those who don’t. They have lower blood pressure, live longer and experience less depression. Organizing team volunteer opportunities as part of a corporate meeting can have benefits to both employees and the community.

IMEX, for instance, debuted a new program at its 2016 trade show held in Las Vegas: Garbage Grabbers Clean Up. Meeting professionals and IMEX staff joined the Outside Las Vegas Foundation to “netwalk” through the city’s green spaces, cleaning up the walking trails and parks as they did so.

“Nature is a tonic for humans,” says Janet Sperstad, CMP, and program director of the Meeting and Event Management Degree Program at Madison College in Wisconsin. “Even a picture of nature revives a tired mind. The experience of nature doesn’t have to be real for it to have a calming, relaxing effect on us.”

Getting Started

There are many healthful improvements that can be made to company events and meetings relatively easily, by simply being aware of the decision to shift in that direction and making planning choices with intention toward that goal.

Food Choices. Choosing a menu to offer healthful food options has gotten a lot easier these days, fortunately. Most large hotels and convention centers, as well as many local meeting spaces and restaurants, provide a wide range of options and work carefully with clients to plan the menu.

Healthy cooking demonstrations while employees dine, or having informal speaker sessions on healthy living topics, are naturals to set up during these times. Meal breaks also offer a great opportunity to build in some physical movement — try a stretch session, encourage group or buddy walks during lunch breaks, provide maps to local walking trails and passes to the onsite fitness facility, if there is one.

Downtime. We all know that one of the biggest pitfalls of meetings, conventions or trade shows is the hectic pace, which can easily lead to burnout. It’s at this point that the attention and focus

of attendees wanders — and the rest of the event can be virtually lost on them.

Simply having a peaceful area for attendees to “escape” and recharge is extremely beneficial, and easy to do. It can be as formal as nap pods with noise-canceling headsets and massage therapy sessions; or as simple as setting up a calming space with low lights,



For fun and networking, dance lessons were offered at an annual educational conference for clients and partners in Texas, planned by consulting firm Travois. Credit: Travois

soothing music and a break away from the buzz of activity.

Fun. Oftentimes we underestimate the benefits of laughing and having fun together as a team — which can reap tremendous wellness benefits in and of itself. From the examples already described, such as playing with puppies and making leis, to tried-and-true team efforts such as obstacle courses and fitness challenges, think about activities that people can really enjoy together.

Google is really good at this. At their headquarters in Mountain View, California the company sponsors regular experiences that keep employees from getting in a rut, physically or mentally — part of what the company’s fresh, innovative environment is known for.

“A lot of the events they do on campus are fun and high energy,” says the care coordinator at the Google Wellness Center. “Each quarter they have themed events all around campus, from setting up ice rinks in winter inside one of the

cafés, to live music and a food festival meet and greet.”

Google also celebrated holidays with themed parties — such as The Beatles “All You Need Is Love” at Valentine’s Day — and encouraged team members to bring family members. Letting employees’ loved ones be a part of these activities is often appreciated more than companies

estimate, especially with most people’s tight schedules these days, when they’re scrambling to fit in extra personal time.

Other healthy meeting ideas that have been successfully incorporated into corporate events include:

- Onsite fitness classes.
- Meditation lounges.
- Sports event reimbursement.
- Health fairs.
- Lunch and Learn presentations.
- Provide local fitness and wellness resources and ideas.
- Invite employees to share their success stories.
- Create a Wellness “Wall of Fame.”
- Set up team challenges.

Travois provides wellness activities for its conference attendees because they enhance the experience, says Rensing. “It helps us foster relationships while everyone is having a good time. We know healthy, happy employees are more productive — better equipped to serve our clients.”

C&IT

Critical Clauses

Force Majeure, as Recent Natural Disasters Have Shown, Is Just One of Many Sticky Issues Planners Face in Today's Contract Negotiation

By Patrick Simms

The current climate, both meteorological and political, is far from stable: Hurricanes Irma, Harvey and Maria; North Korea's missile tests; and possible terror attacks have all been in the headlines.

Disruptors

For planners who review hotel contracts and draft addenda, such tragic and worrisome developments are reminders of the importance of the force majeure clause in particular. The clause has long included various types of contingencies such as acts of God, acts of terrorism, civil disorder, strikes and government travel warnings that make it impracticable or impossible to hold the meeting at the intended destination. But extra care should be taken on the details of the clause in order to minimize risk. The location of the contingency, for example, should not be limited to the location of the hotel, but also cover the point of departure for most attendees, if applicable.

"During Hurricane Harvey your event could have been taking place in Seattle where the weather was not affecting, but a significant number of attendees could have been coming out of Houston where flights were cancelled and homes destroyed, not allowing them to attend. Protect yourself from attrition and cancellation (penalties) in these scenarios," recommends Katie Muck, senior director, global meeting services for Meeting Sites Resource. The same point applies to acts of terrorism. The clause should account for those acts that occur either "in the meeting locale or the location of origin of a material number of registered attendees," advises Deborah Borak, CDS, CMM, SMMC, vice president/team director for Conference Direct.

Another aspect of natural disas-

up-to-date information from the hotel and city and be able to communicate that to attendees."

Market Forces

While the content of the force majeure clause is not typically a point of debate between planner and hotelier, other contractual items tend to be more contested, such as rates, concessions and attrition policy. The seller's market in many first- and second-tier cities continues to make many hoteliers less flexible on these terms. "I am absolutely encountering a seller's market in first-tier and some second-tier cities due to demand," Muck observes. "The majority of new hotel builds have been in the select/limited service category; therefore, there is still a lack of function space, especially when it comes to

manager with Husch Blackwell LLP. "It's really become important to understand where the value for each (party) is, in order to create a negotiation that is going to work best for both parties."

Open Dialogue

Hoy begins negotiations by outlining all of her group's needs in terms of pricing and concessions, and then seeing where the sales rep can accommodate those needs. "Maybe they'll come back with, 'I'm flexible on parking but not on internet fees.' If what they come back with is something that works for me and for our budget, then we move to the next step with the contract," says Hoy. "I find that as long as it's an open dialogue and we're in it for a positive outcome together, then it usually works out."

"Many organizations are now dealing with...whether they can **hold their event** or if they need to cancel. This can be challenging."



Deborah Borak, CDS, CMM, SMMC

Vice President/Team Director, Conference Direct, Littleton, CO

ters and other potentially dangerous events is that they don't always make it impossible or commercially impractical to hold a meeting, but they may make attendees wary about traveling. This can put the host organization in a difficult situation. "Many organizations are now dealing with hurricanes in Texas and Florida, and are having to navigate (the issue of) whether they can hold their event or if they need to cancel. This can be challenging if the hotel is open, but attendees think it is not safe to travel to the area," Borak explains. "If the hotel is open and the airport in that city is operating and attendees can make it, force majeure does not apply. The organization should have a plan on how to get

large meetings." Similarly, Kim Hentges, CMP, senior planner, events and incentives with Lennox Industries Inc., has found that "new hotel builds are offering less meeting space per room. ...It seems finding available space is a bigger issue than actually going through the contract negotiation process."

