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Organizations  
Work for You

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**LEVERAGING**  
Your  
**DMO?**

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ISSN 1095-9726

USPS 012-991

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AUGUST 2019

Vol. 26 No. 4

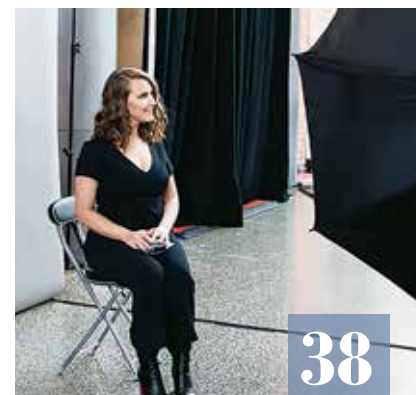
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## Are You Leveraging a DMO?

In today's fast-changing meeting world, making strategic partnerships with DMOs will help you reach your destination planning goal with professional assistance. Your expectations at a chosen destination can more easily be attained with a specific destination management organization, where you can get everything from content development agenda setting to all event experiences to registration and transportation. Working with



a DMO globally will quickly bring you up to speed at your chosen destination and will effectively save planning time and provide in-depth knowledge of the destination. In this issue's cover story, professional planners provide insight with their reasons and their successes by working with DMOs.

Also in this issue, the spoken word can go a long way in creating a memorable event. Choosing the right speaker for your event can either energize attendees or put them to sleep. A speaker's presentation must be relevant to all attendees, not just management. An important

point that is often overlooked is that the planner and speaker do not clearly identify their objective. Most important is that the speaker needs to deliver a current message and address the organization's current corporate landscape. The selection of the speaker who is most appropriate to achieve your goals while considering cost is a step that should be taken in making your choice. Check out the "Spoken Word" feature story in this issue.

Are you creating engaging experiences for your attendees? Being interactive throughout your events are opportunities to provide a lasting impression. Capturing your attendees' attention and continuing the momentum after the event is over, is really what makes the difference between success and failure. Get the attendees in your audience involved by asking questions using live polling or other engagement platforms. See "Creating Engaging Experiences" in this issue and see how other planners have been successful in creating the engaging experience.

*Harvey Grotsky*

HARVEY GROTSKY

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A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

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Insurance & Financial Meetings Management is published bi-monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 N. Military Trail, Ste. 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$10.00 U.S.A.; back copies \$12. Yearly subscription price is \$65.00 in the U.S.A.; \$135.00 in Canada. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Insurance & Financial Meetings Management, 2700 N. Military Trail, Ste. 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Insurance & Financial Meetings Management), and the publication disclaims any liability with respect to the use of reliance on any such information. The information contained in this publication is no way to be construed as a recommendation by I&FMM of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted by or binding upon any corporate/incentive travel planner or agent. Reproduction of any portion of this publication by any means is strictly forbidden. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited photographs or manuscripts. Subscriber: Send subscription inquiries and address changes to: Circulation Dept., Insurance & Financial Meetings Management, 2700 N. Military Trail, Ste. 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Give old and new addresses including zip codes. Enclose address label from most recent issue and allow five weeks for change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2019

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# THE LODGE AT SEA ISLAND

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NOW OPEN: HARD ROCK HOTEL LOS CABOS

CABO SAN LUCAS, MEXICO — The Hard Rock Hotel Los Cabos is open. The new 639-room, all-inclusive resort is the first of Hard Rock’s all-inclusives that is an entirely new build. It’s also the first property for the brand with swim-up suites. The resort offers the brand’s signature music-themed amenities, including: the Rock Star Suite, Rock Spa, Body Rock Fitness Center and music memorabilia. Since the property is set within Cabo San Lucas’ Diamante development, guests also have access to three nearby golf courses designed by Davis Love III and Tiger Woods. The property boasts 60,000 sf of meeting and event space, five swim-up bars, six pools, water slides, eight a-la-carte dining options and three lounges: Sun Bar, Moon Lounge and Club Heaven. Entertainment options include designated family and adult-only areas, a bowling alley and Hard Rock’s kids program, Hard Rock Roxity Kids Club.



Hard Rock Hotel Los Cabos

IRF STUDY REVEALS HIGH RATES OF CHANGE TO INCENTIVE PROGRAM DESIGN TO COMPLY WITH U.S. FEDERAL REGULATIONS

The Incentive Research Foundation recently released its signature study, 2019 U.S. Federal Regulations and Non-Cash Awards. The IRF’s research into program owners’ understanding of U.S. regulatory and tax requirements reveals a high rate of change in incentive program design due to a perceived need to make accommodations to comply with regulations. The IRF’s survey generated 398 responses from decision-makers for non-cash rewards programs representing a cross-section of U.S. businesses with \$5 million or more in revenue. The four business sectors reporting were Automotive/Manufacturing, Pharmaceutical/Healthcare, Technology/Telecommunications and Financial Services. Additional key findings discussed in 2019 U.S. Federal

Regulations and Non-Cash Awards include: Program owners’ overall confidence in the ability to identify regulatory and tax requirements was high, with 77% of respondents being “very confident.” To comply with regulatory or tax requirements, 39% of firms eliminated at least one program. Knowledge of regulatory and tax requirements was relatively higher for Financial Services firms and Technology/Telecommunications firms — and relatively low for Automotive/Manufacturing. Compliance practices are more fully developed at Technology/Telecommunications firms and Financial Services firms, while Pharmaceutical/Healthcare firms do not yet have fully developed and implemented compliance practices.

THE RITZ-CARLTON, ST. THOMAS SET TO REOPEN LATER THIS YEAR

ST. THOMAS, USVI — Marriott International recently announced that Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas is set to reopen in December 2019, more than two years after historic hurricanes slammed parts of the Caribbean island. The \$100 million renovations include fully reimaged and redesigned public spaces, guest rooms and suites, event and meeting space and dining venues. Situated on 30 acres of cascading grounds, The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas will have a refreshed look and feel, introducing a pristine color-palette inspired by the sea and a renovated, tropical landscape. Other property highlights will include a remodeled infinity pool and a new 60-foot catamaran, Lady Lynsey II, offering snorkeling tours, sunset dinner cruises and island-hopping excursions.

CLEO BATTLE PROMOTED TO COO OF LOUISVILLE TOURISM

LOUISVILLE, KY — Cleo Battle has been promoted to the newly created position of chief operating officer of Louisville Tourism. Battle has served the convention bureau in Louisville, Kentucky since 2013 as executive vice president. In his current role, Battle overseas convention development, destination services, tourism development and marketing and communication. In his new role, he will cultivate strategic partnerships and revenue development strategies, initiatives and priorities. He will also manage a new visitor profile study process and be engaged with a new strategic master plan that will serve as the framework for Louisville to increase its annual visitation from its current rate of 16 million to 25 million people by 2030. Battle has worked in the hospitality industry for 34 years, previously serving 12 years as vice president of sales and services for VisitRichmond, VA, where he also held the positions of director of sales and sales manager. He began his career in the hotel industry working for Embassy Suites, Holiday Inn and Sheraton Hotels.



Battle

CSI DMC EXPANDS FOOTPRINT, OPENS CSI DMC IN DENVER

WASHINGTON, DC — The international event management company CSI DMC, based in the Washington, D.C. area, announced the opening of its new regional office, CSI DMC in Denver. This regional office will provide support to

CSI DMC in Denver will continue to deliver the brand’s service-driven approach.



clients throughout the Greater Denver area and Rocky Mountain Region of Colorado. CSI DMC in Denver is another strategic regional opening for CSI DMC in its 32 years of being a destination management company partner to clients around the globe. The catalyst for opening this location follows a successful CSI DMC formula of extensive research, local team development and being where it meets its clients’ needs. CSI DMC in Denver will continue to deliver the brand’s service-driven approach, while providing the expertise, creativity and value that clients expect.

PALACE RESORTS INCREASES ITS TOURISM INVESTMENT IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

SANTO DOMINGO, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC — Palace Resorts, a five-star, luxury all-inclusive resort will be expanding its tourism offering with a new investment set in the Macao zone in Punta Cana. Palace Resorts began construction of its new hotel Moon Palace Punta Cana, a 2,150-room hotel; featuring 20 restaurants; 9 Bars; 7 swimming pools; a water park; a Greg Norman Eco Signature Design Golf Course; a 75-booth Wellness Spa; a casino; a 118,000-sf Convention Center; a food distribution center; as well as a housing community for hotel staff.

Gibran Chapur, executive vice president of Palace Resorts, stated that the Dominican Republic is a safe tourist destination and that it will continue growing and developing; therefore, Palace Resorts will confidently continue investing in its tourism sector. Chapur expressed that he felt no concern whatsoever with regard to the recent safety issues that affected

HILTON IS STRONGER THAN EVER IN PUERTO RICO

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO — In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rico’s hospitality sector is staged for a major comeback. In mid-June, Hilton officially reopened Caribe Hilton, the San Juan hotel/resort, following a \$150 million renovation. All guest rooms, the vast majority of the Caribe Hilton’s landscaping,



El San Juan Hotel, Curio Collection by Hilton

public spaces and food and beverage venues have been completely refreshed, including 65,000 sf of revamped meetings and events space. Proceeding, El San Juan hotel, which opened in 1958 on San Juan’s Isla Verde Beach and is part of Hilton’s Curio Collection, underwent a \$65 million renovation and reopened last December. The rest of Hilton’s Puerto Rico portfolio is nearly at full strength, which include: the Embassy Suites by Hilton San Juan Hotel & Casino, DoubleTree by Hilton San Juan, Hampton Inn & Suites San Juan, Embassy Suites by Hilton Dorado del Mar Beach Resort and Hilton Ponce Golf & Casino Resort. In the running are: the Condado Plaza Hilton in San Juan, now offering limited services; and El Conquistador, a Waldorf Astoria Resort near Fajardo, still undergoing restoration. Brad Dean, CEO of the destination marketing organization Discover Puerto Rico, says Hilton’s bounce-back is emblematic of Puerto Rico’s larger recovery.



Moon Palace Punta Cana

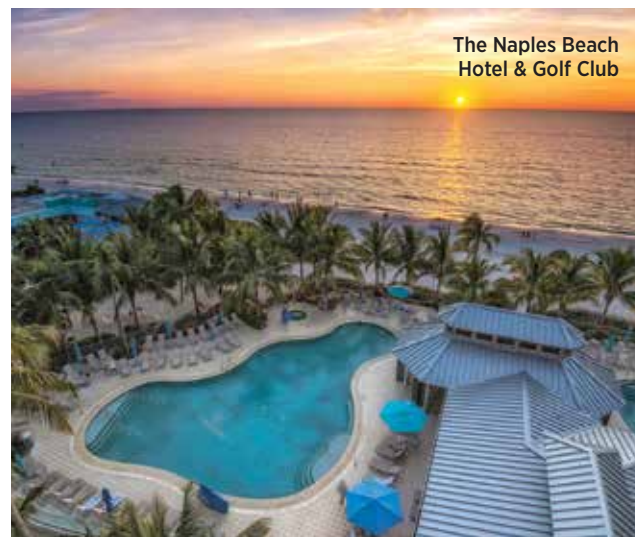
the country — seeing it more as a circumstantial situation, resulting from the high-volume tourist influx that the country has welcomed in recent years. On his behalf, Francisco Javier García, tourism minister, ensured that the country has responded to the situations which arose not long ago:

“We can feel confident, that as a country, we have undertaken the necessary actions to counteract the recent events, and will always work toward continuing to improve and especially prevent these situations from ever taking place again,” García expressed.



## THE NAPLES BEACH HOTEL & GOLF CLUB OFFERS INCENTIVE FOR BOOKING A MEETING IN 2020

NAPLES, FL — The AAA Four-Diamond The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club in Southwest Florida is offering a “Meet in Paradise” promotion available for limited time to new bookings from June 1, 2020 to October 31, 2020, providing up to a 20% rebate to the group master account. The promotion applies to groups of 10 rooms or more per night for a three-night stay, must be booked by September 30, 2019, and may not be combined with any other offer, according to David Tyler, director of sales and marketing. This provides even more reason to book a meeting at the lush, 125-acre resort, which is Southwest Florida’s only resort directly on the beach with an on-site championship golf course, world-class spa and award-winning tennis center. Featuring 34,000 sf of flexible indoor meeting space, the 319-room resort also has many truly beautiful outdoor and beach-front venues. Plus, groups and guests always benefit from no resort fees and complimentary self-parking and valet parking.



The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club



Moore

## U.S. TRAVEL HALL OF LEADERS INDUCTS BOB MOORE AND NANCY NOVOGROD

WASHINGTON, DC — Travel industry leaders Bob Moore, former long-time Hilton executive, and Nancy Novogrod, the 21-year editor-in-chief of Travel + Leisure, will be honored as the 2019 inductees into the U.S. Travel Association Hall of Leaders, the organization announced. “Bob was an innovator throughout his career, working to evolve business and leisure travel to meet the demands of a changing industry,” said Roger Dow, U.S. travel president and CEO. “Nancy has been a leading voice in travel for decades, using her position at the helm of one of the industry’s most influential titles to drive travel to the U.S.” Distinguished individuals are named to U.S. Travel’s Hall of Leaders for “sustained, noteworthy contributions that have positively impacted the travel industry and raised industry-wide standards.” With these two inductions, 100 travel industry professionals have been inducted into the U.S. Travel Hall of Leaders since it was created in 1969.



Novogrod

## NOW ACCEPTING RESERVATIONS FOR HOTEL EFFIE SANDESTIN OPENING SUMMER 2020

MIRAMAR BEACH, FL — Ushering in a new era in aspirational vacationing to Northwest Florida’s Emerald Coast, Sandestin Investments, LLC announced the name and launch of its exquisite family owned hotel, set to debut in early summer 2020 — Hotel Effie Sandestin — now accepting leisure and group reservations. The hotel features 250 guest rooms with multiple room types, a delectable three-meal restaurant, craft cocktail lobby bar, and in-room dining all curated by celebrity chef Hugh Acheson. It also boasts a luxury spa, state-of-the-art fitness center, the only rooftop pool on Florida’s Emerald Coast and 20,000 sf of meeting space, including a 13,000-sf ballroom.

Named after owner Tom Becnel’s grandmother, Hotel Effie exemplifies all the charm and personality of its namesake. Best described as the ultimate hostess, Hotel Effie creates a personalized experience that surrounds each guest with a friendly environment and authentic style of service that defines genuine Southern hospitality. Hotel Effie welcomes guests as part of the family and looks forward to fostering that relationship for years to come.

