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THE MAGAZINE FOR GLOBAL MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

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## PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE //

# SITE Global Conference Honors Crystal Award Winners

For three decades, the annual Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Crystal Awards Recognition Program — sponsored by IMEX Group, the world-wide exhibition for incentive travel, meetings and events — has brought industry acclaim to incentive travel companies. The winners are world-class organizations that excel in the design of unique, memorable group travel experiences.

The 2019 awards were presented at the SITE 2020 Global Conference in Vancouver, BC, which took place last month. Eight companies were honored for cre-

ativity in program design, marketing, corporate social responsibility and business results.

More than 600 incentive travel professionals from 42 global destinations attended this conference. “Inspired by the conference theme — Limitless — we’ve been dreaming up brand new ways to connect, learn, discover and, indeed, shape the future of the incentive travel industry. We’re going for a festival feel this year with multiple stages in a venue that’s light filled and inspirational and a destination that genuinely knows no bounds,” says Jenn Glynn, CIS, CITP, president of SITE 2020.

Keynote speakers at the Global Conference included New York Times best-selling author, Ben Nemtin, who spoke on “5 Steps to Making the Im-

possible Possible.” Educational tracks included “Designing and Innovating Incentive Travel Programs,” “Valuing Creativity in a Commoditized World” and “Event Industry Trends and Forecasts.”

“The SITE Global Conference brought the whole world of incentive travel to Vancouver. We want to harness the wisdom of this powerful community to shape the future of our industry. Last year in Thailand, we started this fascinating conversation and published the “The Bangkok Manifesto,” 10 aspirational statements about our métier. This year, we are moving from aspiration to action and leaving the conference with a tangible implementation plan for 2020,” says Didier Scaillet, CIS, CITP, CEO of SITE.

As a SITE member for more than three decades, I attribute much of my success in this segment of the industry to my membership in this prestigious organization.



**Harvey Grotsky**  
Publisher

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Corporate & Incentive Travel (USPS 716-450) is published monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$12.00 U.S.A. only. Yearly subscription price is \$125.00 in the U.S.A.; Canada and foreign is \$165.00. Back copies \$14.00 U.S.A. only. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Corporate & Incentive Travel, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Corporate & Incentive Travel), and the publication disclaims any liability with respect to the use of or reliance on any such information. The information contained in this publication is in no way to be construed as a recommendation by C&IT of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted, by or to be binding upon, any corporate/incentive travel planner or agent. Reproduction of any portion of this publication by any means is strictly forbidden. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited photographs or manuscripts. Subscribers: Send subscription inquiries and address changes to: Circulation Department, Corporate & Incentive Travel, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Provide old and new addresses including zip codes. Enclose address label from most recent issue and please allow five weeks for the change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2019

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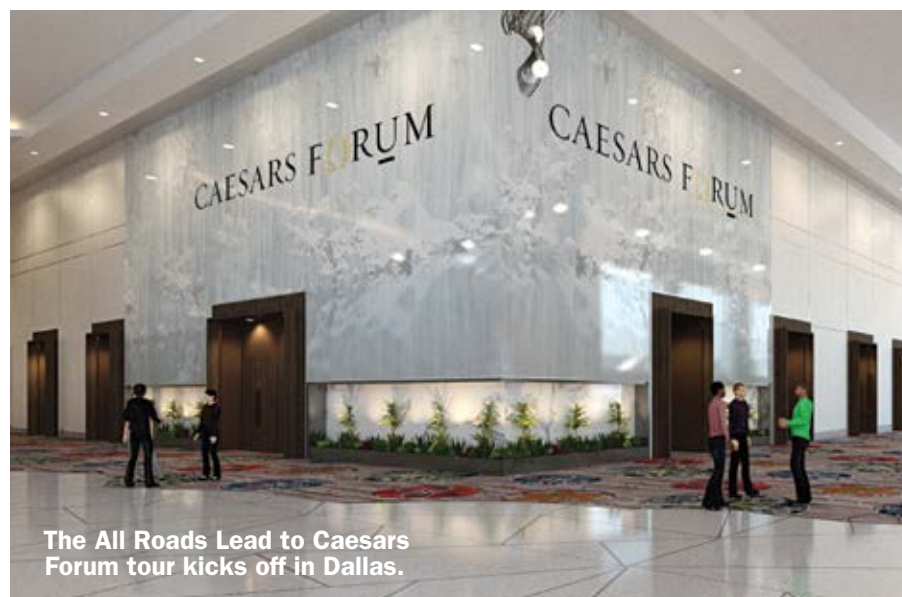
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INDUSTRY NEWS