Limited growth in meeting space, combined with rising competition for that space among groups, does not bode well for planners seeking ideal contractual terms. And the seller's market isn't limited to first-tier cities and popular second-tier cities such as Austin, Texas. "Even in Kansas City (Missouri) where I'm located your negotiating power as an event planner seems to be less," notes Shana Hoy, CMP, event

While it seems commonsensical to engage in a such conversation toward reaching an agreement, Muck has found that "Overall, the sales process has become more transactional vs. conversational. In the compressed market we face, together we need to figure out a better way to make it happen and talk to one another to get a yes on the RFP."

The dialogue is important so that the sales rep can truly understand the group's value proposition and advocate it to the revenue manager, Muck says. "Oftentimes, the revenue management team is giving the sales staff parameters to work within. However, if the sales manager is armed with the information from the customer first, they



“You should **never pay more** for cancelling than you would have spent to execute the program.”

Kim Hentges, CMP

Senior Planner, Events and Incentives, Lennox Industries Inc., Richardson, TX

have the opportunity to get a yes for the client more often.”

Event History

Of course, the planner himself needs to be clear on the value of the group’s business in order to convey that to the rep. Being armed with key supporting data — including past and anticipated spend on guest rooms, F&B, AV, recreation and other items — is especially critical when negotiating in today’s market. “We keep good records of our event history,” says Thais Toro, MBA, event manager with Cox Automotive. “I like to know my numbers so I can create confidence” in the hotelier. The confidence instilled in the sales rep can lead to more favorable concessions than they would otherwise allow. Muck explains, “When you provide the supplier with the value of the program and the expectation of some of the prioritized concessions for the client before rate is quoted, you are more apt to receive those concessions.”

Toro’s approach has even yielded

success in the highly competitive market of Las Vegas, where she once convinced a hotel sales rep to match her contracted room rate to any lower room rate subsequently advertised by the hotel. The contract included a clause stipulating that “if for any reason after our event is booked the hotel lowers the rate in any promotion, they will be willing to match that with ours,” she says. Her argument was that her company and she as a planner would not look good in the eyes of attendees if they see an advertised room rate that is lower than the rate being paid for the meeting. Per the clause, the hotelier indeed lowered the group’s rate to match a promoted rate during the dates of the offer.

Shocked by Electrical Outlet Charges?

Room rate is one of many cost centers that planners have to manage in an atmosphere where hoteliers are often raising surcharges and adding new ones. “Contracts are becoming increas-

ingly long due to having to cover every type of scenario or any type of charge,” Borak observes. She gives a telling example: “The latest charge I am encountering is for electrical outlets. One would think that if there is an outlet in a meeting room, it is available for use. (But) if a group needs power strips, they not only have to pay for the strips, but the power itself. One client I work with had (attendees) in a breakout, and two people plugged their phones into the wall outlets to charge them. The conference service manager came along and unplugged the phones and told the planner they had not paid for power so the outlets could not be used. This is something that planners will need to keep an eye on as some hotels are utilizing this additional revenue stream.”

Service Charges and Taxes

Another growing cost center is service charges and taxes. According to Hoy, they can comprise 35 percent or more of the bill, particularly in first-tier markets such as New York City. “That re-



“We **keep good records** of our event history. I like to know my numbers so I can create confidence (in the hotelier).”

Thais Toro, MBA

Event Manager, Cox Automotive, Atlanta, GA



“Together we need to figure out a better way to make it happen and talk to one another to get a **yes on the RFP.**”

Katie Muck

Senior Director, Global Meeting Services, Meeting Sites Resource, Omaha, NE

ally takes a chunk out of your budget when you’re looking at room rate or your F&B,” she notes, and looks to offset that expense with reduced room rental fees or setup fees, or a reduced rate on banquet menus or specialty menus.

“One of the things I’ve started doing is building menu pricing into the contract, so I know when I’m budgeting for the event what those fees and what those numbers are going to look like,” she says. Some hoteliers have also been adding portage and house-keeping fees on the front end, as well as service charges in addition to labor charges for AV. “Ultimately, the services you are receiving should be included in

the labor charge, and you should not be paying both,” Muck maintains.

Negotiable Items

Typically negotiable charges include internet and resort fees. “Most hotels have Wi-Fi as part of their business, so I don’t see why they need to charge for it,” Toro reasons. She also observes that resort fees have been on the rise, and tries to have them reduced or waived, depending on the nature of the meeting. “If it’s a business meeting, people are not going to be at the pool, and they don’t read the newspaper (delivered to their door). So I try to explain that I’m not going to pay (a fee for such

amenities), and explain that there are other ways I’m going to bring profit to your business. In most cases, if they don’t remove the fee, they reduce it,” she relates. As always, it’s key to emphasize the group’s value to the hotel in order to try to get a concession on a particular fee. A case for complimentary outdoor setup, for example, may be made based on the volume of F&B revenue the group will bring through outdoor events.

Once the agreed-upon surcharges and fees have been specified in the contract, Hentges suggests it is prudent to include verbiage such as the following in order to guarantee transparency: “No additional charges not specified in this Agreement will be incurred by Group for work performed and/or services provided without written consent from an authorized representative of the Group.”

Cancellation Penalties

As discussed above, a comprehensive force majeure clause is not just prudent but necessary, especially in this day and age. But when the clause does not apply to a cancellation, the penalty terms go into effect, and here some hotels appear to be taking advantage of favorable market conditions to take a harder line. “Some clauses now have cancellation based on revenue instead of profit, and require cancellation (penalties) on F&B as far as a year or two out,” Borak says. Both have been points of contention among planners.

Muck urges that groups should only be penalized for the hotel’s “true losses.”

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"If the hotel wants to go after all their losses for the cancelled event, then a mitigated damages-based contract where losses are calculated afterward would address this." As to penalizing for F&B losses, the cancellation clause should be "more related to the room block commitment," Hentges argues. "Food & beverage should only be included closer to the program dates." Regarding rebook and resell clauses, both of which can amortize the cancellation penalty, Muck sees many hoteliers accepting one or the other, but not both. "Often the hotel is in such a compressed market they will not accept either one," she adds.

Whatever amount of the hotel's lost revenue a group is ultimately liable for in the event of cancellation, the hotelier should not make more money via

attrition to be calculated daily instead of the cumulatively, which can be to the group's disadvantage. Fortunately, this requirement appears not to be widespread; Borak indicates that she has encountered it mainly at independent properties.

Relationships

Fortunately, the platitude that hotels in seller's markets are difficult negotiating partners has many exceptions. The real negotiating partner is the particular sales rep, who can be convinced of a given meeting group's value proposition. A longtime relationship with that rep, where he or she has seen the group perform well on its room block, exceed F&B minimums and more, is of course ideal. But sales reps can and do change positions, and

or her directly on something that is not approved, and why."

A second recourse is the local CVB. "Include them in the process from the beginning," she suggests. "The CVB rep will not negotiate the contract, but can help the hotel understand the value of the business being booked, especially if the group books the city a lot and uses a variety of hotels in that city."