Hotel Effie’s booking website is open for reservations for stays beginning early summer 2020. Visit [HotelEffie.com](http://HotelEffie.com) to learn more about how to book a vacation or group event and stay social on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.



A rendering of the new Hotel Effie Sandestin

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# Speak Like a Professional

## How to Give an Amazing Public Speech That'll 'Wow' Event Attendees

BY SCOTT STEINBERG

**T**ake it from a business speaker who's presented at hundreds of events and conferences: Professional audiences are among the most sophisticated, demanding and well-informed groups to whom you can ever present. Happily, business executives are also among the most receptive to and interested in hearing you or your organization's message. Authoritative insight, fresh perspectives and innovative solutions are often prized amongst company leaders as a vital wellspring for business growth and transformation.

The good news for meeting planners and presenters hoping to make a mark with the executive crowd is that despite commonly held misperceptions, you're not there to solve anyone's problems overnight, but to merely steer those closest to the situation toward asking better questions. Following are several ways you can do just that — either as a business speaker or when working with a business speaker for any occasion.

### UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

No two businesses are alike, nor operating realities. Getting to know and understand organizations, the products and services they offer and changing industry landscapes within which they operate is crucial.

Presentations should always be customized to the individual firm or event and audience level, taking

into account attendees' day-to-day challenges and concerns, and incorporating stories or learning that address or parallel viewers' hands-on experiences. Where multiple stakeholders, departments and initiatives are involved, it further helps to couch presentations in terms that are universally applicable. What matters is context and strategic takeaway, not granularity.

Taking time to truly understand each organization, the area in which it does business and shifts of the professional playing field — not only helps establish trust and empathy, it makes you a more capable speaker on the platform. It also makes you better equipped to both realistically frame points of concern, and provide tailored insight and learning that allows attendees to gain new perspective on them.

### PARTICIPATE TO THE FULLEST

Events incorporating speakers are often designed to offer motivation, inspiration, authoritative input, fresh perspective, underscoring of key themes, a rousing kick-off for new initiatives or some combination of each. All situations imply a positive sense of growth, change and momentum — points which should be reflected in the passion and verve you bring to the stage and reflected in actions taken even when outside the spotlight.

Where appropriate, speakers should make a point of arriving to meetings or conventions early,

staying late and speaking with attendees. If it helps, consider yourself as much a participant as any stakeholder. By truly taking the time to listen to others on hand, not just talk at them, you empower two-way dialogue, gain insight and receive valuable feedback that should be incorporated into your presentations, presenting a sense of timeliness and dynamism.

The problem with canned talks or cookie-cutter speeches? They feel as if you're talking at an audience, not with them — and, especially in the case of sessions which occur in the middle of event programs, look at best indifferent if salient points made in earlier sessions aren't addressed. Whether by participating in conference calls and putting questions to on-the-job experts prior to day-of programs, or making a point of attending panels you're not featured on, always go the extra mile — as successful business speakers can tell you, it reflects in the end result.

### GET AUDIENCES INVOLVED

Being on the day-to-day frontlines, attendees and key stakeholders are better attuned to the reality of their own scenario. They also have a vested interest in seeing you succeed — so why not get them more involved in presentations?

Many simple strategies can help you boost engagement, awareness and takeaway, e.g., inviting observers to participate by submitting questions and suggestions prior to your presentation. Alternately, you might ask them to tape and send you commentary in the form of videos, podcasts or testimonials — all of which, like the above, can be incorporated into your programs. Feedback and input can help more effectively

inform and steer the direction and content of your speeches to provide greater value for the end viewer. Hearing from colleagues or managers within one's own company also helps programs hit closer to home for attendees and demonstrate how the topics you're speaking on impact organizations on a more

It doesn't take hours to  
spark audiences' interest  
in researching  
and exploring subjects  
*further.*

relatable and personable level.

Even an act as simple as requesting questions from your audience up-front and touching upon them when presenting shows that you've taken the time to better address key points of concern. It all adds up to more compelling, relevant and well-received presentations — and reinforces that you both value your audience's contributions, and have gone the extra mile to ensure that their voice is being heard.

### DRAW ON EXPERIENCE

Like any good public speaker knows, inspiration and motivation are key elements of running a successful business — but so are a sense of hard-nosed practicality and eye for operational detail. As important to executives as the raw facts and figures associated with any scenario are strategic considerations and real-world context. Accordingly, case studies and practical examples can prove powerful touchpoints in any presentation.

Many businesses and business owners are dealing with commonly recurring issues such as: managing growth or

change, attracting and retaining key talent and juggling shifting consumer patterns. Few may possess insight beyond their specific vertical or industry as to how other organizations are successfully adapting to and addressing similar challenges faced by leaders across the board.

To this extent, underlying themes and metaphors can help you paint a broad overarching framework — however, concrete examples and comparable situational analyses should serve as the rungs which more effectively tie messaging together. That doesn't mean anecdotes need to be dry or boring; all can provide helpful storytelling devices that under-

score key points and drive sustained audience attention. It pays to support your claims with facts and show how they apply in context — and can make powerful statements when designed to better resonate or ring familiar.

### PRESENT A CALL TO ACTION

The outcome of a successful public-speaking program shouldn't simply be providing the motivation and inspiration needed to overcome the challenges an enterprise faces. It should result in attendees walking away with the knowledge needed to capably and immediately act upon both.

Note that even a single 60- to 90-minute session is enough to provide audiences with a wake-up call, shift in mindset and the basic tools needed to begin putting new insights into practice. While opportunities such as seminars, master classes and workshops certainly provide extended forums for corporate speakers to help drive positive learning and skills transfer, it doesn't take hours to spark audiences' interest in researching and exploring subjects further. Brief though they may be, even passing presentations provide an opportunity to provide powerful tools for driving awareness and embracement of new models or methodologies. Often, all it takes is a starting point and subtle nudge in the right direction to prompt further self-guided research.

Having used the techniques above to better connect with audiences, communicate the value of key messages and drive positive momentum — you'll be well on your way to climbing the corporate ladder.



THE AUTHOR

Award-winning professional speaker **Scott Steinberg** is among today's best-known trend experts and futurists, a bestselling expert on leadership and innovation and the author of *Make Change Work for You: 10 Ways to Future-Proof Yourself, Fearlessly Innovate, and Succeed Despite Uncertainty* and *Millennial Marketing: Bridging the Generation Gap*. Steinberg is among today's leading providers of keynote speeches, workshops and seminars for Fortune 500 firms, and the founder of travel + lifestyle magazine *SELECT: Your City's Secrets Unlocked™*. His website is [www.AKeynoteSpeaker.com](http://www.AKeynoteSpeaker.com).

# Provide the Right Motivation

## Top 10 Reasons Companies Should Offer Corporate Incentive Travel

BY DR. AMARENDRA BHUSHAN DHIRAJ

**I**ndustry leaders such as Apple, Amazon and Google attribute 80% of their value to intangible assets such as brand image, ideas, human capital and partnerships. The common thread among this kind of asset is that you can't own it — intangible assets reside in the hearts and minds of hard-working employees and organizational leaders.

Employers can enjoy remarkable improvements by offering generous incentives when workers put their best foot forward. According to the Incentive Research Foundation, well-thought-out, non-cash incentives drive commitment and an emotional bond between employees and their company.

Resultantly, a growing number of employers are offering intangible rewards, which are also known as alternative currencies. Simultaneously, a growing number of hard-working employees crave recognition.

The following are 10 reasons why you should offer corporate luxury cruises and incentive travel.

### 1. LUXURY INCENTIVES OFFER FLEXIBILITY

You can easily cater to each recipient's needs with a luxury incentive travel package. Whether an essential IT employee guided you through the latest cyber storm unscathed or a top manager doubled sales for the quarter, you can assemble an indulgent incentive

that hits home. You can choose from myriad destinations and activities that will delight and satiate your most diligent and discerning personnel.

### 2. ESTABLISH A CULTURE OF LUXURY AND SUCCESS

Once word gets out about your company and its lavish culture, internal stakeholders will naturally associate your organization with opulence. This sentiment breeds an intuitive desire for success and a winning atmosphere.

Establishing your enterprise as an elite organization is an excellent way to compel employees to work toward meeting company goals. Also, a culture of

luxury boosts morale and encourages employees to strive for optimal performance.

### 3. DRIVE MORE SALES & RESULTS

Incentivizing a team toward aggressive growth is a process. It requires the commitment of the entire team. Once you establish this culture, no one wants to feel subpar. A winning atmosphere and incentive plan inspire workers to achieve.

### 4. ATTRACT THE BEST & BRIGHTEST

To maintain your competitive edge and attract top talent, you must deliver the needs and wants of job candidates. A culture of luxury will attract the talent

that you need to outperform marketplace opponents. Once the word is out that your firm is one of status, you'll attract the best and brightest job prospects in the industry.

### 5. INCREASE EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION, INSPIRATION & ENGAGEMENT

You can keep employees motivated and inspired by offering luxury incentives and high-culture rewards. Spectacular incentives indoctrinate a sense of healthy competition among staff members. With the right motivation, employees work smarter and harder so that they will earn rewards.

### 6. SEND A MESSAGE TO YOUNGER EMPLOYEES

Millennials are the largest segment of America's talent pool. It's time to think about how you will tenure your best staff members. Young professionals want to know that you will take care of them when they perform well. What's more, they aspire to earn the roles and achieve the lifestyles of their accomplished superiors.

### 7. LUX TRAVEL INCENTIVES CAN BOOST PROFITS

Travel promotes physical and mental well-being. In due course, luxury travel incentives equate to healthier employees. Healthy employees are more productive and will produce more profit for your organization.

### 8. TOP-SHELF GIFTS MAKE EMPLOYEES FEEL VALUED

A luxury incentive creates more value than cash any day of the week. A cash reward allows employees to buy something, but the value created by the purchase will fade quickly. A luxury incentive, however, is a positive memory that your best employees will eternally equate with your organization. You can show that you appreciate your employees and create a positive sentiment that will last a lifetime by offering a luxury gift.

### 9. PAMPERED EMPLOYEES ARE MORE CREATIVE

Luxury travel enables your corporate champions to take a break from stress and responsibility. In the process, workers have a chance to reinvigorate their faculties and senses. After the excursion of a lifetime, your employee will return to work with fresh eyes and a mind flowing with ideas.

### 10. BECOME THE TALK OF YOUR INDUSTRY

When you lavishly reward driven, successful staff members, other companies and employees take notice and they will spread the word. Incentivized employees are brand ambassadors for your organization. A luxury excursion will give employees fodder for stories that will send "wows" around the room. Few people discuss the mundane, and if they do, even fewer people remember. However, people love to talk about extravagance. They will preach the gospel of your enterprise to all who will listen.

It's no secret that the battle is heating up for the world's top talent as industry undergoes its latest transformation. Leaders who do not offer intangible rewards face two unattractive alternatives. They'll have to make do with second-rate talent or pay exorbitant salaries to attract exceptional job candidates.

If you hire underperformers, it's unlikely they'll do more than keep your organization chugging ahead at its current rate. You can kiss innovation goodbye.

Even throwing money at the problem may not produce the desired results. If you attempt to stimulate performance solely with remuneration, you'll most likely attract self-motivated job candidates. This type of professional is likely to magnify organizational shortcomings by promoting a culture driven by numbers and metrics. However, by offering extravagant incentives, you can attract the kind of talent that's willing to perform — with the right motivation.



THE AUTHOR

**Dr. Amarendra Bhushan Dhiraj** is the CEO and editorial director at CEOWORLD Magazine, the leading global business magazine written strictly for CEOs, CFOs, top managers, company directors, investors, senior executives, business leaders and high net worth individuals. Visit [www.ceoworld.biz](http://www.ceoworld.biz)



A luxury incentive trip to a destination such as Portofino, Italy can motivate employees even more than a pay raise.

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# *the spoken* **WORD**

## Choose the Right Speaker for a Memorable Event

BY DEREK REVERON

Planners spend valuable time and a healthy slice of budgets searching for and hiring the right speakers. That's why it's crucial that planners maximize return on investment by getting the best speaker for keynotes, general sessions, breakouts, seminars and education and training meetings.

Speakers should do more than motivate, inspire, educate and set the tone for meetings. Planners should also expect speakers to create memorable experiences for attendees, generate buzz to build attendance and provide added value. Recruiting the right speaker can leave a positive impression on attendees even if other areas of a meeting don't go well.

Making the best decision is especially important for financial and insurance firms, which need speakers who know a company's often complex business lines and can relate to the meeting's theme. A speaker's presentation must be relevant to all attendees, including executives and managers.

According to global keynote speaker and inspirational thought leader Holly Dowling, who frequently gives speeches to financial companies including Deloitte, one of the world's largest accounting companies, "It's about delivering a current message, addressing the challenges they are facing and what's really going on in the corporate landscape. That's a huge issue for financial companies."

### PERCEPTION IS KEY

Another significant speaker-related issue for financial and insurance companies, according to event planners and

others in the industry, is perception.

Greg Jenkins, partner, Long Beach, California-based Bravo Productions, an event planning and production company, has worked with several financial and insurance clients, including Farmers Insurance Group and Transamerica Life.

According to Jenkins, "The financial and insurance industry often must exercise more reserve in the appearance of lavish spending. In addition, the scrutiny of misconduct and wasteful spending may be of even more concern to those industry planners."

As a result, Jenkins adds, "A financial planner will want to choose a speaker who does not reinforce any

Overall, there are certain basic practices that planners, especially those who work for financial and insurance companies, should follow when choosing speakers.

Pick speakers based on the characteristics and needs of each meeting and audience. Planners may need different types of speakers for different purposes — keynotes, seminars, motivational talks, inspirational speeches, breakouts, training and education and new product launches, etc.

### FOLLOW THE BASICS

Meet with stakeholders to determine the goals and objectives of the event. According to Lisa Warren, a partner at San Diego-based Speak-Inc Speakers Bureau, planners should ask themselves the following questions: "Is the event primarily educational, meant to inspire, and/or to attract attendees? Is there an overall event theme you'd like the speaker's content to compliment? What are the topics that would resonate within that theme, or in general help meet the objectives of the event?"