## Caesars Forum to Tour Across U.S.

LAS VEGAS, NV — Caesars Entertainment will be touring to 14 stops around the country. The five-week tour, called All Roads Lead to Caesars Forum, begins this month and will offer pop-up Caesars Forum brand experiences. The goal is to give meeting and event planners a glimpse into the \$375 million, 550,000-sf conference center, which officially opens in March. The pop-ups will include culinary offerings, industry speakers and live entertainment. Caesars Forum, which will be able to accommodate 10,000 attendees, is already generating buzz. More than 170 contracts have already been booked, representing \$460 million and 1.3 million room



The All Roads Lead to Caesars Forum tour kicks off in Dallas.

nights, according to company officials. Meetings and events industry leaders such as ConferenceDirect, Cvent,

HelmsBriscoe, MPI and PCMA have all selected Caesars Forum as host for their annual conferences.

CAREER

## Global DMC Partners Names Catherine Chaulet President and CEO

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Global DMC Partners (GDP), the leading global network of independently-owned DMCs and creative event experts, has appointed Catherine Chaulet as president and CEO. Her leadership over the past

six years has led to numerous awards and accolades and the growth of GDP, which now boasts a global footprint of more than 65 DMCs worldwide and is the leading global network of DMCs. With her new title and expanded role, Chaulet will further champion the hospitality industry and its critical influence on the global economy. In the year ahead, she will travel



Chaulet

extensively, connecting with DMC partners and clients while building upon the company's strong foundation in the meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) category. "I am particularly proud to be working with an exceptionally talented team that is focused on implementing the best solutions and strongest value to our clients," Chaulet says.

CAREER

## San Diego Tourism Authority Appoints Julie Coker President and CEO

SAN DIEGO, CA — The San Diego Tourism Authority (SDTA) has appointed Julie Coker as its new president and chief executive officer. She will be directing strategic development and manage-



Coker

ment of the organization, as well as working to promote and market the region and ensure economic growth for San Diego. She comes to SDTA from the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau, where she was also president and CEO. She has worked for more than 30 years in the hospitality industry, including 21 years with Hyatt Hotels. She is also on the executive committee for the U.S. Travel Association.

RENOVATION

## The Beverly Hilton to Undergo \$35 Million Renovation

BEVERLY HILLS, CA — The Beverly Hilton will undergo a complete renovation encompassing all guest rooms, including nine private luxury suites, indoor/outdoor event spaces and meeting rooms, as well as public spaces and their signature CIRCA 55 restaurant. They expect the renovations to be completed in the spring. The public spaces, including the main lobby, Oasis Tower lobby and CIRCA 55, will be the final phase. The goal is to reintroduce this landmark hotel to a new generation of meeting planners.



The Beverly Hilton

RECOGNITION

## Visit Orlando Named Best Tourist Board in the World

LONDON — Visit Orlando was awarded Best Tourist Board during the UK's Global Travel Awards held in London last month. This award was voted upon by UK travel agencies. Their award fell under the Destinations category and was sponsored by TravelZoo. The awards honor companies and individuals across the tourism landscape worldwide.



Photo by Chris Sardinas

INDUSTRY NEWS

## ALHI and Posadas Expand Partnership in Latin America

DALLAS, TX — Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI) has announced it is expanding its partnership with Posadas, the parent company of Fiesta Americana Grand Meetings Mexico. Eleven new Posadas properties will be added to the existing ALHI portfolio, making for a total of 15 Posadas properties in strategic locations around Mexico and the Dominican Republic. "There couldn't be a more exciting time to grow our partnership with this leading independent hotel brand as they expand their reach in additional luxury markets beyond Mexico," says Michael Dominguez, president and CEO of ALHI. Posadas has built a strong reputation in Latin America and is known for its unparalleled hospitality.

INDUSTRY NEWS

## Incentive Research Foundation Elects Officers, Conducts Vision 2025 Strategic Planning

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Incentive Research Foundation has announced their 2020 IRF Executive Committee and Board of Trustees. Representing all segments of the incentives, rewards and recognition industry, the IRF Board of Trustees leads the foundation in meeting its mission of conducting research and providing education highlighting the power of incentive and motivational programs. The Board recently met to conduct strategic planning for the IRF's Vision 2025. "The members of the IRF Board of Trustees bring a tremendous level of expertise and passion for the incentives industry," says Kari Vrba, chair of the IRF Board of Trustees.