As a third recourse, the planner who has reached an impasse on some contractual item might schedule a meeting or conference call with a "behind the scenes" hotel staff member who can provide information that may resolve the issue. "For instance, when groups are trying to negotiate food and beverage prices or determine meals, talking to the chef directly can be a win-win for the group. The chef can advocate



"One of the things I've started doing is building **menu pricing** into the contract ... so I know what those numbers are going to look like."

Shana Hoy, CMP

Event Manager, Husch Blackwell, Kansas City, MO

cancellation than it would have made if the group had held the event. "The cancellation clause maximum should (take into account) the attrition allotment and never equal 100 percent of the aggregate contracted guest room and food & beverage commitment," Hentges advises. "You should never pay more for cancelling than you would have spent to execute the program."

The average attrition allotment, however, tends not to be as large as it was during the buyer's market. "We try to negotiate at least an 80 percent attrition clause, but not all hotels are willing to do that," Hoy says. "I'm starting to see 10 and 15 percent (allowable attrition) as opposed to 20 percent." On top of that, some properties are requiring

a planner can be left feeling like the wheel must be reinvented with a new rep. If that should happen, it is often good strategy to copy the hotel's national sales office on email communications with the new property rep. "We have found that keeping our national sales office informed from the beginning and throughout the entire process is beneficial in case we come to a place where the negotiations stall for any reason," says Hentges.

In a similar vein, if a planner feels he or she is being "taken advantage of," Borak recommends asking to speak with the director of sales. "Since the director is typically the one that the sales rep is passing things by and getting approval from, it can be helpful to hear from him

for what they need, and showcase other options that are not in the catering menus," Borak says.

Room rate negotiations, securing balanced attrition/cancellation terms, and keeping surcharges and fees in check are all challenges that have been exacerbated by the seller's market. When a particular property sales rep is not making it easier to meet those challenges, it behooves a planner to look to others on the supplier side that can help pave the way to an agreement, whether a national sales rep, CVB or property representatives outside of the sales office. Tight market conditions call for more patience and resourcefulness before deciding that a property has been given its fair shake. **C&IT**

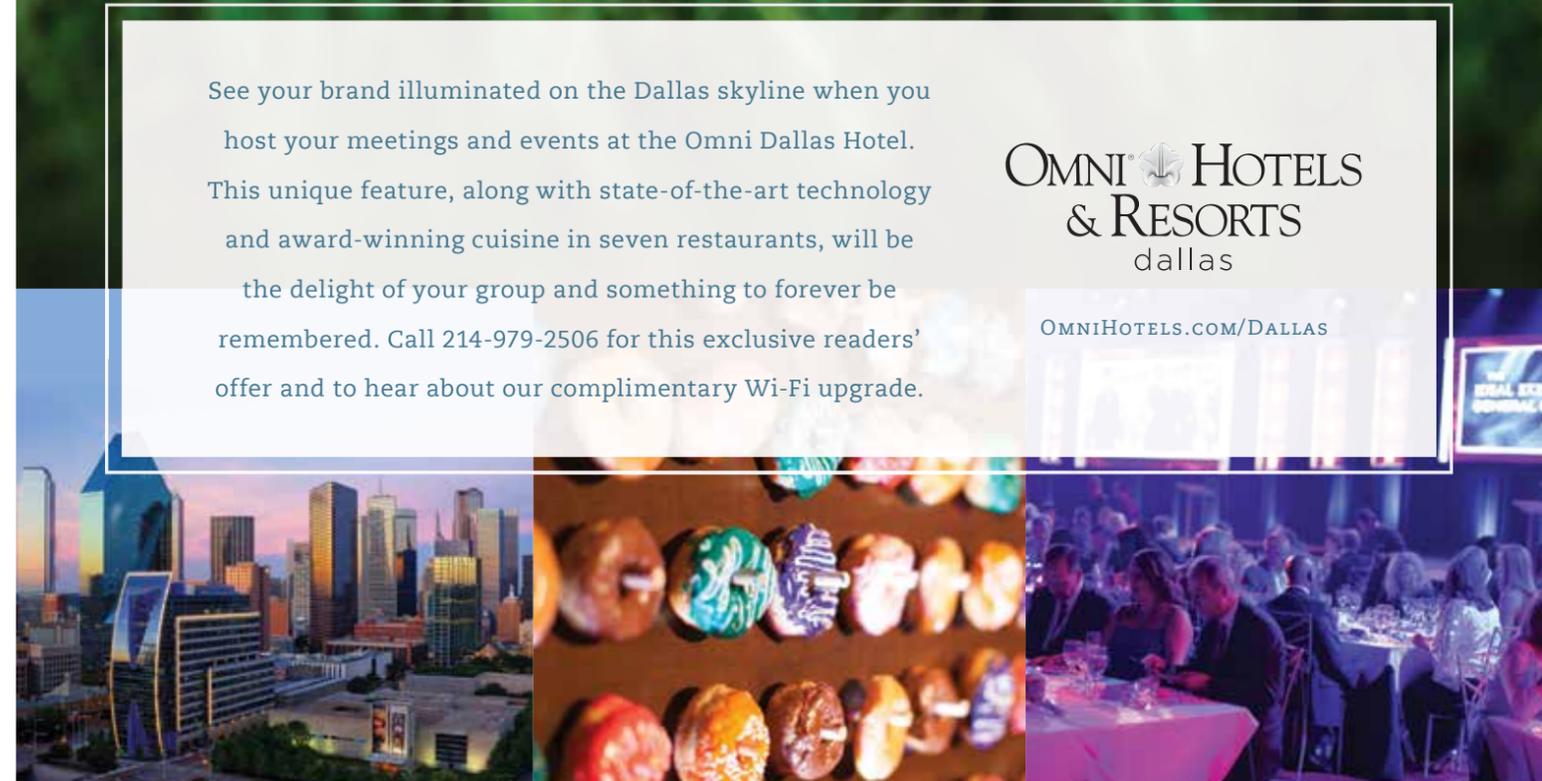
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Destination



A successful closing night event at Mardi Gras World ended McKesson's annual ideaShare conference, held at the convention center.

New Orleans

Let the Good Times Roll — and Get Business Done

By John Buchanan

It's no accident that New Orleans is among the most popular and beloved major meeting destinations in the U.S. Year after year, the Crescent City, so named because of its location on the Mississippi River, draws enthusiastic attendees from across the U.S. to meetings large and small. And its reputation for letting the good times roll invariably precedes their arrival.

"New Orleans is a city that is attractive to a vast majority of Americans," says Bob Whittemore, manager, marketing campaigns, at St. Louis-based Aclara, which supplies hardware and software to public utilities. Last April, the company hosted its annual AclaraConnect customer and industry conference for 1,000 attendees in the Crescent City.