In addition, according to experts, planners should take the following basic steps:

- Create a program committee and crowd source its members and participants.
- Examine industry trends.
- Create a process to solicit the scope and content for the speaker to cover.
- Conduct a peer review by the program committee for topics and content.
- Ask for a contract rider, which covers topics such as advertising, lighting, video and other required equipment and supplies.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDER RUBIN

Global keynote speaker and inspirational thought leader Holly Dowling at "Women of the Vine," an event she keynoted as part of her Executive Women's Empowerment Program.

negative stereotypes or perceptions of the industry. The selection of a speaker who is most appropriate for the specific purpose of the event while defraying cost is a step that should be taken in making the choice."

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Lynne Wellish CMP, CHSE CHO, speaks at MPI Potomac's Mid Atlantic Conference and Expo (MACE) 2019. She advises planners to get a speaker who is the best fit for their group.

## KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Understand audience demographics including professional and personal challenges and share the information with prospective speakers.

According to Barbara Myers, CAE, CEO of IMN Solutions, an Arlington, Virginia-based meeting and events company that works with financial clients, "Ensure understanding and clarity with your speaker about why the audience is being brought to the event and what you want to achieve."

Warren agrees that knowing audience demographics is paramount. "Who is in the audience?" Warren asks. "What are their age ranges, job titles and percent male and female, etc.? All of these factors should be considered prior to embarking on the selection process."

Make sure a speaker can connect with an audience's demographics. According to Jenkins, "It's wise to review your group's historical patterns and determine who in the past were successful speakers and who bombed."

Ask questions such as the following: "What made the speaker's presentation dazzle your attendees?" Jenkins asks. "What was the audience reaction? In addition, has your audience demographics and interest changed over the past few years? Surprisingly, some planners assume their audience's tastes and interests are entrenched."

In addition, ask speakers to do their own research on your financial or insurance company and its issues to

contribute unique ideas to the meeting and its audience. The more information a speaker knows about the group, the better job the speaker can do. Look for speakers based on the fresh and relevant ideas they can present to an audience.

## DELIVERY, CONTENT RULE

Hire a speaker with good delivery, style and content. All three are needed for the best results. Audiences may like speakers with good delivery and poor content, but not necessarily with poor delivery and good content.

"View raw videos, not edited versions, because they represent a better sense of the speaker and the audience's reaction. Anybody can look good on tape."

**HOLLY DOWLING**

Global Keynote Speaker  
and Inspirational Thought Leader



Don't select speakers who give "canned" speeches. Choose a speaker who is dedicated to achieving event goals and can tailor a presentation to a specific meeting.

"Ask for examples of a speaker's 'thought leadership' in areas of finance and insurance through books, blog posts, articles, etc. to determine how well he or she knows the industry," Myers says.

Budget, of course, is always a top consideration.

"Budget is a key factor which, combined with the other considerations

helps, narrow the focus on appropriate speakers," Warren says. "For example, if one of the purposes of engaging a speaker is to draw attendees, the budget may need to be in the higher range to secure a well-known personality."

However, keep in mind that famous, highly paid speakers aren't necessarily the best fit for a group simply because of celebrity status.

"A great speaker may not be great for your group," says Lynne Wellish, CMP, CHSE CHO, a speaker, trainer and consultant for planners and others in the hospitality industry. "On the other hand, speakers who aren't household names may be just what an event needs."

## SEEK ADDED VALUE

Planners should want more from speakers than a great speech. Look for people who can provide value to a meeting beyond the speech itself.

According to Myers, "Depending on the objectives of the event, and the specific speakers being considered, it's always a good idea to think about what additional value they might bring to the event. However, added value that speakers provide voluntarily or upon request will vary."

For example, Myers adds, "Some speakers love to come in early to mingle with guests and get a feel for the culture or write a blog to share on a company site. Others won't agree to do anything but speak for 60 minutes."

Here are other examples of added value some speakers provide:

- They are available for pre-event phone calls.
- They participate in audience meet-and-greet and photo sessions before speeches.
- They provide a written summary of crucial takeaways for distribution to attendees.
- They promote information about the meeting on their own social media networks, including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

According to Myers, "Speakers can be an influencer via social media in terms of

attendance promotion if they have many followers. Celebrities or high-profile speakers can attract media attention and attendance to the event and lend credibility. Also, a famous speaker can reinforce the event brand through social media."

## VETTING IS CRUCIAL

Start researching early in the planning process to avoid having to choose someone who isn't a first choice, and give the selected speaker ample time to prepare.

Conduct thorough interviews. Dowling thinks planners can learn much about a speaker from a phone interview. "You can determine if they are interesting, authentic and compelling," says Dowling, creator of the podcast "40 Absolutes for Every Meeting Planner."

"You can tell a lot about a speaker on a phone call — the person's energy, attitude and the way they talk," Dowling says. "Also get the speaker on the phone with the stakeholder to establish a comfort level."

Planners and professional speakers recommend including the following questions in interviews:

- Has the speaker been successful with similar groups in the past? Request examples. "Ask for past attendee surveys and feedback from previous speaking engagements," Myers says.
- What approach does the speaker take to learning about the audience and the event's goals?
- How does the speaker go about researching the audience, including their business lines and responsibilities in finance and insurance?
- What are the speaker's ideal audiences?
- Can the speaker make a short promotional video, specifically for your meeting, and post it to the event's social media sites as well as the speaker's?
- Can the speaker provide goals, objectives and messaging for the meeting?
- Will the speaker provide bullet points of how the content would enhance the meeting's message?

There may also be unique circumstances to consider when interviewing prospective speakers.

For example, Warren says, "Does the event location require lengthy travel or



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take place on a cruise ship? Most speakers charge a premium when an event necessitates taking additional days off their calendars for travel or otherwise takes them out of circulation for multiple days."

On the other hand, some speakers may be motivated to retain their standard fee if the location is enticing enough for them to combine it with a vacation, Warren adds.

## GET REFERENCES

Get recommendations from planners who have worked with speakers under consideration. "They are the most important thing because they have heard the speakers and experienced the reaction to their groups," Dowling says.

According to Warren, "The best way to vet a speaker is through a recommendation from a trusted associate or peer in the industry, coupled with reviewing their materials (high quality video, topic descriptions and bio)."

Also get references from other professionals in the meeting and hospitality industry. According to Wellish, "Reach out to staff and board members of industry associations, industry peers and industry partners." In addition, inquire about credentials such as certified public speaker and other accreditations and professional affiliations.

Says Warren, "Industry message boards like that of the Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals (FICP) is also a great way to request feedback from peers who may have seen a speaker you're considering."

Experts suggest asking the follow-

Speakers should do more than motivate, inspire, educate and set the tone for meetings. They should also create memorable experiences.

ing questions to a reference:

- Was the speaker accessible and responsive prior to the booking?
- Would they hire the speaker again?
- Is there anything you did not ask about the speaker but may be helpful to know, such as his or her professionalism or presentation?
- Did the speaker make his or her content available for review before the speech?
- Was the presentation's messaging on target with the goals, objectives and scope requested?
- What were the major takeaways for the audience?
- Was there a post-speech assessment with feedback from the speaker and attendees? What were the results?

## KNOW YOUR SPEAKER

Seek videos of speakers to know their personalities and how they connect with audiences. "View raw videos, not edited versions, because they represent a better sense of the speaker and the audience's reaction," Dowling says. "Anybody can look good on tape."

Watch the speaker give a live presentation if possible.

"Speakers love this and, as long as the meeting stakeholder is amenable, this is a great way to vet a speaker firsthand," Warren says. If a live preview is





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Don't select speakers who give "canned" speeches. Choose a speaker who is dedicated to achieving event goals and can tailor a presentation to a specific meeting or event.

not feasible, most speakers are open to a short 'discovery' call to help ascertain if they are a good fit."

Research the prospective speaker online via Google, SlideShare, Twitter, LinkedIn and other sources. Before making a final decision, share the speaker's background, prospective audience message and expected outcomes with meeting stakeholders to get their full buy-in.

## BUREAU PLUSES AND MINUSES

Some planners hire speakers through speakers bureaus, which come in a variety of formats. Some bureaus allow direct contact with the speaker, while others act as an intermediary and handle the entire booking process. However, the bureaus offer advantages and disadvantages.

Wellish cites some of the pluses: "A speakers bureau organizes speakers according to their expertise and connects clients with the right speaker, just as a site selection company connects clients with the right venues," Wellish says. "The bureaus make recommendations to clients based on their goals, objectives, budget, profile of attendees and branding and messaging of the event. Some even take care of all the logistics for getting speakers to the event."

Not all speakers are represented by a speakers bureau. Many indus-

try experts focus on research and not speaking; that's why industry publications like this one are an additional tool for finding speakers.

Possible downsides of using a speakers bureau include high fees and commissions. Also, the bureaus may not

"Failure to provide the speaker with the key message points and demographics about your audience is a recipe for disappointment."

**GREG JENKINS**

Partner, Bravo Productions



include newer speakers on their rosters. In addition, "You may not be able to have open communication directly with speakers because they may have restrictions per their agreement with the bureau," Myers says.

## AVOID COMMON MISTAKES

Following a thorough and logical strategy for choosing speakers can avoid mistakes. Here are some of the most common errors planners make in choosing speakers.

According to Jenkins, "Failure to provide the speaker with the key message points and demographics about your audience is a recipe for disappointment. Also, some planners hire

speakers solely on a tape recording or CDs of them speaking to an audience. Naturally, the CD or tape recording will be of one of the speaker's finest moments and does not demonstrate if they can connect with your audience."

Another common mistake is allowing one's personal biases to affect the decision-making process in selecting a speaker.

"For example, what a planner may deem as a dynamic speaker may not be dynamic to 200 attendees participating in your event," Jenkins says. "Make sure the selection is based on what will work for your audience."

Planners also shouldn't expect speakers to provide "extras" that aren't in the contract. "Unless you put the request in writing and both parties have agreed on the terms, don't expect the speaker to sign autographs, take pictures or attend a post-event reception, etc.," Jenkins adds.

Another common mistake is hiring sports figures, comedians and celebrities to draw big crowds and engage attendees. The name recognition typically boosts attendance, but doesn't always succeed in achieving meeting goals or engaging attendees about a planner's desired topics. For example, one planner hired a famous basketball player to give a sales motivation speech. However, nearly all the audience's questions were about basketball, not sales.

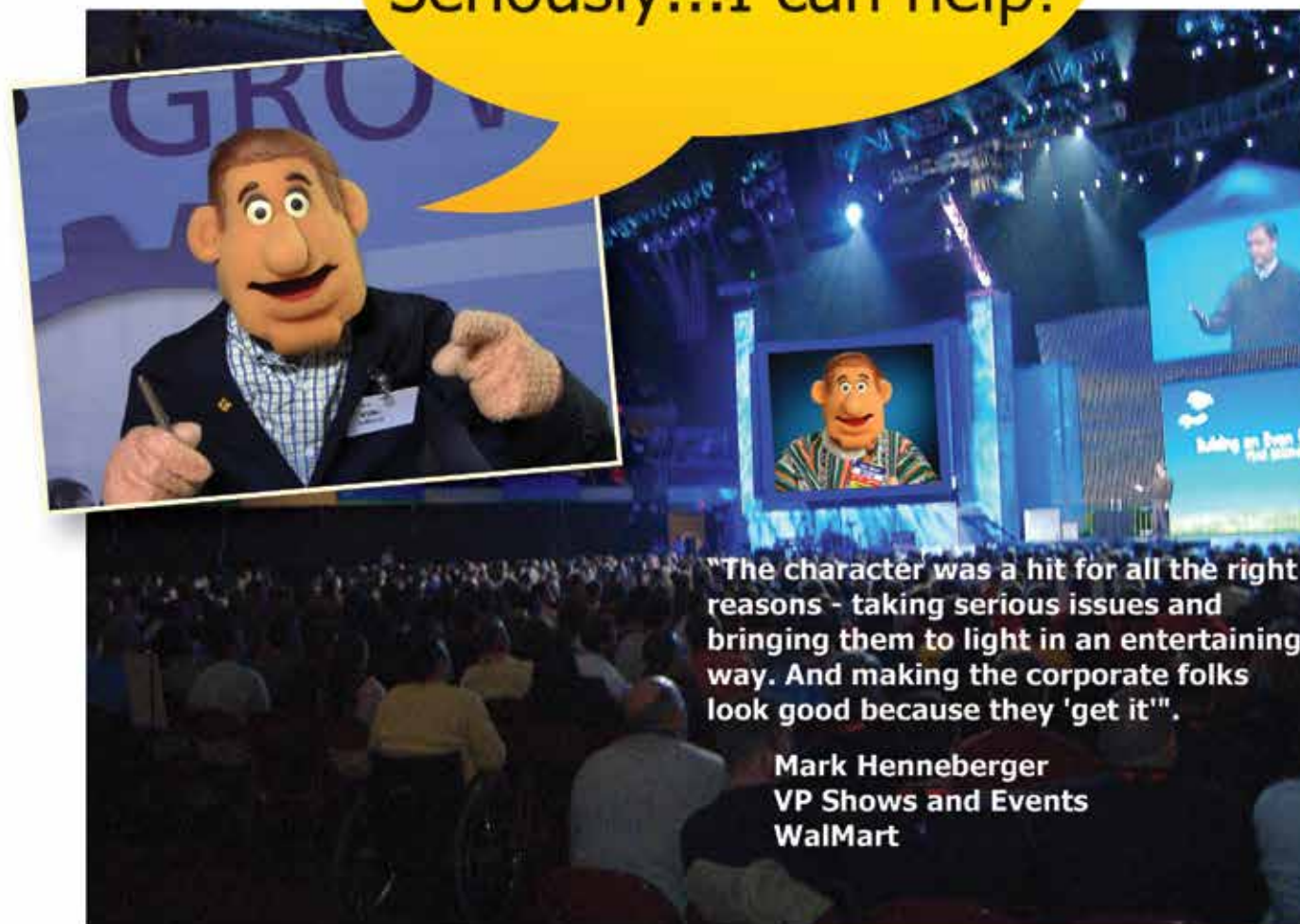
## DEFINE EXPECTATIONS

The best practice is to set clear expectations and responsibilities of the speaker prior to hiring. Put all expectations in writing, including items not directly related to the speech itself such as photo ops, signing memorabilia, etc. Selecting the right speaker can make or break a meeting. Indeed, some planners believe that securing the right keynote speaker is as important as choosing the right property, meeting date and theme.