## RENOVATION

### Station Casinos Debuts New Look

LAS VEGAS, NV — Station Casinos has recently renovated its Red Rock Resort & Spa and Green Valley Ranch Casino Resort & Spa locations. Attendees checking into the AAA Four Diamond-rated Las Vegas and Henderson destinations will enjoy an all new look and feel of the newly refreshed hotel rooms and enhanced suites, including upgraded amenities. For example, at The Red Rock Resort & Spa, there are now a 65-inch HDTVs, RFID room key technology and expanded Wi-Fi coverage, as well as a pull-out sleeper sofa in its Signature Suites. The Green Valley Ranch Casino Resort & Spa has Presidential Suites featuring a sophisticated glass foosball table, three televisions, including a 65-inch HDTV and two 50-inch HDTVs with an integrated music system and upgraded surround sound, bar and a large outdoor terrace that overlooks the backyard pool area.



Red Rock Resort & Spa



Green Valley Ranch

## INDUSTRY NEWS

### New Oklahoma City Convention Center Secures Conferences With \$20 Million Economic Impact

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK — Seven national and international organizations have signed eight contracts for con-

ferences and conventions to be held in the all-new Oklahoma City Convention Center (OCCC), expected to be open by the end of the year. Organizers anticipate a total of more than 37,000 room nights and \$20 million in direct economic impact from these bookings.

“It’s an honor to be the host city for such high-caliber conferences,” says Mike Carrier, president of the Okla-

homa City Convention & Visitors Bureau. “The new venues and infrastructure throughout downtown show OKC’s commitment to the meetings and convention industry, and we can now provide a unique attendee experience for even larger events. There are already several conferences that have signed official agreements and they anticipate more coming to Oklahoma City. More announcements will be forthcoming in the future months.”

The \$288 million center will feature nearly 275,000 sf of dedicated meeting space and 65,000 sf of usable event space. The OCCC was ceremonially “topped out” last summer. The convention center will open late this year and booking is now open for 2021 and beyond.

The OCCC sits just west of a 70-acre downtown park, Scissortail Park, and directly adjacent to the 605-room headquarter hotel from Omni Hotel & Resorts opening next year.



Oklahoma City Convention Center

## TIPS + TRENDS

### 5 Reasons Why You Should Stop Using Spreadsheets to Manage Your Events

Imagine you’re managing a team of sales reps attending one of the largest conferences in the world. Now, imagine that you can stay back at the office and see the meetings that each sales rep has scheduled, where the meetings are located, and you won’t have to chase down your team members to update everything post-event.

Sounds like a fantasy, doesn’t it? What if we told you that it can become your reality? How, you ask?

Through a new technology that simplifies the conferences and trade show experience called meeting automation. Meeting automation platforms (MAPs) automate the tasks and activities for which you typically rely on spreadsheets and landing pages. MAPs also help create more successful meetings and prove that you can measure the value of pre-booked meetings at conferences and trade shows.

Below are five reasons why you should stop using spreadsheets to manage your meetings and jump into the world of meeting automation.