"It scores very highly in meeting and convention magazines as a desirable destination," says Whittemore, who used the New Orleans Marriott as his hotel. "So those realities do a lot of our work as planners up front when it comes to using New Orleans as a destination. It's also easy to get to because the airlift is

good. And the city offers top-notch dining and entertainment. So for us, that means the city checks off all the boxes we need to make it work for us."

The natural and strong appeal of New Orleans is rendered even more important by the fact that AclaraConnect's attendees come to the meeting voluntarily and pay their own way. "Even more important than that, for us, is that we compete with other conferences in our industry," Whittemore says. "So we have to deliver a strong value proposition in addition to an appealing destination. And New Orleans did that for us."

The result? Aclara tied its all-time attendance record. Not all companies are so easily attracted to New Orleans. Some harbor concerns about its randy reputation.

Although pharmaceutical supplier McKesson had used New Orleans successfully for a meeting more than two decades ago, it had long been removed from consideration because of management concerns that its reputation as "Party Central" meant it was not a family-friendly destination, explains manager of events marketing Ashley Fisher, who relocated to New Orleans two years ago from the company's San Francisco headquarters.

"So when I was living in San Francisco and planning this meeting five years ago," Fisher says, "I contacted family members in New Orleans and said, 'I need you to come up fast with a list of family-friendly things to do in town.' And once I had that information and showed it to people, they realized New Orleans would be an exciting destination that actually was very family-friendly."

"The feedback we got on the Mardi Gras World event was the most positive we got on anything we did."

**Ashley Fisher, Mgr., Event Marketing
McKesson, New Orleans, LA**



"We have to deliver a strong value proposition in addition to an appealing destination. And New Orleans did that for us."

**Bob Whittemore, Manager, Marketing Campaigns
Aclara, St. Louis, MO**

The Infrastructure Advantage

Because New Orleans is one of the top destinations in the country for citywide association conventions that draw thousands of attendees to a single event, its meeting infrastructure is second to none, Banasch notes. "And because of our stature as a major destination, there is perpetual re-investment in our infrastructure, like hotels. That means that all of our hotels are constantly doing whatever it takes to remain fresh and on top of their game."

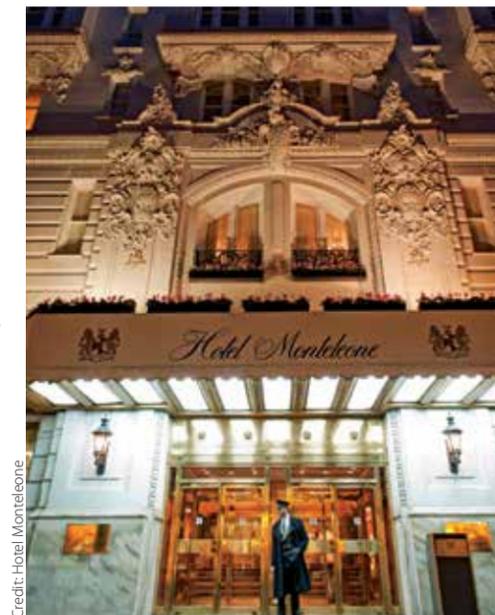
Although the city boasts a vast and diverse collection of hotels, from small properties to major convention hotels, its most well-known and typically considered properties include the New Orleans Marriott, JW Marriott New Orleans, Hilton New Orleans Riverside, Sheraton New Orleans, Hyatt Regency New Orleans, Loews New Orleans and The Roosevelt New Orleans, a Waldorf-Astoria hotel.

The two properties most often used in the French Quarter are the Royal Sonesta and the Hotel Mon-

In July, McKesson hosted its annual ideaShare conference for independent retail pharmacy owners in New Orleans — and attracted more than 5,000 attendees, more than doubling its previous attendance record. That success cannot be solely credited to the destination, but the appeal of the city played a major role, says Fisher, who used the Hilton New Orleans Riverside and Sheraton New Orleans as her co-headquarters hotels.

Cara Banasch, MBA, senior vice president of business development and strategy at the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau, is not at all surprised to learn of the initial concerns McKesson management held about the destination not being suitable for family-oriented meetings. "We hear that concern all the time," Banasch says. "That's one of the core conversations we have with planners. And it's true that for most people, at least at first glance, New Orleans appears to be an 'adult' destination. But the truth is, once you realize all the things we offer, in addition to the French Quarter and Bourbon Street, you realize we are a wonderful family destination that's a lot of fun. We just have to educate people."

What makes New Orleans truly special as a destination, Banasch says, is that it is a place of authentic and unique history, culture and character. "There is no other place like it in North America," she says. "Our food, our music, our architecture, our history, our culture, our people — all of those things make us a one-of-a-kind place. So when it comes to meetings, what happens is that once attendees have been here and experienced the city, they go home realizing they have experienced something very special that you can't find anywhere else."



Hotel Monteleone is a landmark noted for its historical connections to noted American writers.

teleone, a landmark noted for its historical connections to renowned writers including Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner and Truman Capote. "The Monteleone is a gem," Banasch says.

The city's newest properties are the Ace Hotel New Orleans, located in the Warehouse District, and the NOPSI Hotel New Orleans, which is operated by Salamander Hotels & Resorts and located in an old utility building listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The other big news in New Orleans at the moment is the new \$807 million replacement terminal underway at Louis Armstrong International Airport. Due for completion in Oc-

tober of next year, it is being hailed as the most important project in the city since construction of the New Orleans Superdome in 1975.

Yet another factor in the ever-growing popularity of New Orleans as a meeting destination is its globally celebrated dining scene. Although best known for its Cajun-Creole landmarks such as Antoine's, Arnaud's and Galatoires, which have all been around for at least 100 years and have since been joined by equally praised newer establishments such as Commander's Palace, where celebrity chefs Emeril Lagasse and the late Paul Prudhomme got their starts.



Raising Cane's River Center.

Baton Rouge

Although New Orleans is by far the state's best known meeting destination, Louisiana offers a pair of other options that share the same unique characteristics of local flair and cuisine.

Baton Rouge, the state capital, is just an hour from New Orleans and is the home to Louisiana State University (LSU).

Residents of Baton Rouge make the argument that it is every bit as much an exemplar of Louisiana history, architecture, culture and cuisine as its better known big sister to the south.

Its three primary downtown meeting hotels are the Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Center, the Hampton Inn & Suites Baton Rouge Downtown, and the Hotel Indigo Baton Rouge Downtown Riverfront. Located near the LSU campus is The Cook Hotel & Conference Center at LSU.

The city's primary meeting-and-convention venue, located on the banks of the Mississippi River, is Raising Cane's River Center, which features 200,000 sf of new and renovated space, including a 70,000-sf exhibition hall that can be combined with an adjacent arena for a total of more than 100,000 sf of contiguous exhibit space, as well as 17 breakout rooms. The complex also includes the Theatre for the Performing Arts.

The city's most popular offsite venues are its array of plantations, which range from intimate to sprawling, each one with a unique history and distinct ambience. —JB



The Shreveport Convention Center is connected to the Hilton.