On the other hand, hiring the wrong speaker can result in disengaged and confused attendees or overshadow a great event and reflect poorly on the person who did the hiring.

Obtaining the perfect speaker can make a successful meeting spectacular and make a planner look like a star. **THE NEW YORK TIMES**

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# INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE

DESTINATIONS AROUND  
THE WORLD ARE  
INCREASINGLY ATTRACTIVE  
BY DAVID SWANSON

JEFF FRENETTE PHOTOGRAPHY

Parc de la Chute-Montmorency is a spectacular, historic site about 15 minutes from downtown Québec City. It offers activities such as zip lining, hiking trails, meeting and dining venues and more.

**V**egas? Been there. Florida? Done that. When it comes to selecting a destination to hold that special meeting or an unforgettable incentive program, planners are increasingly looking for a “wow” factor that will drive attendance, engagement, and loyalty. Enter, well — the rest of the world.

## SO MANY OPTIONS

Whether heading to proven marquee stars such as Paris or Hong Kong or venturing further about to such developing destinations as Morocco or Vietnam, there is almost no limit to the international options available for meeting planners to consider when trying to break the mold. And setting a program in a foreign location isn’t just about stocking up on passport stamps — companies are identifying tangible benefits to their globe-trotting.

“International destinations drive impact within an organization,” explains Cate Banfield, CIS, vice president of Event Solution Design & Strategy

for BCD Meetings & Events. Banfield notes that companies are increasingly shifting budgets back to incentives, allowing them to explore countries that might not have been deemed possible in the past. “Customers who have typically had their programs in the U.S. or Caribbean are now starting to explore further afield to destinations where some of their folks have never been.”

Catherine Chaulet, president of Global DMC Partners, concurs.

“The world is much bigger, and there are so many options,” Chaulet says.

Canada’s Québec City, for instance, is one such option. Although it’s not an overseas destination, it offers the look and feel of a European city, which makes it attractive to planners and attendees. According to a recent report, the Québec City Convention Centre hosted 210 events in the last 12 months, including 71 conferences — 18 international and 53 national. The venue can accommodate up to 9,000 attendees and connects by an underground walkway to the Hilton Québec and Delta Hotels by Marriott Québec.





HAVAS CREATIVE TOURS, A GLOBAL DMC PARTNER

Also, Travel+Leisure magazine recently gave Québec City the No. 1 spot on its list of Top 5 Canadian cities. Other notable hotels in the area include the Fairmont Le Château Frontenac, the Hôtel Manoir Victoria, The Relais & Châteaux Auberge Saint-Antoine and Québec City Marriott Downtown.

“Going international has always triggered a lot more interest, especially with the financial and insurance industries,” Chaulet says. “For a lot of these companies, these incentives have one main goal: increasing the corporation’s revenue by tapping into the employee’s desire to win a spot on one of these incentives by selling and promoting more of the corporation’s services.”

Chaulet says utilizing new and exciting destinations for incentives can be a tool for attracting and retaining employees. “It’s becoming so critical, particularly for these industries. Not only do we see an enormous need to invest in incentives, but also in creativity, so a lot of effort is put into building programs that cater to millennial and Gen X employees, thinking about networking while addressing the needs of the individual. It’s a combination of business and leisure — ‘bleisure’ — and providing enough flexibility for attendees to have alone time.”

Joe Reise, travel planner at Motivation Excellence Inc., adds that the companies themselves are seeking to broaden their horizons and develop a more global perspective. During an incentive program held in London, McKenzie Financial Services organized

Catherine Chaulet, president of Global DMC Partners, says new and exciting destinations for incentives, such as Iguazú Falls in Brazil, can be a tool to attract and retain employees.

a dinner joined by financial professionals from England. “They were able to provide perspectives on how they see the market,” Reise says. “A lot of times these kinds of conversations help generate ideas, how to understand the global market and perhaps how to generate business here at home.”

But from a purely motivational viewpoint, Kip Lambert, CIS, brand ambassador for Destinations Inc., says

“Because travel-based incentives motivate at these emotional levels, they can be far more memorable and effective than a cash reward.”

**KIP LAMBERT, CIS**  
Brand Ambassador  
Destinations Inc.



travel resonates on emotional levels. “Travel is romantic. Travel is learning new cultures, experiencing sights and sounds, smells and tastes and uncommon experiences,” Lambert says. “Because travel-based incentives motivate at these emotional levels, they can be far more memorable and effective than a cash reward.”

One of Lambert’s recent clients was the U.S. insurance company EMI Health, which provides its 40 to 50 best brokers with a trip to an overseas destination every year. For an incentive last

year, EMI chose New Zealand. “What attracted our client most was New Zealand’s bucket-list nature and the wide range of group activities available,” Lambert says. “The client’s priorities were a ‘wow’ destination that would influence their insurance brokers’ selling decisions; a five-star experience including all meals, lodging, excursions and entertainment; and a good mix of free time and scheduled group events to facilitate networking. They felt that New Zealand had that star power.”

With New Zealand’s top attractions spread across two islands and hundreds of miles, Lambert says one hurdle for the client was the duration of the trip, often a consideration for overseas meetings. “We had to paint a picture for the client to convince them that they needed to make this trip two days longer than previous programs, to make sure that the itinerary had everything packed in that they wanted to accomplish.” The 100-member group started their tour in Auckland, the usual point of entry for North American arrivals to New Zealand, before moving on to the South Island, where many of the country’s more adventurous activities are based.

Lambert says the highlight of the program was a visit to the Kawarau Bungy Centre outside of Queenstown. The bridge crossing the Kawarau River gorge is the location where AJ Hackett invented the bungee jump, leaping off the bridge with an elastic cord tied at his ankles. It’s become one of New Zealand’s top tourist sites and has grown to include a viewing platform and meeting spaces.

“Our group arrived and enjoyed cocktails while they watched the experienced jumpers show off their trick jumps, while dinner was also being served in the indoor space of the Bungy Centre. The space is well designed and fits the theme of the mountain, the bridge and its history with bungee jumping. Our favorite small touch were the centerpieces, complete with sections of bungee cords bundled and cut into small pieces, with a small card explaining the origins of bungee jumping and how the cords are made, all for guests to take home as a memento of their evening.”

In the end, Lambert says more

than 40 of the brokers stepped up to the do the jump.

“Find out what your group is really into,” Lambert adds. “We were surprised at the level of participation for the bungee event. I also wish I could’ve gone back to the beginning of planning to get a better gauge of our guests’ interest in Hobbiton and the Waitomo Glow worm Caves. On their last full free day, many guests decided to make an independent drive to these venues, located more than two hours from Auckland. If I could do it over again with this knowledge, I would have made a plan for the group or I would’ve advertised this more heavily as an option that people could book ahead of time.”

What criteria should be considered before diving into international waters?

Chaulet says her No. 1 criterion is airlift — considering where the employees are based and how difficult it is to reach various destinations.

“The budget is a big part of it,” Chaulet adds. “Time of year is another consideration — what kind of look and feel they want? Do they want nice weather, or do they want more of a cultural element in the program?”

Chaulet says she also finds out what level of knowledge the company has about international programs.

“There are logistics around passports and security,” Chaulet says. “Will the organization take care of this or is it something we will be expected to do? How much do they want to outsource vs. manage themselves? We always think of logistics first.”

“We had a financial company that was very interested in doing an inter-



ADRIAN HODGE / ROTORUA CANOPY TOURS



BEN PIPE PHOTOGRAPHY

national event in Asia,” Chaulet recalls. “At first, everything was very exciting to them. But the minute we started explaining the logistics, we realized that by educating the client a bit further on the nuances — budget, flight time, passports, and comfort level of the attendees to travel far — it wasn’t the best fit anymore. In the end, we reverted to a Caribbean destination, which was much more practical option for this particular company.”

## A STRONG DOLLAR HELPS

Fortunately, a number of places that might have been unaffordable for some planners just a few years ago — Europe or Australia, for instance — have become more accessible as the U.S. dollar has strengthened.

“We’re in a good spot because the U.S. dollar is so strong,” Banfield says. “For instance, destinations in the U.K. have become more affordable. London is certainly expensive, but the prices aren’t as high as people think and they’re really trying to capture those groups. We’ve been doing city-country splits — a central London hotel paired with a country experience in a manor house. It’s all about that cultural immersion and finding the places and spaces that allow you

New Zealand offers a wealth of venues and heart-pumping activities such as zip lining. The bridge crossing the Kawarau River gorge is the location where AJ Hackett invented the bungee jump, leaping off the bridge with an elastic cord tied at his ankles.

The strength of the U.S. dollar has made destinations such as London and other European cities more affordable.

to create authentic experience that you may not find on your own.”

Southeast Asia is one place meeting planners are finding excellent value, and for a recent Asia Cash Cycle Seminar organized by Currency Research, Britnee Hursin, CMP, conference director, chose Bangkok, Thailand.

“We considered all the major Asia-Pacific destinations,” Hursin says. “But Bangkok has both regional and international appeal, offering a great location with accessibility to international direct flights, good value for the budget, five-star service and a vibrant culture. Everyone speaks English and is very welcoming to foreign visitors. It was particularly attractive to us because the Bank of Thailand — the central bank for the country — had previously reopened their money museum. We thought that this would be a great attraction for our delegates. I found Bangkok to be one of the easiest places to host a conference.”

The seminar attracted 223 delegates from 36 different countries, all of whom were based at the Shangri-La Hotel, Bangkok, set along the Chao Phraya River. While not located in the central business district, the Shangri-La is close to shopping and attractions and the river provides a buffer from the traffic and pace of Bangkok. The city’s metro system and river taxis make travel easier to other areas of the normally traffic-clogged city.





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“The team on-site at the Shangri-La Hotel property is by far one of my favorites to work with,” Hursin says. “They acted like an extension of our own staff and were dedicated and invested in making sure the event was memorable. They truly went above and beyond, and some staff members even helped me set up registration, something which is never expected.”

Hursin continues, “We had planned to host a dinner outdoors but due to weather we unfortunately had to take our guests to the same ballroom that they had been sitting in all day for educational presentations. But the hotel staff whipped out a surprise dance floor, some lighting and table décor to help transform the ballroom into a social space. I cannot talk enough about how accommodating the staff was to our last-minute requests and their efforts to ensure that everything was delivered on-time so we had a successful show.”

Hursin also lauded the services offered by the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau. “They provided excellent support and all the information I needed to share with our delegates regarding local restaurants, sightseeing and emergency safety information. They also provided us with VIP

Britnee Hursin, CMP, at the check-in desk, welcomes a delegate to a conference at the Shangri-La Hotel, Bangkok in Thailand.

express passes to expedite airport visa control for our staff, which made arrival to Bangkok much easier after the long journey from Austin, Texas. This was my fifth time back to Thailand, and I enjoy each trip more every time,” Hursin says.

“But more important than the destination, it’s always — how are we going to build the program?”

**CATHERINE CHAULET**  
President  
Global DMC Partners



sin says, adding a pro tip: A foot massage after a long, hard-working day. “They are easy to get at one of several shops just outside of the hotel — amazing massages for under \$10.”

Reise is another incentive plan-



Sunset at Wat Arun in Bangkok. Planners say although Thailand has a long travel day, it offers five-star hotels for three-star prices.

ner who finds Thailand offers “exceptional value.”

“Getting over there is the tough part,” Reise says. “It’s a long travel day. But once you’re there, you’re getting five-star hotels for three-star prices, with outstanding service. Plus, it gives people an opportunity to experience an exotic destination that they might not otherwise get to in their lifetime.”

## LOOK FOR VALUE

Reise says his company looks for value in tertiary destinations. “Instead of Berlin or Munich, we go to Dresden, Germany. Costs are about 35 percent less, and yet you can still have the same European culture and entertainment experience.”

For a U.S.-based healthcare services company, Reise took his 240-person group to Gleneagles Hotel in Scotland for an incentive and award meeting. “We also looked at Montreux and Barcelona,” he explains. “But Scotland was chosen because the client had just acquired a major company in the U.K., and also because the company’s top VIPs are major golf enthusiasts — Scotland has world-class golf. The hotel offered an excellent blend of unique Scottish ambience and a plethora of activities on-site, as well as world class sightseeing nearby in Edinburgh and other areas of Scotland.”

Reise made sure the entire program was infused with a solid dose of Scottish culture. “Our first night was

themed around ‘Scotland through the Centuries,’” Reise recalls. “We used multiple rooms, each of which represented a different century in Scottish history, including different foods, décor and entertainment unique to each century. And for our final night party we took over Stirling Castle. The men received kilts and the women Scottish sashes to wear for the final evening — we recon-firmed fittings on arrival day. We had bagpipers, Scottish entertainment and it was a smash hit.”

Reise notes that it can be difficult to find hotels with larger meetings spaces in Europe, but for another evening event, Gleneagles worked with Reise to convert its indoor tennis facility into the client’s desired set-up for meeting space and the awards dinner. “This was challenging, as we wanted to create the illusion that people were entering a meeting venue. We required 9,000 sf and Gleneagles was one of the few hotels or venues that could accommodate this. Together with the hotel staff and DMC we created a very unique and special environment for participants to meet and receive their awards.”

Reise adds, “Europeans think differently than Americans. What we take for granted in American hotels can sometimes be considered an exception in a European hotel. Pay attention to details for non-traditional venues that require you to do things like bringing in a kitchen. Make sure you are aware of what capabilities and limitations there are for hosting an event that includes off-site catering. It’s important to communicate all of these details up front before committing.”

Chaulet adds, “This is why it’s important to work with professional meeting planners, so you can go in with your eyes



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A band of bagpipers play in front of the statue of Robert the Bruce in the Stirling Castle in Stirling, Scotland, United Kingdom.

open. Financial and insurance companies have very sophisticated meeting planners at the helm. But more important than the destination, it’s always — how are we going to build the program?”

## INCREASING POPULARITY

What countries are planners hearing requests for with increasing frequency? “A lot of companies are exploring the Pacific Coast of Mexico, and San Miguel in Central Mexico,” Banfield says. “They may not have the budget to go to Spain, but they want that Spanish history and culture and they can find it in San Miguel. People are also paying attention to Peru and Cartagena, Colombia.”

“My favorite incentive destination right now is Croatia,” Banfield adds. “It’s the most epic, epic experience. It’s still a spot where you can find really great value, but that’s going to flip pretty soon. More and more people are exploring Croatia — it’s really skyrocketed in popularity.”

Chaulet says Europe remains tried

and true, and that southern countries such as Italy, Spain and France continue to attract a lot of insurance and financial incentive programs.

“What is interesting, is the secondary destinations that are popping up,” Chaulet says. “In Italy, we’re noticing demand beyond Rome and Florence, such as the Puglia region, and offering something more unique. Instead of big hotels, we’re seeing smaller groups and catering to a more exclusive experience. Northern Spain, the Basque region — these were not places we looked at before. The Nordic countries are becoming extremely attractive, as well as eastern countries like Croatia and Montenegro, and Prague is very much of interest.”

Asked to name one country that will be on our radar soon, Chaulet picks a sleeper.

“The destination in the pipeline that is going to have a lot of visibility for the next two years is Malta,” predicts Chaulet. “This is a destination that has aggressively pushed for more visibility, has done a superb job with infrastructure and it has historic as well as resort activities. There are direct flights from anywhere in Europe, and then one quick flight to Malta.”

IFMM

Croatia has skyrocketed in popularity thanks to its value and the experiences it offers.



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Bonnie Godsmann, CEO of GAMA International, values the relationships her organization has created.

# Are You Leveraging Your DMO?

## Make Strategic Partnerships With Destination Organizations Work for You

BY MAURA KELLER

When Bonnie Godsmann, CEO of GAMA International, an organization dedicated to promoting the professional development needs and leadership skills of leaders in the insurance, investment and financial services industry, looks to orchestrate a meeting or event in a specific destination, she values the relationships GAMA has established with destination organizations across the world.

“As a global financial services organization that has recently expanded its meetings and member experiences beyond the U.S.

border, utilizing a destination organization has been critical to the successful rollout of our international initiatives,” Godsmann says. “Our membership base, being financial services professionals, lends itself to an expectation — from content development agenda setting to event experience to transportation. All of these items we would never be able to accomplish in a credible and culturally sensitive way without the help of a destination specific organization.”

Don Welsh, president and CEO of Destinations International agrees. A seasoned

tourism executive with more than 35 years of experience in the industry, Welsh has implemented a strategic realignment for Destination International to deliver the resources members have determined to be essential to the success of their organizations. Destinations International is the world’s largest resource for destination organizations and also provides a wealth of information to meeting planners who are looking to enhance their relationships with destination organizations across the U.S. and throughout the world.

“A convention and visitors bureau (CVB) plays a critical role in meetings and conventions,” Welsh says. “As partners in the meeting planning process, CVBs connect the destination’s unique attributes to elevate the event experience, source local ‘thought leaders’ and help evaluate a meeting’s economic impact and success.” As meeting and event planners are asked to do more with less, CVBs can become an extension of their teams, and all of a destination organization’s or CVB’s services are free. Quite simply, it’s why the sales and services department in CVBs exist.

Destination organizations know their market inside and out and can be a game changer for meeting planners looking to organize meaningful, experiential meetings and events. In fact, as Destinations International has found, destination sales professionals help drive more than 1 in 5 group room nights in their communities within the U.S. every year.

And destination organizations continue to improve their offerings to meet the specific needs of the meeting and event planners with whom they work. For example, VisitPittsburgh provides specialized event-specific services, such as the organization’s Bring It Home campaign, which creates connections between the CVB and locals who are members of national associations. As a result, contacts that the CVB makes at such organizations as the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and other corporations and foundations can help meeting and event planners when they are orchestrating an event in the area.

To help make meeting planners’ lives a bit easier, especially as it relates to destination visits, the San Diego Tourism Authority recently created its Site Experience Program with the goal of stream-



PHOTO BY VICTOR GOODPASTURE

lining the site experience for planners. As part of the program, the San Diego Tourism Authority sends a video to the planner to let them know who will meet them at the airport while also sending pertinent info to the hotel or hotels about what the planner is looking for in a venue — saving time and effort on everyone’s part.

According to Natasha Caputo, director of Westchester County Tourism & Film, in White Plains, New York, as a destination organization, Westchester

Planners suggest asking the local DMO about popular themes for the area. San Diego is the perfect place to add nautical-themed entertainment and décor such as this costumed server offering hors d’oeuvres.

In the case of Westchester County, given the county’s proximity to New York City and its “convenient-from-anywhere” location, the region has fast become a go-to destination for meetings and events. And, as a result, a lot of

“As partners in the meeting planning process, CVBs connect the destination’s unique attributes to elevate the event experience, source local ‘thought leaders’ and help evaluate a meeting’s economic impact and success.”

**DON WELSH**

President and CEO, Destinations International



County Tourism & Film offers a breadth of venues that cater to every group size, a variety of accommodations, great dining choices, activities and more. “The right destination connection can make all the difference in linking planners with the right resources to make their event a success,” Caputo says. “We aim to be an extension of the meeting planner’s staff and work to create the right atmosphere and environment for a productive and memorable group experience.”

meeting planners turn to Westchester County Tourism & Film to help with the logistics of their events. As Caputo explains, the atmosphere and slower pace provide a literal breath of fresh air, with ample opportunities for inspired creativity. The county’s venues cater to almost every group size and the region offers a full variety of accommodations and meeting locations, dining choices and activities ranging from corporate scavenger hunts and team-building events to refreshing outdoor adventures.



“We have set ourselves apart when it comes to accommodating inspiring and uplifting events. However, our work never stops,” Caputo says. “We continue to strengthen our offerings and this year alone, have seen renovations, rebranding and new openings for events spaces around the county.”

## PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

Destination organizations and CVBs are the go-to community experts in the destination management for financial and insurance-focused meetings and events. CVBs are not only the destination experts, they are the influencer within the destination to drive results for a meeting planner’s event.

Destination organizations know what works and what types of meetings and activities have been successful for financial and insurance-focused groups in the past. As Caputo explains, meeting and event planners can gain valuable insights on unique area experiences that they might not otherwise discover. For example, Westchester County can engage groups in The Give Back program, designed to provide groups and corporations an inspiring outlet for giving back to those less fortunate. Three of Westchester County’s top charitable and environmental organizations — Food Bank for Westchester County, The Westchester Parks Foundation and Teatown Lake Reservation — are hard at work helping to improve the lives of people every day.

“The potential for missed opportunities like those mentioned exists when planners fail to take advantage of destination organizations,” Caputo says. Westchester County offers a Meeting Planner RFP on its website that is a great tool and starting point for connecting with the right resources and venues for their meeting.

Carolyn Davis, CMP, owner and senior meeting and event planner at Strategic Meeting Partners LLC in San Diego, California, sees destination organizations as a pure time saver for your meeting and event planning business.

“A destination organization in an unfamiliar city is always my first call, as they can bring me up to speed on what the city can deliver for a meeting

quickly,” Davis says. “They will then do the initial leg work for me, providing assistance in listing hotels that meet my criteria, as well as providing me with a list of other suppliers that I may need in building out the meeting.”

As Davis explains, to leverage the wealth of information at their proverbial fingertips, many destination organizations provide a list of hotels that meet a meeting planner’s criteria and will even send out a meeting planner’s RFP to appropriate locales. A destination organization is also the expert of the city’s key attractions and the city’s mass transit plan and they are able to refer meeting planners to other contractors and suppliers, while also pro-

“A destination organization in an unfamiliar city is always my first call, as they can bring me up to speed on what the city can deliver for a meeting quickly.”

**CAROLYN DAVIS, CMP**

Owner and Senior Meeting and Event Planner  
Strategic Meeting Partners LLC



viding directories of hotels, maps of the area and lists of suppliers. This wealth of knowledge and expertise is what meeting planners need to leverage in orchestrating a perfect event.

As Welsh explains, destination organizations and CVBs serve as an extension of a meeting planner’s staff to provide real-time collaboration and access to the city experience and connect meeting planners to the resources they need to be an event advocate within the destination.

One thing Welsh and his team at Destinations International hear repeatedly is that planners don’t always think of a CVB as the first step in their event-planning process. Because of this perception, Destinations International is working with industry partners such as MPI, PCMA and IMEX Group to heighten the awareness of what services CVBs provide and why they are a critical resource to meeting planners.

“Destinations International is working to drive awareness on the value CVBs can deliver on behalf of the meeting planner to make an event successful,” Welsh says. “CVBs will be an advocate for a planner’s business event

strategy by being aligned and focused on their meeting objectives and business outcomes. It is through our vast industry partnerships and resources that meeting planners will not only know how to use the CVB as a resource for every meeting but will utilize their complimentary services to help in the planning and execution of their event.”

Cindy Hayes, CMP, DMCP, director of sales with PRA New Orleans, says there are key advantages for meeting planners when working with destination organizations.

“One of the most important things in life that is irreplaceable is time” says my boss weekly. “You can’t get it back,” Hayes says. “By working with a destination management company, meeting planners will work with local experts on the ground. They won’t waste time researching and vetting vendors on the internet.”

Hayes and others at PRA New Orleans save clients a lot of time that could be allocated elsewhere. “Using a destination company provides planners with an in-depth knowledge of the destination. With our company, we have long-standing relationships working with the best and most reliable suppliers and treat them as partners.”

Meeting planners can make the most of their relationships with the destination organization partner by truly understanding the expectations of their internal clients and sharing those expectations with their destination organization partner.

As Hayes explains, so many times, she is on the same page with the planner but their stakeholders had something different in mind. Planners can leverage their partnership with a destination organization by understanding that all their supplier-partners have been rigorously vetted and subject to annual reviews to ensure they meet the highest quality of service standards and safety.

“One of the biggest, most common mistakes that meeting planners make when working with a destination organization is not clearly understanding the expectation of their stakeholder and communicating something that was totally different,” Hayes says.

PRA New Orleans had a client who asked the company to sign a reverse

force majeure clause in their contract. “We made sure that same reverse clause was in our supplier/partner contracts,” Hayes says. “Unfortunately, a hurricane hit South Florida where the majority of attendees were traveling from to attend the meeting, so they had to cancel. Our production team leveraged the relationships we have with the supplier/partners who understood the client needed to cancel their events due the hurricane hitting their home office location. Not long after they were back up on their feet and operating, our client rebooked the meeting. Had it not been for the extraordinary relationships our event producer had with our supplier-partners, we would not have been able to recreate almost the same experience a few weeks later for our client and their guests.”

Davis thinks an event planner can make the most of these relationships when they fully understand what that specific city’s destination organization or CVB offers, as it tends to vary from city to city. For example, a second-tier city may offer a meeting planner more financial incentives than a top-tier hotel. “Most will offer complimentary site inspections that include housing and a fully flushed out agenda transporting

meeting planners with a guide for site inspections of the hotels and attractions the meeting planner is considering for their meeting,” Davis says. “This is a win-win for all parties involved.”

That said, a key mistake for meeting planners to avoid making is not providing the destination organization with all the facts or to provide general information of the meeting. “It’s an ethical mistake to take advantage of their hospitality for personal use, such as bringing their entire family for a site inspection of SeaWorld,” Davis says.

## CREATIVE STRATEGIES

Maintaining a strong hold on the meetings and conventions arena requires some strategic initiatives on the part of destination organizations and CVBs. While a meeting planner may already know that a convention held in Wisconsin represents good value compared to other destinations or urban markets such as Orlando, Las Vegas or Chicago, destination organizations in more expensive locales can help meeting planners “scout” the region for more budget-appropriate venues and lodging. Free parking, easy ground transportation, spacious accommodations, loca-

tion, access to leisure activities such as golf, spas, waterparks and outdoor sports all can add value to a meeting destination. And the experts and destination organizations understand this.

Meeting planners greatly appreciate the value quotient that coincides with free parking, affordable room rates, flexible food budgets, free amenities such as waterparks and money-saving green practices. Experts agree that there are countless partnership opportunities for unique and experiential meetings and events and destination organizations to guide those itineraries and experiences.

“I believe that the relationship between destination organization and meeting planners will continue to grow as cities, their hotels, restaurants, attractions and suppliers continue to change,” Davis says.

As planners are being asked to do more with less, Hayes thinks the future holds even a greater partnership between meeting planners and destination management companies. “Each side can always learn from the other,” Hayes says. “But it will be even more important to work hard to develop relationships based on trust.”

**I&FMM**

## EMBRACING INTEGRITY

*Familiarization Trips are Popular, but Planners Must Avoid Pitfalls*

**D**estination organizations and convention and visitors bureaus often offer meeting planners familiarization trips — particularly when an area of a city or region has recently been renovated or new construction of a large venue, such as convention center, has been completed.

Familiarization trips can be a great way to learn about a property or group of properties. However, when things become excessive or violate company policies, then a meeting planner should refuse to participate and find the next opportunity that is in-line with their personal and professional values.

When a familiarization trip is being offered to a meeting or event planner, there are some inherent ethical questions they need to ask themselves.

Some of the key questions to ask include:

- Is the familiarization trip being given as a bribe or is it intended to help a meeting planner become familiar with an area to know if it is the right destination for the planned event?
- Does the familiarization trip offer help the meeting plan-

ner make a sound decision based on what is best for the company or client being represented, or would it be considered in excess and for personal gain?

- Is the meeting planner requesting “extras” to treat themselves without the company’s knowledge?

- Is the trip for the meeting planner to work and learn about a destination or a cheap way to take a vacation?

There are instances when a meeting planner definitely should not accept a familiarization trip:

- The host is insistent that they are the only choice and tries to win a meeting planner over with excessive swag items, limo rides and other amenities

that do not make sense based on the venue and budget.

- The meeting and event planner should not accept a gift that may cause a perceived detriment to their company or their reputation.

- In alignment with company policy, the meeting planner is not allowed to take cash or cash equivalent such as gift cards or gambling chips.

**I&FMM**



# PLAY IT SAFE

**WITH A GOOD PLAN, THERE'S NO NEED  
TO PANIC WHEN DISASTER STRIKES**

**BY DEREK REVERON**

It's the first day of the event and hundreds of insurance company attendees are in meeting and break-out rooms. Suddenly, people are running everywhere screaming that a gun-toting person has taken hostages in a ballroom. Do you panic because you don't know what to do next? Or do you gather yourself, breathe deeply and implement an emergency response plan (ERP) that has anticipated such a situation? An onsite hostage situation is just one of numerous crises that can endanger the health and life of attendees, postpone a meeting, ruin it altogether, or damage the professional reputation of a planner.