Shreveport-Bossier City

Located in northwestern Louisiana is Shreveport-Bossier City, which offers more than 11,000 hotel rooms and the Shreveport Convention Center, built in 2007 and managed by SMG.

"The convention center is attached to a 313-room, full-service Hilton Shreveport Hotel that opened at the same time as the convention center," says David Bradley, vice president of sales and services at the Shreveport-Bossier City Convention & Tourist Bureau.

The destination specializes in meetings of between 100 and 500 attendees. "And we're known as one of the best values anywhere for meetings in that range," Bradley says. "We are also gifted with six resort casinos and a race track casino. The largest of our casino resorts is the 660-room Horseshoe Casino Hotel. Our primary attraction is the Red River. We're located right on it. And we have a fantastic riverfront shopping and dining complex, known as the Louisiana Boardwalk, located in downtown Bossier City."

A new Eastbank dining-and-entertainment complex is now being developed in Bossier City.

The area's primary event venue is the 14,000-seat Century-Link Center arena.

For entertainment, the destination offers multiple spas and Louisiana Downs, which hosts horse racing from September to December.

A new Shreveport Aquarium will make its debut by end of the year. Shreveport-Bossier City also offers a thriving dining scene. "What really makes our dining scene special is that it consists of local restaurants," Bradley says. "And we offer something for everybody. You can get everything from homemade Cajun food to great ribs, steaks and seafood."

What really makes the area special, Bradley says, is that "we offer a small town flavor, combined with big city attributes." —JB



The iconic Commander's Palace, where celebrity chefs got their start.

"Our dining scene is constantly evolving, especially since Hurricane Katrina in 2005," Banasch says. "We now have more than 1,200 restaurants in every conceivable category. And before Katrina, we only had about 800. So our dining scene is just thriving. And it's no longer just about the old places like Antoine's or Arnaud's."

Hot new restaurants recently opened include Trinity, a new Emeril Lagasse eatery called Meril's, and Curio, located in the French Quarter and serving what it calls "American cuisine with Creole flair."

Things to Do

Just as its food scene is one of the factors that makes the city a major draw for meetings, its eclectic list of offsite venues and things to do enhances its appeal.

Even though the Aclara conference included no official offsite events, many attendees, during their free time, ventured into the French Quarter and the city's other famous neighborhoods, such as shopping and arts district Magazine Street, to experience the unique culture and flavor of the city, Whittemore says. "And on the opening day of the conference, before it officially began that evening, we did offer offsite events such as a walking food tour and a tour of the National World



Mardi Gras World Square on the Mississippi River hosts large events.



"Our food, our music, our architecture, our history, our culture, our people — all of those things make us a one-of-a-kind place."

Cara Banasch, MBA, S.V.P. Business Development & Strategy, NOCVB

War II Museum," he says. "And each of the five events we offered was well attended."

In order to take full advantage of the uniqueness of New Orleans, Fisher and her colleagues planned offsite evening events and activities throughout the city. "Two of the real highlights were an event at the National World War II Museum and our closing night party at Mardi Gras World," Fisher says.

"Once we realized the kind of attendance we were going to have for the meeting, we realized we needed to move our



The Kushner Exhibit is (WWII Museum's) newest smaller space perfect for a budget-friendly group," says Hosts Global's Tony Leggio.

closing night party to a bigger venue," Fisher says. "And Mardi Gras World was perfect. We had about 3,000 people at the party. We had live entertainment and stilt walkers greeting people, and we used the Float Den, where the Mardi Gras floats are, as a major backdrop. It was also a beautiful night, so we used the plaza alongside the river. We also staged a mini-Mardi Gras parade. We brought in all sorts of family-friendly activities like face painters and alligator handlers. Then we ended the event in the venue's ballroom with a concert. And the feedback we got on the Mardi Gras World event was the most positive we got on anything we did."

A third highlight of McKesson's meeting was a Mississippi River cruise on the historic paddle wheel boat Creole Queen, which departs from the French Quarter. Fisher did a buyout and drew 700 guests.

Tony Leggio, account executive at local destination management company Hosts Global New Orleans, stresses that in order for a meeting group to truly experience and enjoy New Orleans, they must go offsite for some events.



Credit: Shannon Brinkman

Historic Preservation Hall can host small groups for private events.

One unique and extraordinary option is Preservation Hall, an intimate and historic venue located at the heart of the French Quarter. Its mission is to preserve the culture of live New Orleans jazz, played by some of its most celebrated elders as well as a younger generation, by showcasing the world-renowned Preservation Hall Jazz Band. "What's really great about doing an event at Preservation Hall, for small groups of up to 75-80 attendees, is that it can be the start of an evening," Leggio says. "You can do a cocktail reception and concert before you then head out to a dinner somewhere else in the French Quarter."

Another unique venue Leggio likes is the Old New Orleans Mint, built in 1835, which is in the French Quarter. Today, it includes a small jazz museum in addition to its historical exhibits.

Another French Quarter venue Leggio favors is Bourbon Vieux, a private event venue on Bourbon Street, that features the largest wrought iron balcony on the central thoroughfare of Mardi Gras. "It has very much of an old New Orleans feel on the inside," Leggio says. "It's just a spectacular venue," and he adds, "You can throw beads from the balcony on the busy Bourbon Street, which is the epitome of a NOLA experience."

An outdoor venue Leggio often recommends to clients is Crescent Park, which skirts the locally beloved Faubourg-Marigny and Bywater neighborhoods. "It's right along the Mississippi River and it has a beautiful covered space, so you



"What's really great about doing an event at Preservation Hall, for small groups of up to 75-80 attendees, is that it can be the start of an evening."

Tony Leggio, Account Executive
Hosts Global New Orleans



Credit: Bourbon Vieux

Bourbon Vieux can accommodate up to 750 for corporate events.

Based on their experiences as planners, and the enthusiastic feedback they got from their attendees, both Whittemore and Fisher give high marks to New Orleans as a destination.

"A year after a meeting, no one is going to remember the food," Whittemore says. "But they are going to remember the destination if it's a good one where people have fun. And that's why New Orleans is such a successful destination and why it worked so well for us. It's fun, it's unique, and people remember it because they have a great time."

Adds Fisher, now an enthusiastic resident, "It's such a vibrant city. The food and music are great. It's very friendly. The people are great. The culture is amazing. The city is also very walkable. And there's so much to do that each attendee can create his or her own personal agenda. It's just a great destination for a meeting." **C&IT**

can do a wonderful evening along the river," Leggio says. "And for meetings, the park can be rented from the city. And it can accommodate groups from small to huge, in the thousands."

A Helpful, Professional CVB

Yet another factor in the success of New Orleans as a meeting destination is its CVB, which provides a wide range of support and attendance-building services.

"We worked very heavily with the CVB," Whittemore says. "I always work very closely with the local CVB for the Aclara-Connect event. And the New Orleans CVB was very helpful. In particular, they helped us promote the conference and build attendance. They are a very talented group."

Fisher also applauded the CVB for its role in supporting her meeting. "We worked very heavily with the CVB," she says. "For example, they were very helpful in arranging the event at Mardi Gras World. They also were very helpful in contracting the additional hotels we ended up needing. We started with three, and ended up with 12, so we definitely needed the help. The CVB also provided a concierge-style support desk for attendees in the convention center so people could make dinner reservations or book shows or find out about attractions. The CVB really did a great job."



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Destination

Orlando

The No. 1 Meetings Destination
— Through Thick and Thin

By David Swanson

When a hurricane that is forecast to be the most potentially catastrophic on record is headed for the city you've chosen as your annual meeting location, it's not hard to imagine the apprehension a planner might feel in the hours before, during and after the storm.

How Microsoft Ignite Overcame Irma

"It was tense watching all the media reports, worrying about the wonderful people that we work with, along with the residents," explains Vivian Eickhoff, CMM, event director for Microsoft Ignite. Hurricane Irma landed in Orlando on September 10, just two weeks before Microsoft's 26,000-attendee annual event was scheduled to begin at the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC).

In fact, as Irma swept through Central Florida, the National Guard, FEMA, local law enforcement, utility crews and other responders were staged at the OCCC. Six helicopters were sheltered in the convention center's North Concourse. And Microsoft Ignite's core hotel, the Hyatt Regency Orlando, opened its doors to more than 900 dogs — and their families — during the storm.

"To be honest, we should have had better plans identified before Irma," added Eickhoff, five days after the storm passed. "This was actually a great lesson in scenario-planning for the 'what if.'"

Microsoft Ignite

Learn. Connect. Explore.

The Orange County Convention Center hosted Microsoft Ignite, which attracted 26,000 attendees despite a hurricane scare two weeks prior.

"After the storm hit we waited a bit and then started to check in with folks to see how they were doing. The county and OCCC did a great job of informing us daily with quick email updates. Once the curfew was lifted and our contacts could start assessing the damage, our team at Microsoft started a punch list to determine if the show could still go on as planned."

As Eickhoff's team worked to gather intel about the condition of the city's infrastructure, Microsoft's third-party planner Experient flew in to meet with airport operations, the OCCC and core convention hotels to assess how re-

covery and clean-up operations were going. The team confirmed that drinking water, sewage treatment, power, road access and access to food would not be a problem.

"One thing we were very clear on was that if any first responders or displaced families were still in-house at the OCCC or in hotels, we did not want to displace them. Rather, we would work around them and move our folks and alter our production schedules," she said.

Getting things in shape for Microsoft Ignite was a priority: The event was projected to leave behind an economic impact of \$59 million in Orlando. It's one of only three shows that utilizes both buildings of the OCCC — 2.2 million sq ft of exhibit space.

Microsoft worked with its supplier team to verify the status of shipments, the ability to access the more than 150 semi-trucks needed to ship in gear and the availability of buses, since many were expected to be in use by FEMA elsewhere in the state. Eickhoff said it took three days after the storm to confirm that the show could go on.



"(The Orange County Convention Center planning teams) are responsive, they bring creative ideas, they're willing to help us achieve the impossible, and they are truly interested in our success."

VIVIAN EICKHOFF, CMM, Event Director
Microsoft, Redmond, WA

"I give a ton of credit to our amazing supplier team, as they quickly engaged in finding out answers and teamwork to come together." Eickhoff added that there were no communication challenges. "Teams with the OCCC were very proactive in sending updates and responding."

Orlando weathered Irma better than some Florida destinations. Fred Shea, senior vice president of convention sales and services with Visit Orlando, said the city's location in the center of the state meant wind volume was considerably less than in coastal areas.

"The winds here were under 100 mph," explained Shea. "But we were running at full capacity at our hotels, because people were evacuating to Orlando. September is not the busiest time for us, so we were lucky not to be in the middle of a big convention." In the days after Irma's passing, the teams at Visit Orlando and the OCCC worked to get the message out that Orlando was back to business as usual.

"Our role was to convey to our customers what was open, what was available and exactly what was happening," said Shea. "The hotel workers and first responders were so organized and did a very good job of communicating internally and to residents and visitors. And our customers have been terrific."

Such proactive services are one reason Orlando has been ranked by Cvent as the No. 1 destination for meetings and events in the U.S. for five out of the last six years. Eickhoff credits the city's top-notch planning teams at the OCCC — "from the sales director to the account manager" — for Orlando's success as a meeting option.

"They are responsive, they bring creative ideas, they're willing to help us achieve the impossible, and they are truly interested in our success," says Eickhoff. "The OCCC and the city work with many types of clients, from association to corporate, and I think that allows them to have a solid understanding of our needs. They are familiar with attendee flow and dealing with everything from trade shows with thousands of attendees to corporate shows with lots and lots of session meetings."

"When we were looking for a new location for Microsoft



The Microsoft Ignite expo floor at the Orange County Convention Center.

Credit: Dolan, Personike, Hubb

AN ALL-NEW PERSPECTIVE ON MEETINGS AND EVENTS

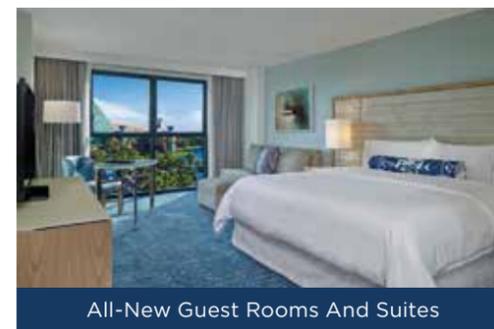


All-New Walt Disney World Dolphin Lobby Concept - Scheduled for completion in September 2017

The Walt Disney World Dolphin lobby will undergo a \$12 million re-design, the final stage of a \$140 million renovation project, the largest makeover in the resort's history. It will be completely transformed into a sleek, contemporary space featuring new food and beverage options and offer an inviting area for guests to relax or network. A recipient of the prestigious Meetings & Conventions Hall of Fame Award, the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin is a nationally respected and recognized leader in the convention resort arena. The resort offers more than 329,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, 84 meeting rooms, and 2,267 guest rooms and suites which feature the Westin Heavenly® Bed. Attendees can also relax in the luxurious Mandara Spa, indulge in one of our 17 world-class restaurants and lounges or enjoy our unique Disney Differences.



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Credits: Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort



With a total of 332,000 sf of meeting and event spaces, Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort just completed a \$140 million top-to-bottom redesign.

tendees and partners was always positive. Also, our attendees from Western Europe like the ease of flying to Orlando versus West Coast locations.”

Eickhoff says the OCCC’s space between the West and North/South Buildings allowed her team to creatively design experiences for attendees and partners. But she notes that the facility’s signage could be better. “As in many convention centers the signage is not always that helpful in directing folks. For our event, it would be ideal to have video fiber infrastructure existing across all the venues to save on lots of costs that we have to pay out for each time.”

Fifty area hotels were part of the room block for Microsoft, with the 1,641-room Hyatt Regency Orlando serving as one of the key venues. Connected to the OCCC’s West Building by a pedestrian footbridge that opened earlier this year, the Hyatt Regency was Cvent’s top-ranked meeting hotel in Orlando for 2017. The facility offers 315,000 sf of meeting space, including five pillar-free ballrooms ranging up to 55,000 sf.