## **PREPARE AN ERP**

That's why planners must be prepared with an ERP to respond to any crisis. According to Allison Cooper, vice president, conference experiences, LPL Financial, "In today's world, not having a crisis management plan shouldn't be an option. There should be a requirement for all conferences to have some sort of security plan," says Cooper, who is on the board of directors of Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals (FICP). "Security on site needs to be a norm before executing a program."

Koleen Roach, director, meetings and conference management, Securian Financial Group Inc. offers this warning to planners who lack ERPs: "Unfortunately, those who do not have a plan in place will find out very quickly what the risks are when a crisis occurs. Best to not have to find out the hard way. Put a plan in place today." Indeed, attendees and the public expect insurance and financial firms to take precautions against the unexpected.

Jeff O'Hara, CMP, DMCP, president, PRA New Orleans, deals frequently with insurance and financial firms. According to O'Hara, "Due to the types of products that these companies provide, there is an expectation that they take even more care than most companies to avoid risk. Their customers put trust in the companies for their long-term personal financial security, so it is natural to presume that these companies would ensure the utmost of risk prevention for their events."

O'Hara adds that lacking or incomplete risk prevention is itself a risk for insurance and financial firms. "Any failure in this area gets extrapolated, especially if



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Without an emergency response plan, planners risk endangering attendees because they won't know what to do in the event of a crisis, which can range from natural disasters such as an earthquake or hurricane to a terrorist attack, labor stoppage or an unruly attendee.

it gets into the public eye," O'Hara says.

Lack of an ERP can exacerbate a crisis and threaten the safety and security of attendees. Yet, according to recent studies, more than half of meeting and event planners lack an event-specific crisis management plan. Many planners lack ERPs because they don't have the time to create one or depend on event insurance or a venue's emergency procedures.

Planners without an ERP who have never faced a serious meeting crisis can be lulled into a false sense of security and avoid creating a plan. However, planners who suddenly experience a crisis often change their perspective.

Roach created an ERP plan before a crisis hit and, fortunately, hasn't experienced one yet. "We've had a few minor situations that we were able to sort through without too much struggle such as stolen passports, medical urgencies, misconduct, etc., but it was those few situations and awareness of other world events that have impacted the programs of other companies that made it very clear to us we needed a formal plan," Roach says. "Thankfully we haven't had a major crisis, but I know if we do, we are very prepared to respond."

## **BE READY TO HANDLE A CRISIS**

Planners shouldn't wait for the worst to happen to create an ERP. Hav-

ing a plan is especially important for financial and insurance firms due to the nature of the industries, says Kyle Jordan, CAE, CMM, CMP, director of conferences and meetings for the Financial Planning Association (FPA).

"As we look at preparing for all of the standard crises and risk potentials, including those that are natural and human-made, finance and insurance professionals should be aware of significant political, financial and economic factors and impacts," Jordan says.

Jordan advises planners to be aware of sudden and unanticipated changes to financial policies and laws which can impact financial and insurance company meetings. In creating an ERP, Jordan adds, financial and insurance planners should ask themselves: "Does your organization need to prepare for different pre- and post-election outcomes? Does your organization need to prepare for a 700-point drop in the Dow Jones average, changes to the political landscape or swings in the economy?"

Most planners haven't faced a serious crisis. However, those who have know the value of preparation.

Cooper once dealt with a hotel fire, and it validated her company's decision to have its own on-site security. "The fire department was out there, and the hotel security was nowhere to be found," Cooper says. "Our security team helped



get the guests out of the building and back in later. Our security team also met with the hotel the following day to go through the issues from the night before and discuss where the hotel could be at risk if they weren't better about making sure their security management plan is in place and on alert at all times."

Last year, O'Hara experienced a crisis with an insurance group that illustrates the need for planners to work closely with DMCs before and during a crisis.

"At close to midnight on a Saturday, there was a fire in the hotel, and it was evacuated," O'Hara says. "Hundreds of people were on the street in the middle of the night while the fire was extinguished. The meeting planner, following the company crisis plan, determined that she needed to find alternate accommodations."

The planner then called O'Hara's operations manager, who quickly went to the all-night grocery and picked up a load of bottled water and snacks and brought them to attendees.

"Eventually, attendees reentered the hotel, and the insurance group's planner found another property to take the group in the middle of the night," O'Hara says. "In the interim, my operations manager was on the phone securing buses to transport the group to the new hotel. By the time they returned to their rooms for their belongings, we had coaches waiting out front to bring them to the new hotel. The only way this could happen is by having a local DMC partner on the ground that has the contacts to secure buses to transport 400 people in the middle of the night during an emergency."

While planners need ERPs for readily identifiable crises, they also need the plans for run-of-the-mill problems that can escalate into issues that threaten meetings.

Intoxication would be an example. According to Cooper, "Most of our incidences stem from over-intoxication. Instead of a having a home office person who may have a relationship with the inebriated client deal with the situation, we have our security guys escort them to rooms and pull them aside to have conversations, etc."

While the intoxication issue may

be relatively common, it's the rarer threats resulting from violent social, criminal and political incidences that have increased the need for ERPs. Here are key actions to take when creating an ERP:

- **Brainstorm.** Meet with the planning team and stakeholders to discuss problems that could possibly occur.
- **Assess.** "Evaluate risks based on location, attendee profile, amount of movement the group will be

"Unfortunately, those who do not have a plan in place will find out very quickly what the risks are when a crisis occurs."

**KOLEEN ROACH**  
Director, Meetings and Conference Management  
Securian Financial Group Inc.



doing, travel time involved, any risky activities and an assessment of the stability of the local government," Roach says.

- **Know entry and exit points.** Can people access the venue via loading docks, climbing fences or through other points?
- **Evaluate on-site security.** Find out what emergency plans, procedures or protocols properties and venues already have in place. Is there an on-site security staff and what are their responsibilities? How will you control the access and credentialing of attendees, volunteers, VIPs, entertainers and others?
- **Determine potential threats.** Create a list of possible emergencies that could happen and plan for each one. Possibilities include terrorism, the sudden death of an attendee, medical emergencies, demonstrations, protests, injuries, fires, active shooters, power failures and extreme weather.

## HAVE A STRATEGY

Roach says, "Have you clearly thought through a strategy based on the type of crisis — hurricane, earthquake, terrorist attack, strike, etc.? Will it require a satellite phone, solar-powered phone chargers, quick access to cash, knowledge of where local land

lines can be found in case mobile towers are overloaded and a plan for getting attendees out of the situation quickly?"

- **Get the hotel's ERP.** Require that hotels attach a copy of risk management plan to RFPs. If there is no written plan, ask the hotel how it responds to crises. Ask if the property has the staff to handle basic security tasks such as keeping non-attendees out of meeting areas.
- **Make evacuation plans.** How will you ensure an orderly evacuation from properties and are there enough exits to do so in an orderly fashion? Include an evacuation plan for every meeting room, especially large rooms.
- **Know local shelters.** Have hotel and venue specific plans for evacuation and sheltering in place.
- **Anticipate changes.** Have alternative itinerary alternatives in the event of an emergency that requires changes but not cancellation. Include back-up plans for speakers and outdoor events.

• **Review.** Walk through emergency plans with meeting and hotel staff. In addition, keep the following tips in mind when creating an ERP.

Tightening budgets can make it difficult to get management and stakeholder support for crisis management planning, but planners must make the effort.

According to Roach, "The single most important element is to have executive level buy-in and full support in creating and implementing the plan. If you do not have the support of your executive team, any plan you create simply won't work."

Don't depend on the hotel or venue to provide crisis plans and procedures. Risk management should be a team effort that includes properties and venues.

Provide a copy of the ERP to all planning team members and train them how to implement it. A good plan may be of little use if staff doesn't know how to quickly implement it.

Don't have a one-size-fits-all ERP. Tailor the details of an ERP to each hotel and venue.

Designate staff responsibilities. According to Cooper, "Make sure you have the right people managing the plan on site. Sometimes corporate secu-



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According to recent studies, more than half of meeting and event planners lack an event-specific crisis management plan.

urity isn't enough, and they aren't trained adequately for true emergencies."

Work with CVBs and DMCs, some of which have faced crises before and can provide valuable assistance during an emergency.

## LEARN FROM YOUR PEERS

In addition, Jordan suggests planners learn from peers who have created successful ERPs. "One of the most pertinent key questions that I ask is, 'What are others in different industries doing with their crisis and risk management plans and what can we learn from what they're doing in those market segments?'" Jordan says. "Although we're finance and insurance meetings, there are strategies and tactics that we can learn from those performing healthcare meetings, religious meetings, government meetings, etc. We can't let the biggest obstacle of our own risk management planning be tunnel vision that is solely focused on crises in our own industry."

No ERP can be successful unless it includes a detailed communications plan component. According to Roach, "Regardless of industry, a communications plan should be at the forefront of the planning process for event professionals. I don't think you can single out the financial and insurance industries as having an especially different or unique set of parameters when it comes to developing and implementing a crisis communications management plan."

Roach's basic approach to developing an ERP communication plan is the

following: "There is the overall communication plan that defines who the key contacts are (executive level, security, conference team, HR, communications, etc.), the order in which they are contacted in the event of a crisis and who makes the ultimate decision on how it should be handled," Roach says.

According to Jordan, some planners lack a crisis communication plan or have one that is incomplete.

"I think the most overlooked part of a detailed crisis management plan is what happens when we don't have access to a communications section," Jordan says. "The crisis communication plan should include redundant backups at the physical destination, at the central office and digitally if we are to be truly prepared for all responses and all types of communications."

Jordan was prepared with a communications strategy when an issue threatened the FPA's 2,000-attendee annual conference.

"We had a labor stoppage at our host property," Jordan says. "We partnered in advance with the property to talk through strategies and options to mitigate any service impacts. We instituted daily service recovery meetings with the property to ensure we were addressing participant's concerns related to the work stoppage."

Jordan adds, "Although we couldn't mitigate all of the service impacts, being upfront about our concerns and offering customer-centric solutions to our supplier partner helped us work through the situation."

## BUILD A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Make it easy to understand. "An easily communicable crisis communica-

tions section is the key to the execution of the crisis management plan," says O'Hara, who has read the plans of several insurance and financial firms.

O'Hara adds, "It does no good to have a great plan on paper if the people on the ground are not clear on what to do with it and who is responsible for each action step in case of a crisis."

Rank-order potential crises that may have to be communicated.

"Potential crises should be grouped in sections based on severity, and the communication plan for each level of severity clear and easy to execute," O'Hara says. "It should include who needs to know what, who makes each level of decisions, and how do you reach the decision makers 24 hours a day."

List contact information. Include contacts for meeting, hotel, CVB and venue staffs. Also include emergency contacts for attendees, emergency service providers, police, hospitals and vendors.

Include at least three ways to contact meeting staff during crises — cell phones, two-way radio and a hotel or venue's public address system.

Create a phone tree that allows each staffer to call a pre-established number of key people and attendees to speed up communication without one person having to call everyone. Include provisions for contacting attendees who haven't arrived on-site after a crisis happens.

Be prepared to communicate emergency contact information to attendees via email, text and signage at events. Include a media communications strategy and designate a media spokesperson.

Even the best plans can't always prevent or mitigate a crisis. Any kind of crisis can happen any time during any meeting, large or small, and planners must be ready with meeting-specific ERPs.

A plan can make the difference between life and death, prevent or reduce injuries, stop a bad situation from worsening and help protect planners from lawsuits.

However, an ERP is ineffective without the leadership to implement it quickly and calmly while handling panicked attendees.

Planners' actions or lack thereof during the first moments of a crisis can make the difference between an interrupted meeting and one that is completely ruined.



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# CREATING ENGAGING EXPERIENCES



BY KEITH LORIA

DEPOSITPHOTOS.COM

## How to Run Events That Ultimately Impact Attendees

It seems life is moving at a faster pace than ever before with high tech and big data all the rage. This often translates into meetings aimed at the financial and insurance industries playing into these 21st century ideals, though that can impact the type of meeting that is held.

While attendees might be temporarily impressed with the in-the-face, popular-now ideas and tech involved in a meeting, many of those memories are fleeting and are soon forgotten. That's why small, purposeful changes or decisions can help a meeting planner make sure a meeting or event has impact, delivers on the goals of what it is set out to accomplish and leaves a lasting impression on attendees and other stakeholders.

Paget Kirkland, owner of Kirkland Event & Destination Services, based in Lake Worth, Florida, finds that the most memorable experiences not only visually dazzle the guests, but they engage one on an emotional level.

"Interactive events or tangible aspects throughout are moments that tend to leave a lasting impression," she says. "Capturing attendees' attention is one thing — continuing the momentum of the experience long after it has ended is what makes the difference. This momentum can be created through a series of events with one leading into the other and the reinforcement of a relatable theme throughout. The most preferable is an event which touches the heart."

Darci M. Motta, CMP, CITE, senior

conference manager for CSAA Insurance Group, a AAA insurer in Walnut Creek, California, says at a basic level, meeting planners need to create environments that are inclusive and create a sense of belonging before any meaningful engagement can exist. If attendees feel like they belong and it's a safe environment, engagement is much more comfortable and real.

"We strive to remove barriers, which can be as simple as transitioning crescent rounds from large banquet rounds to cocktail size tables, and provide tools for fun and easy interaction," she says. "Smartphone-based engage-

"Ask audience members to stand or sit, or speak to their neighbor. Very simple things can make the world of difference."

**CARLY SILBERSTEIN, DES, CED**  
Co-owner and CEO  
Redstone Agency Inc.



ment tools for easy questions, polls and topic ranking and tossable Q&A microphones can help make a space more intimate and dynamic."

session room, transitioning it to a large circle of chairs. One of our leaders then held a large ball of yarn and started the activity by calling out how her goals were connected to another leader in a different division, and then threw the ball of yarn across the room to that person. This went on until the room was a web of interconnectivity. Low cost and low tech, it was an activity that many referenced and then duplicated within their own workgroups."

Carly Silberstein, DES, CED, co-owner and CEO of Redstone Agency Inc., an event and association management company in Toronto, Ontario, notes to truly create a memorable experience, it's important to do things differently, whether that be introducing a new format (round table/fireside chat versus plenary session) or doing something unexpected (such as a yoga stretch between sessions).

"Gone are the days when the speaker can just speak to the audience," she says. "Get the audience involved by asking questions, using live polling or other engagement platforms. Ask audience members to stand or sit, or speak to their neighbor. Very simple things can make the world of difference."

Cori Dossett, CEM, CMP, president of Conferences Designed in Dallas, Texas, says while she can't stress enough how important it is to know the group, knowing some history of the meeting and what they have done can be just as vital for creating an engaging experience. Are there golfers? Are there families with young children? Is there a





PINPOINT PHOTOGRAPHY

common unique need or other situation in which the planner needs to be aware?

"In addition, you can take advantage of the city you are in and incorporate it into your meeting," she says. "A few years ago, I planned and executed a meeting for 3,000 during the Texas State Fair in Dallas. The opening reception had an old-time theme with little cost in decorating a hotel ballroom, and the closing party was at the actual fair. And this was an adults-only group, and they loved it."

Not that it's just about the parties.

Dossett explains incorporating unique experiences into the education breaks up the monotony of a meeting.

"Ditch the Powerpoint and have a session outside," she says. "Combine a keynote lecture with something fun."

Karen Fiorini, owner of Global Planning Source in Aurora, Ontario, says when reviewing the chosen destination for any meeting or experience, a lot of studying and analyzing goes into planning the various events that make-up the trip.

That includes looking at the various

Redstone Agency Inc. hosted an immersive experience for clients and supporters at a unique venue in Toronto. The event included an oxygen bar, branded/personalized edibles, innovative food, a headshot station and more.

tourist attractions that are available and taking it to the next level with the VIP access. She suggests making the experience be something that can only be done as a group, and not as an individual.

An example is an evening dining experience she arranged for meeting attendees in London on the upper walkways of the Tower Bridge also referred to as the "London Bridge," 140 feet above the River Thames.

"It is the only bridge in the world that has an exhibition inside," Fiorini says. "Cocktails were enjoyed on the East Walkway of the Bridge, while dinner is served on the West Walkway overlooking the spectacular sight of London as dusk falls and the lights come on. A harpist playing in the background was a perfect musical touch to the evening."

Shelley Grieshop, creative writer with Totally Promotional, a Coldwater, Ohio company that provides materials for financial and insurance meetings, says often the best way to engage meeting attendees is to get them out of their chairs.

"Give them an experience that is fun and memorable such as playing a game

that prompts them to find solutions to common industry problems," she says. "At the very least, you may get them thinking outside the box and not dozing off in the back row."

An idea she suggests to her meeting planner clients is tossing stress balls to attendees who must answer a question related to the topic before passing it on.

"To give the meeting planner some exposure, they can place their name and logo on the stress balls and hand them out to attendees to take home," Grieshop says. "For some extra fun, they can choose 'character' stress balls such as our Professional Pete."

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Many events are remembered for certain things that went on, but meeting planners can go beyond just having attendees "remembering" and create a meeting that has actual meaning to someone.

Silberstein says the best way to do that is through application.

"Provide content and experiences that go beyond the theoretical or hypothetical," she says. "Having real-world, right-now application value is the key."

For example, at the Association Management Institute Company Day in conjunction with the Texas Society of Association Executives Ideas 2018 Conference, the sessions were engaging, interactive and intimate. Silberstein explains the session content was real and raw, and because the seating was in an intimate setting that was deemed a safe space, ideas flowed from presenters and from audience members.

April Caldwell, CFO at Jacksonville, Florida-based April Caldwell Inc. and a women's wealth adviser and money coach, shares that a "real experience" is more than the norm. "Attendees think they know what to expect when attending a financial workshop and to make it engaging you need to do the unexpected," she says. "Make it interactive, have a Q&A session, bring vulnerability in your speech and use real life stories. People have to be able to see themselves in the examples and stories you give."

For instance, last year Caldwell talked about life insurance and long-term care at a national meeting.

"As I sat on the stool, because I



PINPOINT PHOTOGRAPHY

Carly Silberstein, of the Redstone Agency Inc., wanted to "engage all of the senses" at a recent event.

recently injured my back, I used my example to show how unexpected things happen and how long-term care played a part in what I was going through," she says. "I showed examples of out-of-pocket expenses and what long-term care would provide in payments. I also showed pictures of my grandparents and told two stories of life insurance and long-term care using them as examples. The room was in tears and it had a profound impact on everyone there."

It is unpredictable when and where there will be a connection. Whether it is

other in a relaxed setting and sat in a session together the next day where I ended up hiring the keynote speaker. The hotelier sent me a note afterward referencing a specific book I mentioned to him and today, 10 years later, he is my go-to hotelier in that city."

Creating memorable content for a meeting involves many steps, Fiorini says, citing the venue location, guest speakers that are chosen based on content, theme and expectation.

"An example I have is 'Put Your Dreams in Motion' — a private mansion setting with a lovely landscaped backyard that was used for many weddings, but it was transformed into a seminar business setting for a half-day learning environment," she says. "This was followed by a private poolside barbecue lunch finished off with an afternoon 'You Be the Driver' of an exotic car."

Jacob Dayan, CEO, CMO and founder at Chicago-based Community Tax LLC, has been involved in numerous meetings with the CEOs and other business heads of potential strategic partners, and says having an opportunity to meet with individuals of this pedigree is a great experience at a meeting.

"Preparing for these meetings in and of itself, is a great learning experience,"

## 5 TIPS FOR PLANNERS SEEKING TO CREATE ENGAGING EXPERIENCES

*A Comfortable Environment Spurs Creativity, While Games Keep Attendees Alert*

A meeting is only as good as the planners who arrange them and get things organized. For those working in the financial and insurance sectors, here is some advice to ensure that your meetings are remembered long after the event has ended.

1. The event needs to be about the attendee's goals, not the planner's goals. "Create a comfortable environment, from atmosphere to seating," Caldwell says. "Engage with your audience before and after, one-on-one, and get to know them."

2. Silberstein notes there are plenty of small ways to leave an impression.

"Stickers can be used to facilitate networking as this is low budget and low tech; the audience can shout out takeaways letting people think about things they may not have; and you can create engagement between attendees."

3. By nature, humans are competitive, so incorporating

games can help in maintaining attention spans and creating meaning. Dossett says Conferences Designed once had a keynote lecture, lunch, golf trivia and play at TopGolf, and even the non-golfers were able to participate and enjoy it.

4. Fiorini says meeting planners should think outside their comfort zone. "Think outside the box, dream a bit and have some fun," she says. "By creating extraordinary experiences, guests are sure to remember them for a long time and has a better impact."

5. Take time to plan a meeting agenda that allows attendees time to become comfortable with their surroundings.

"Start the meeting with a social period, perhaps lunch, to let everyone get acquainted," Grieshop says. "When that happens, each person is likely to participate more freely. Never just herd attendees into a room and dive into the meat of the meeting."



I&FMM

"People have to be able to see themselves in the examples and stories you give."

**APRIL CALDWELL**  
Women's Wealth Adviser,  
CFO and Money Coach  
April Caldwell Inc.



a connection or contact with someone or a tidbit in a talk that changes a life in some way — hearing about it later makes us smile. Dossett notes creating a situation where a person makes some sort of connection with another is wonderful to hear about post-event.

"As a planner, I remember a few events that struck a chord with me," Dossett says. "I had recently sent a few proposals to a particular hotelier and ran into him at an outdoor reception at an industry event. We got to know each



he says. “The knowledge and insights gained from some of the best business minds can be invaluable, especially applied to my own business.”

Every company or organization has its unique purpose or mission. Kirkland shares that when you create something which reinforces that element, you have a home run.

“Community ‘givebacks’ can be incorporated into almost any event,” she says. “This provides a lasting impression on your attendees that your business cares about the different communities it enters and encourages its employees to do so as well. Your guests will feel a sense of pride and camaraderie.”

For instance, in Palm Beach County there are over 45 miles of public beaches. Her company has developed a team-building experience partnering with the local Loggerhead Marinelife Center to have a beach clean-up, museum and Sea Life Hospital Tour as well as a financial contribution to continue protecting endangered sea life.

“Guests love being able to have a day of fun in sun, with friends and co-workers, while also giving back to the environment and even learning about our local Loggerhead Sea Turtles and marine life,” Kirkland says.

“Smart meeting professionals leverage the ‘brain trust’ in the room to enrich their message.”

**DARCI M. MOTTA** *CMP, CITE*  
Senior Conference Manager  
CSAA Insurance Group

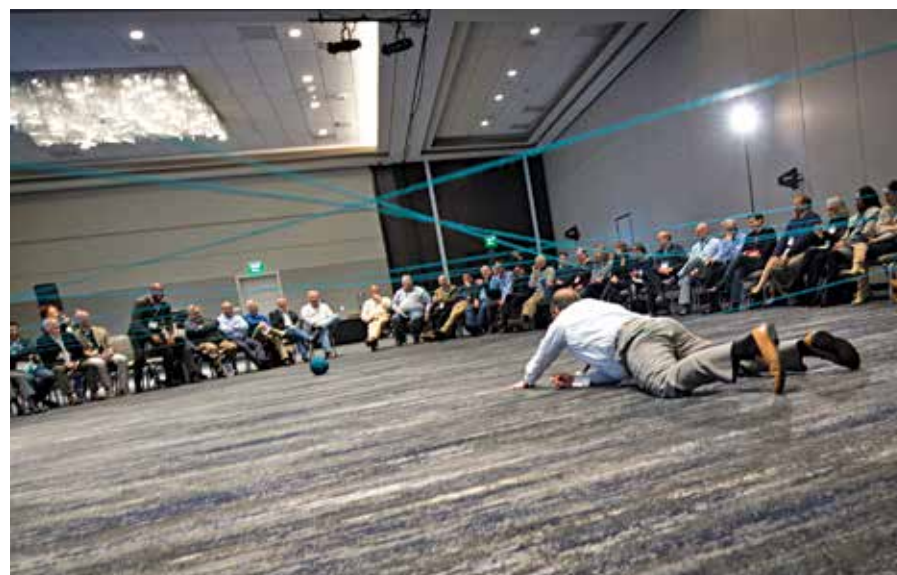


## MANAGING THE BRAIN

For a meeting to ultimately impact people’s lives, industry insiders reveal that using the emotional, social and subconscious levels of the brain is something all meeting planners should consider.

with family and friends.

Motta understands that with how connected everyone is today, most meeting content and speakers can be found online, and complete keynote



CSAA Insurance Group leaders at an event illustrate how their roles connect by tossing a ball of yarn to each person to form a web of interconnectivity.



April Caldwell, who hosts monthly meetings for women called Trail Blazers, uses what she calls ‘real experiences’ to connect with attendees.

presentations are readily available on YouTube, TED Talks and similar sites.

“Attendees come to meetings for personal interaction, direct engagement and face-to-face networking,” she says. “Smart meeting professionals leverage the ‘brain trust’ in the room to enrich their message. Whether by leveraging interactive meeting design elements, creating unique environments, deploying the latest engagement event tech, or a combination of these and other elements, increased and genuine audience engagement is key to program success.”

A meeting planner should never rest on his or her laurels and should constantly try to come up with new ways to bring about these impactful experiences. That could come from asking key questions on surveys, forming an advisory group or leveraging the weight and knowledge of your CVB.

“The worst excuse I constantly hear and see from clients in those who will not consider other avenues of anything, even if it would help their meeting,” Dossett says. “We have way too much to accomplish each day and too much at stake to not embrace and consider various options.”

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Ka Maka Landing	16,000 sq ft
Hālāwai Lawn	21,800 sq ft
Aulani Beach	20,000+*sq ft
‘Ama‘Ama Patio	4,869 sq ft
Ka Wa’a Lū’au	21,800+ sq ft

**TOTAL 76,685 sq ft**

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# Linking Up

BY DEREK REVERON

DEPOSITPHOTOS.COM

## Attendees Hit the Greens for Networking, Team Building and Leisure Time

A successful golf outing can boost attendee camaraderie, fun and networking that forges professional bonds and friendships.

Planning a successful golf program doesn't require experience in the sport, however there are several keys to success, according to Maureen Berardi, global events manager with Bain Capital LP, a Boston-based private investment company.

Berardi suggests planners use a golf format that involves everyone; that planners communicate goals to golf course staff; that planners know the skill levels of participants and that planners have a manageable number of golfers.

"The golf outings I organize are approximately 40 to 50 people and our format is 'scramble' so that everyone with different skill levels can feel comfortable playing together," Berardi says. "The 'scramble' format works well because groups start and end at about the same time and have more interaction with each other."

### COMMUNICATE GOALS

"It is also important to provide details on the group's goals because it gives the golf pro organizing the tournament insight on the golfing ability and work culture of the group and how many people are hardcore golfers versus those who just want to have some fun," Berardi says.

Balancing the skill levels of golfers is crucial as it can determine whether or not some attendees enjoy the outing, and perhaps even the entire meeting.

"Those with lower skill levels may feel intimidated by higher-skilled golfers that are competitive," Berardi says. "Some golfers will opt out of golf and select another activity once they know the other players in their foursomes or pairings are better because they feel uncomfortable. That's why some of the most challenging details of planning a golf outing involves organizing four-

somes because the skill levels are difficult to balance. Another challenge is not understanding the level of difficulty of the golf course itself, which means that some people will be discouraged by how hard it is."

### MIND THE BASICS

An essential element of planning a successful golf experience includes providing details to resort golf staff about the event's goals, whether it's team building, networking, leisure or just plain fun.

That's the approach of Paget Kirkland, owner of Lake Worth, Florida-

golf outing that Kirkland planned for 60 employees of a financial firm last year. Other goals included ensuring that attendees have fun before, during and after hitting the greens. That's a big reason why Kirkland chose the 'scramble' golfing format, which provides even inexperienced players a chance to compete.

Under the 'scramble' format, each team has four players. Every player tees off and then hits the second shot from where their best drive landed. After that, all golfers play from where the best of the four shots landed until the end.

"Scramble, in my opinion, is the best



based Kirkland Event & Destination Services Inc., who has planned several golf outings for financial and insurance firms.

According to Kirkland, "Communicating the goal is important because it will set the tone of the event. If the goal is leisure time for attendees, the format will be set for everyone to play their best and to have fun. If the tournament was intended to build business relationships, we would set the pairings to be meticulously organized to achieve that goal."

Team building was a goal for a

The Lodge at Sea Island offers golfers a chance to network on three courses — Seaside, Retreat and Plantation.

format for team building," Kirkland says. "In addition to keeping the pace of the tournament, it allows golfers to play their best while still giving the beginner level players a bit of boost."