Meeting Hotels and More on the Move

Of course, Orlando’s convention and meeting business normally hums along at a more predictable pace. The city has 150 meeting hotels offering a combined 4.5 million sf of meeting space. A number have renovations or expansions in the works. Among them:

In September, the Starwood-managed Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort completed a

Ignite we considered everything from event space needed, to hotel capacity, airlift, overall costs to attendees, labor costs, and dining, entertainment and shopping for attendees. Orlando met all of these needs. When we’ve had Microsoft events in Orlando in the past, the feedback from at-



Credits: Walt Disney World Parks & Resorts

A rendering of a new tower coming to Disney’s Coronado Springs Resort that will offer rooftop views of nightly fireworks shows.

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DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld (right) is nearing completion on a renovation that will almost double the meeting space and add the outdoor Palm Promenade (above).



Credits: DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld

\$140 million head-to-flipper redesign. The property, located just outside Disney's Epcot and Disney Studios theme parks, possesses more than 332,000 sf of meeting space, including 110,500 sf of contiguous convention/exhibit space. A new feature for planners is the recently added 2,800-sf Lake View Room, which boasts floor-to-ceiling windows and can be utilized for indoor-outdoor receptions. All of the resort's 2,267 guest rooms received a facelift, as did the convention space and the lobby on the Dolphin side of the hotel.

Currently under construction at Walt Disney World is a new, 500-room tower at Disney's Spanish-themed Coronado Springs Resort. A rooftop restaurant and lounge atop the tower will offer views of nightly fireworks shows at nearby theme parks, while the expansion also adds additional meeting space to the hotel's existing 220,000 sf of dedicated meeting and function space. Existing rooms are being reimaged with convention attendees in mind, and landscapes are being transformed into a series of floating gardens.

Elsewhere at Walt Disney World, an expansion of the convention center at the Yacht and Beach Club Resort will bring the total flexible meeting and event space at the resort to 100,000 sf and will now include a 16,000-sf ballroom divisible into eight breakout spaces. And Disney Springs — formerly known as Downtown Disney — has had a wholesale transformation and now features top brand shopping and an even-longer roster of dining options. Newest of these is Paddlefish, a refresh of the full-size paddle-wheel steamboat that previously housed Fulton's Crab House. The three-deck restaurant can be rented out in part or in full, hosting up to 525 guests seated, or 750 reception-style.

The 1,020-room DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld is nearing com-

pletion on a renovation that will almost double the property's flexible meeting space to more than 100,000 sf. The new Majestic Ballroom will add 20,000 sf of indoor conference facilities when it opens later this year, while the Palm Promenade adds 23,000 sf of outdoor space. The rest of the resort's meeting spaces also are being refreshed, while the spa facility has been converted into boardrooms. Also underway: an updated look for the 300 rooms in the 17-story Tower Building (the balance of the resort's rooms were renovated recently).

And locally owned Rosen Centre recently announced renovations already underway for a refresh of all guest rooms, scheduled for completion by the end of this year. The room design will have a contemporary look emphasizing the serene ambience of a spa, and will feature new pillowtop mattresses. Tech updates include multi-outlet connectivity bars in all rooms. Rosen Centre has 150,000 sf of meeting and event space, including a 35,000-sf Grand Ballroom, and the property is connected to the OCCC by a pedestrian walkway.

Rosen Shingle Creek recently refreshed all 1,501 guest rooms, redesigned the resort's championship golf course and unveiled a swank new open-air covered pavilion, per-



Rosen Centre boasts 150,000 sf of meeting and event space.

Credits: Rosen Hotels & Resorts

fect for private functions. Perhaps most important for business travelers are new recharging stations and added power outlets for increased connectivity in public spaces.

Perhaps the city's most dramatic growth has been at Universal Studios Florida, where convention and hotel space has expanded considerably in the past year. Loews Meeting Complex at Universal Orlando now encompasses 247,000 sf of convention space, including a 41,000-sf ballroom. The facility is connected to Loews Royal Pacific Resort and the year-old Loews Sapphire Falls Resort, offering a combined 2,000 rooms. Plus, Universal and Loews will unveil its sixth hotel, Aventura, in summer 2018, close to the entrance of Universal's Volcano Bay, the resort's new water theme park which opened this past summer.

A Seamless Experience

It was a site visit, before construction even began at the Loews Meeting Complex, that sold Victoria Dick, corporate event planner for Duro-Last Roofing, on scheduling the company's January 2017 National Sales Conference at the resort. The 1,200-attendee group used rooms at both Loews Sapphire Falls Resort and the adjoining Loews Royal Pacific Resort.

"We booked it before one shovel had been put into the ground," explains Dick, adding that the property was the best of six that were considered. "Our event is very heavy on meeting space with a large production element to go along

with that. The group likes to keep everything on the resort property and not use convention centers. Our organization encourages our family-owned businesses to include members of the family to attend — there are so many options with hotels and meetings as well from the planning side of things. We liked the idea of having several food outlets on property as well as the closeness of Universal Orlando Resort, and it was great to see the variety of ways you can get around once you are on property."

Plus, the facility was able to accommodate Duro-Last's unique requirements.

"We do a roofing competition where 10 to 12 two-man teams compete against time and each other to put the best roof on," says Dick. "Some of the equipment could not be used inside the hotel, so this ended up being done in a portion of their parking garage, and it went off without a hitch. About four months prior to our event we had another installation class that popped up. The Loews group worked with us to find a spot at Sapphire Falls. We ended up in their exhibit hall, which was a perfect place for that event as well.

"The fact that we were able to work so closely with the new resort next door as our overflow hotel was great — they made it seamless. The function space being all in one area is a great plus. The hotel was wonderful with signage and branding so we could direct our group to exactly where they needed to be."

In addition to the new water park, the Universal Studios



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MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR RENOVATION FEATURING AN ADDITIONAL 40,000 SQ FT OF INDOOR/OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE



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Universal Orlando Resort offers a myriad of event options from indoor spaces to outdoor options in Universal's theme parks and The Cayman Court event lawn at Loews Sapphire Falls.

Credits: Universal Orlando Resort

Florida resort includes two full theme parks and Universal CityWalk, a dining and entertainment complex, which has also grown during the last two years. CityWalk is located a short walk, boat- or bus-ride away from the resort's hotels.

"We did a small function at CityWalk at the Hard Rock Cafe," notes Dick. "It was for a group of 200 on a Saturday night, and included reception, dinner and small awards banquet. The team there was great to work with and the night went very well."

Dick pointed to several individuals that helped her event go off without a hitch.

"Fuat Guven, the assistant director of F&B, is awesome," says Dick. "I worked with him previously when he was employed at another resort several years ago, and to my surprise he recognized me and came over to strike up a conversation. It did not matter if it was F&B-related or not, he would get answers and made an effort to make sure I was taken care of. Our main point of contact, Margie Sanchez, was very accessible, made things happen, and dealt very well with last-minute changes. And Penda Manley was our group reservation coordinator, and she did an amazing job. No matter how many changes or additions I needed, she was right there to make it happen."

A Learning Experience

For Kristin Canterbury, CMP, senior events and customer outreach manager, National Geographic Learning/Cengage Learning, a location removed from the theme parks was one key to the success of her event.

"The Loews group worked with us to find a spot at Sapphire Falls. We ended up in their exhibit hall, which was a perfect place for that event as well."

VICTORIA DICK, Corporate Event Planner
Duro-Last Roofing, Saginaw, MI

"Sometimes travel to Orlando can be overwhelming and can seem like a neverending line for amusement parks," suggests Canterbury. "It was a breath of fresh air to arrive at the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, with its resort feel, elegant yet relaxed décor, and personalized service. It was the convenience of Orlando with the luxury I wanted to bring to our attendees. It's a bit farther out from MCO than other properties, but it's worth the extra few minutes' drive to stay and work in a high-quality setting."

Located 28 miles southwest of Orlando International Airport (MCO) in Kissimmee, the resort was home to a 200-attendee annual sales meeting for National Geographic Learning in July-August. Canterbury says Orlando was a good fit for her group based on the abundant flight options and plentiful attractions nearby for "free" nights. And, "we knew we'd get value for our dollar and get great service," she adds.

WE'RE EXPANDING MORE THAN JUST HORIZONS.

Opening late spring 2017 through fall 2017, the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate will add new meeting space, a spectacular wedding venue, outdoor event space, room accommodations, a market-style restaurant and expanded pool areas—including Orlando's only resort wave pool. With the completed expansion, there will be more ways to defy convention and even more reasons to celebrate.

GUEST ROOMS: 862
SUITES: 71
INDOOR MEETING SPACE: 248,111
LARGEST MEETING SPACE: 28,800
MEETING ROOMS: 48
THEATER CAP: 3,200
BANQUET CAP: 2,400
CLASSROOM CAP: 2,000
EXHIBIT SPACE: 72,000



MEETING SPACE

An additional 100,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space will be added, scheduled to open this fall. The Osceola Conference Center will feature six new flexible breakout rooms, with a fresh, sleek design. Also included, a 6,500-square-foot Great Room, designed for special events and weddings, and the Great Room Terrace and Patio offers the option of a grand lawn, fireplace and promenade, ideal for outdoor events.

ACCOMMODATIONS

In addition to the 769 guest rooms and luxury two and three bedroom villas, additional accommodations will be added this fall. A new three-story building will consist of 93 spacious, upscale guest rooms. This will bring the resort's total guest room count to 862.

DINING AND F&B

Eight on-site restaurants are available, including our new Market-Style restaurant.

SPECIAL AMENITIES/INCENTIVES

In early summer 2017, expanding the already impressive 15-acre recreation area, Omni Orlando Resort will unveil 24,000 square feet of additional deck space, Orlando's only resort wave pool, 16 additional private cabanas and an expansion of the kid's pool area and water slides. ChampionsGate is also home to the Greg Norman designed National and rejuvenated International Course, and the David Leadbetter Golf Academy World Headquarters.

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Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate offers an 18-hole Greg Norman-designed golf course and nearly 250,000 sf of meeting and event space.

Credit: Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate

"The Omni team immediately recognized and appreciated our business and event," explains Canterbury. "They understood the goals and objectives — to present a high-quality learning and networking experience — and they worked with me closely every step of the way to meet and exceed our needs. From working with our group's many specific dietary needs, to creating an indoor food truck experience and lawn games and fireworks, I don't think I ever heard the staff say 'no.'"



"It was a breath of fresh air to arrive at the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, with its resort feel, elegant yet relaxed décor, and personalized service."

KRISTIN CANTERBURY, CMP, Senior Events and Customer Outreach Manager
National Geographic Learning, Boston, MA

Earlier this year the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate broke ground on a \$40 million expansion project which added 23,000 sf of additional pool deck and recreational space, installation of Kissimmee's only resort wave pool and a new 93-room property villa building. The resort's Trevi's Restaurant was redesigned to include an outdoor garden terrace and bar. The expansion also added 100,000 sf of expanded event lawn and conference center space.

"Most of the meeting space has natural light or access to natural light in the prefunction areas, which I always appreciate," says Canterbury. "Between banquets and catering, in-house AV, and the destination team onsite, they communicate well and gave us lots of support and creative, but not pushy suggestions on how to make our ideas work. The staff takes care of the planner, which is always nice once you're onsite for over a week. I felt like I was part of the family after this event — one way I recognize a wonderful property with talented staff."

"Admittedly I prefer venues that are removed from the theme park environment," adds Canterbury. "But it was nice

to know that they were still accessible. I felt like the Omni was a good fit for a more grownup crowd looking to work and relax in a polished yet elegant setting."

Post-storm Outcome

And how did Microsoft's post-storm event pan out? We checked in with Vivian Eickhoff as her event was concluding and she reported that Microsoft Ignite was a great success. And not only did she not receive negative comments from guests, but attendees participated in spur-of-the-moment volunteer efforts aimed at post-storm recovery for the Orlando community and beyond.

"Attendees built over 2,000 hygiene kits at the conference, for those impacted by hurricanes Harvey and Irma," explains Eickhoff. "This was thanks to a partnership with Clean the World set up just days after we connected with them. We also donated over 1,000 conference backpacks, water bottles and T-shirts, and worked with American Red Cross to donate blood. The Big Red Bus was onsite for two days." **C&IT**



Joy P

May 15 at 9:07pm

Time to raise a glass and toast an amazing year. Gotta admit, luxe surroundings and VIP service is even better when you know you earned it. Cheers! [#BestMeetingEver](#) [#OrlandoMeeting](#)



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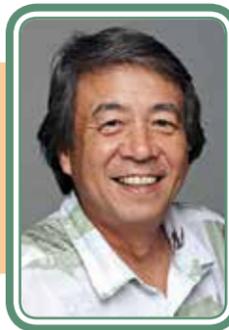
On The Move



BLANEY



BASS



CONCHING



ALLOR



PETERS

Wendy Blaney was named chief sales officer, group sales, for Atlantis, Paradise Island in The Bahamas. She formerly served as director, in-market East and Atlantic City for Caesars Entertainment Corporation.

Mario Bass was named as vice president of sales and services Visit San Antonio. He was director of sales and market-

ing for JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa.

Lee Conching was name vice president of Meet Hawaii citywide sales. He most recently served as the Hawaii Convention Center's director of sales.

Turnberry Isle Miami has named **Shane Allor** as director of sales and mar-

keting. He was director of sales and marketing for JW Marriott Camelback Inn Resort & Spa in Scottsdale, Arizona.

The new AC Hotel San Francisco Airport/Oyster Point Waterfront has named **Jenay Peters** as director of sales. She most recently served as senior sales manager for the Holiday Inn Golden Gateway in San Francisco. *C&IT*

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