### FULL GOLF DAY

The 60 golfers arrived for the tournament and got breakfast "followed by time for golfers to warm up," Kirkland





says. “We then had a surprise, fun component with a trick golfer doing some amazing shots, which really wowed the guests. They were then briefed on the format and provided housekeeping notes related to the tournament. During the event, two beverage carts made their way across the course offering drinks and snacks. The carts and beverages were branded for client recognition. Having a photographer take team photos while the group plays is always a nice touch.”

The tournament wound down with relaxation at the clubhouse lounge.

“At the end, an open bar with hors d’oeuvres were served,” Kirkland says. “This allowed slower teams time to catch up and time to collect and calculate their scores. The winners were recognized at that night’s dinner. The group had a good time, partly because the format allowed beginner golfers and experienced golfers to compete on a level playing field.”

Depending on the group, planners may want a pleasurable golf outing with minimal competition, according to Ed Elsner, manager of golf events for Destination Kohler in Kohler, Wisconsin, who has planned several golf events for financial and insurance firms, and who planned such a golf tournament. “The group was for 80 players with a goal of

having a little competition, but keeping in mind that they will have a very large mix of skill levels,” Elsner says. The group enjoyed the format as the good players were able to play their own ball and nobody felt like they must win or contribute. We planned a shotgun start, which allows everyone to tee off from different holes simultaneously and finish in a timely manner. That made transportation to the course, and lunch

“They put together a 2-hour instructional clinic, rotating between three stations, putting, short game and full swing, followed by three holes played on the course.”

**PATRICK DILL**  
Director of Golf  
Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate



Golf events at the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate can include instructional clinics, ‘scramble’ formats and ample networking opportunities.

Top-notch golf instruction, which greatly enhances the experiences of attendees, is available at many resorts, including Ojai Country Club and Ojai Valley Inn & Spa in Southern California. The resort offers personalized instruction that’s tailored to events of various sizes, including the “mental game,” a psychological approach to golfing.

At Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, a small golf outing for an insurance company included instruction and focused on an “end-to-end” experience before, during and after golf.

“The insurance agency was looking to have its agents use golf to improve sales,” says Patrick Dill, director of golf at Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate. “They put together a two-hour instructional clinic, rotating between three stations putting, short game, and full swing followed by three holes played on the course. Cocktails and snacks were served throughout the golf experience followed by a cocktail reception and round table for agents to discuss what they learned and how it could be applicable for business use. The same company used the same format for a

and dinner, easier to plan than when using straight tee time. Everybody arrived on time.”

#### ATTENDEES LOVE TIPS

Advice from golfing experts helped the golfers get the most out of their outing. “The group requested some golf instructors and paid for use of a private portion of the practice facility,” Elsner says. “The instructors gave tips to all and then walked up and down the line giving individual advice when asked. The guests really enjoyed the advice and camaraderie with the golf professionals.”

customer event to present a life insurance presentation on obtaining potential customers.”

#### PLANNING CHALLENGES

Planning a successful golf tournament requires planners to overcome several potential pitfalls. One of the challenges involves obtaining player handicaps to match players by skill levels.

According to Elsner, “If you are hosting an event that requires a handicap index, this can be a challenge as many golfers do not post scores for handicap purposes or just do not play enough to receive an official handicap. There are many scoring events that do not require handicaps, so they should be considered in such cases.”

Elsner points out another challenge: “If you are a corporate event and the company is paying, your biggest challenge is getting commitments to participate,” Elsner says. “Since it is not their money, you end up with many changes and usually don’t know your final count until the day of the event. This can be tough for planning for competitions and ordering the correct amount of food, gifts, prizes etc.”

Elsner cites common mistakes in other areas:

Beware of golf fees. “If your event is one that needs to collect entry fees, that is always the most challenging,” Elsner says. “There will always be guests who fail to or do not want to pay in advance.”

Don’t take a one-size-fits-all approach. According to Elsner, “It’s a mistake to assume that what you have done in the past is good and can work at every location. All facilities have different policies when it comes to events and should be reviewed in advance.”

Another potential pitfall involves mismatched pairings, which can involve disparate golf skills as well as playing pace.

According to Kirkland, “Some golfers prefer fast play while others like to take their time. If you put a fast playing team behind a slow playing team, it can be frustrating for the team in the back that’s constantly waiting. It’s also important to factor in what you want



to achieve — for example, pairing sales employees to appropriate customers, or pairing all levels of employees together to enhance team-building goals.”

Miscalculating how much time a golf event takes can also leave a sour taste among attendees and cramp the meeting agenda.

Says Kirkland, “Underestimating how long it takes to play a full round of golf is common. So often we have tournaments ending late which, in turn, makes the attendees late or rushed for

“Execute the event, show attendees a great time and the event will grow organically year after year.”

**JANE BRODERICK**  
Director of Golf  
PGA National Resort & Spa



dinner. Pairings and placement of the pairings can also impact the timing.”

#### KEEP IT SIMPLE

Don’t over-complicate things. “Another mistake is trying to do too many things,” Elsner says. “Most guests just want a good golf experience and do not really care about all the crazy contests. Keep it simple. Keep the real golf experience as the point.”

Don’t single-handedly take on every detail of planning a golf tournament. “The biggest mistake I have seen planners make is not delegating tasks,” says

Summertime weather makes for a perfect golf clinic at Big Sky Resort in Montana.

Jeff Larsen, golf sales manager at Omni La Costa Resort & Spa. “The most successful events are run by planners who use committees instead of one person trying to take it all on. For example, if a planner is meeting with our banquets team to coordinate dinner and an issue with golf pairings arises, it’s challenging for that one person to juggle both at once. Having several different points of contact increases efficiency and better ensures the event will run smoothly.”

Communicate golf event goals to attendees: “It’s extremely important to communicate the goals to all the guests,” Elsner says. “Some come to play just to support events such as charity fundraisers, and golf is a small reason why they attend. Others are more competitive and prefer a challenging format. Being surprised by the goal, format or style of the event can cause a negative attitude.”

Planners who don’t provide thorough information about their groups make it difficult to get the desired result from the golf experience. That’s why it’s crucial that planners provide every detail from the number of rental clubs required to information about the corporate culture of the financial or insurance firm.



## DON'T GIVE UP

In addition, one of the biggest mistakes first-time planners of golf events make is becoming discouraged by poor attendance. According to Jane Broderick, director of golf at PGA National Resort & Spa, who has organized several golf events for financial groups, "Rome was not built in a day, so sometimes it takes one or two events to fill a course," Broderick says. "Our best advice is that planners not give up even if the first year is smaller than originally planned. Execute the event, show attendees a great time and the event will grow organically year after year. We currently host events that began as 40-player events that have grown to over 200 players."

Finally, planners and resort golf experts say that some planners underestimate the golf day from arrival to departure. Traditionally, golf events begin 2-3 hours prior to tee times for pre-golf activities. Total time typically amounts to five hours for most golf events with up to 100 people, including arrival, post-golf activities, scoring, meals and prizes.

From start to finish, an entire golf event could range up to 10 hours. If the golf event drags on too long, or if there isn't enough time to complete it, there is a chance that attendees will become discouraged and drop out. A key to ensuring that golf events start and finish on time is managing the size. Avoid including too many people in the tournament. "Fifty is the ideal size," Kirkland says. "This allows spacing between a few holes and prevents having to double up the tees. Everyone already plays at their own pace and having all golfers start at the same time helps reduce the chances of the group waiting for people that started later."

## CHOOSE FORMATS WISELY

Picking the wrong golf format can ruin a golf event. When choosing formats, don't focus on the score-keeping aspect. Instead, select a format that suits the entire group and keeps it entertained. Planners and golf experts cite 'scramble' as the most popular



DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL

Destinations International Foundation held its annual golf tournament at Gateway National Golf Links. The winners: Kelly Jewison, CrowdRiff; Jason Outman, Experience Columbia SC; Bill Ellen, Midlands Authority for Convention, Sports and Tourism; and Jeff Homad, Memphis Tourism.

format because it is suited for golfers of average or below-average skills, which accounts for most corporate participants. Scramble also lowers the intimidation factor posed by experienced golfers and encourages team building because golf partners must work together. Alternatively, many planners choose the Best Ball format, where everyone plays their own ball but the best score on each hole is counted. This format is also good for

## NON-GOLF FUN

Providing details about the group up front can also lead to suggestions for activities for non-golfers on courses. According to Dill, "We need as much detailed advanced information as possible from planners so we can suggest alternative activities. We have rented out the courses for fun runs, charity walks and runs, biking events, fishing tournaments and group yoga/meditation classes. We also have rented equipment to do laser skeet shooting on our 10th hole."

Other examples of courses with a slate of activities for non-golfers include Omni La Costa Resort & Spa, which offers Golfboards and Phat Scooters, two types of electric vehicles that allow users to "surf the earth." Omni

Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate features Crane's Adventure Golf, a family friendly, themed miniature golf course.

A well-planned golf program can enhance attendee experiences on and off the course. However, success requires planners to match group goals and attendees' golfing skills to the right type of golf program and playing format. When all the parts fit together, golfing attendees will reap the benefits. **I&MM**

"Communicating the goal is important because it will set the tone of the event. If the goal is leisure time for attendees, the format will be set for everyone to play their best and to have fun."

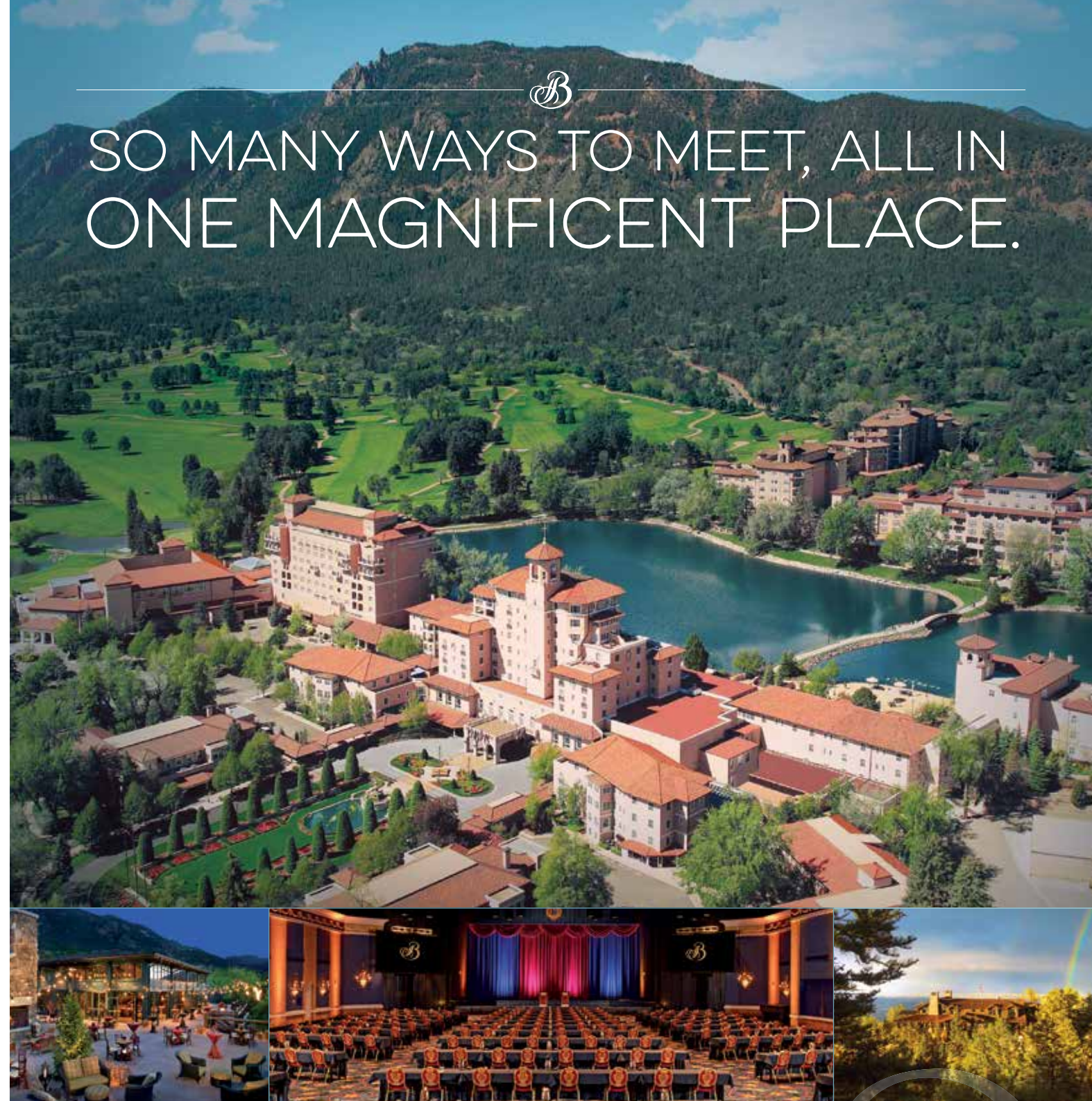
**PAGET KIRKLAND**

Owner  
Kirkland Event & Destination Services Inc.



team building, in addition to building business relationships. Formats other than 'scramble' include 'closest to the pin,' in which the winner makes the tee shot from a par-three hole closest to the pin; 'straightest drive,' in which the winner lands a shot closest to a line painted down the middle of the fairway; 'shortest drive' and 'longest putt.' These options can involve separate contests for women and men.

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Sorrel River Ranch Resort & Spa welcomed **David Corke** as national sales manager. Corke brings to this role more than 15-years of industry knowledge, working for global luxury hotel and resort brands.

Sheraton Phoenix Downtown, Phoenix's largest hotel, appointed **Jon Erickson** director of sales and marketing. Erickson brings to his new role nearly eight years of experience in hotel operations.

Destination South Meetings + Events promoted **Taylor Levy** to associate director of sales. While Levy has been with the team for just over a year, she quickly cultivated and grew relationships throughout Atlanta.

Auberge Resorts Collection, a portfolio of award-winning hotels, resorts and residences, named **Hilary Meisel** director of global accounts, Northeast. Previously, Meisel served as senior account executive, luxury account sales for Marriott International.

The Marriott International — Waikiki Complex of properties owned by Kyo-ya Hotels & Resorts named **Kelli Sahara** new account director for the catering and events department. Sahara started her hospitality career with Kyo-ya more than 10 years ago.

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