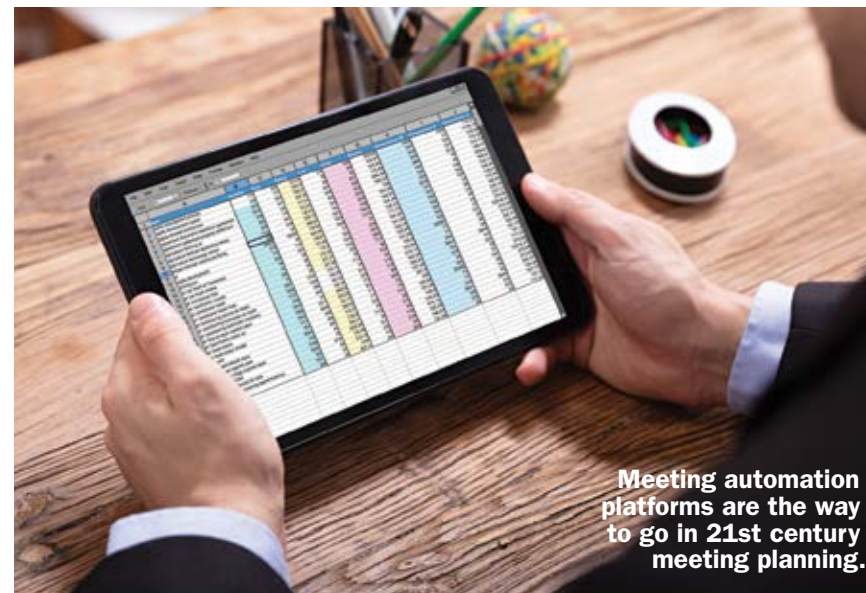
#### Manage Everything From One Place

With meeting automation platforms, you can have your prospects, events attended/attending or sponsored/sponsoring, calendar invites, ROI analysis and more at your fingertips. And because everything is logged automatically and syncs with your CRM, the reliance on others to input their data entry becomes almost nonexistent. The benefits? MAPs save time, syncs with CRMs and everything is in one place.

#### Transparency Across Teams

With meeting automation, team transparency becomes a reality. Sales reps are able to see if there are conflicts in scheduling at pre-set locations and what locations to which they’ve been granted access. No more last-minute scrambling and rescheduling to secure the VIP space for your VIP prospect. Everyone is where they are supposed to be.

Also, if you’re a manager of teams, you’ll be able to see how many meetings each prospect has scheduled and the number of prospects assigned to



Meeting automation platforms are the way to go in 21st century meeting planning.

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each sales rep. With this information, you will be able to make budget-saving decisions. For example, if Jim Halpert has scheduled 17 meetings at PaperCon and Dwight Schrute has only scheduled two, you can decide to assign Dwight’s two meetings to Jim, thus saving your department thousands of dollars. The benefits here are help with budgeting and teams are on the same page.

#### Fewer Mistakes

Spreadsheets are prone to errors because of manual input. These errors can lead to missed meetings, overlooked prospects and wrong locations. When you use meeting automation to schedule and manage your meetings at conferences and trade shows, your calendar is synced and updated with changes, thus eliminating such a large margin of error. The benefits here are fewer errors, and reliance on manual data entry is eliminated.

#### Multiple Calendars Are No Longer a Thing to Track

Let’s be honest: Going back and forth between calendar invites and spreadsheets to update changes in time, locations, attendees, etc., is annoying. When you use a meeting automation platform, you eliminate the middle man. Any changes you make to calendar invites are automatically

updated in your event notes. Here, the benefit is automatic calendar updates.

#### Track and Prove ROI

More than \$570 billion is spent each year on attending conferences and trade shows; yet, most companies don’t have a system in place to account for if their efforts are successful and turning into deals. And, if you’re unlucky, you’ll be the person assigned with tracking down receipts, meeting notes, whether meetings took place, and making sure your CRM and that darn spreadsheet are updated.

By tracking meeting occurrences and notes, you’ll be able to attribute ROI to events where your team had a presence and the source of opportunities, and then track year-over-year performance to inform your decision-making process on what events to attend the following year. The benefits here are easy access to year-over-year performance data and attributable ROI. In short, meeting automation can bring your team into the 21st century.

— Al Torres is the co-founder and president of SummitSync, a meeting automation platform used by companies to increase the success of their event marketing investments. Torres is a multi-time entrepreneur and seasoned executive with more than 15 years of experience in sales, business development and growth strategy.



# Air Travel Is About to Change Forever

BY JOHNNY QUACH

**A**ir travel technology is changing at a rapid pace, so what can we expect to see in the near future? Leading air passenger rights company, AirHelp, invites you for a sneak peek of seven new technologies that are going to rock the future of air travel.

## 1. Robotic assistants — navigate your airport with ease

Robotic airport assistants are becoming increasingly more commonplace — they help you navigate your way through a crowd, and at the same time, keep track of your flight information. According to a report from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the global demand and frequency of travel is expected to increase by 3.5% per year, and air travel is predicted to increase from 3.8 billion travelers in 2016 to well over 8.2 billion passengers by 2037.

In an effort to ease the overwhelming increase in airport traffic, many airports have now ‘hired’ robots who are ready to guide you to the check-in counter and provide you with all the necessary gate and flight information from the moment you first step into the airport. They streamline the check-in experience, eliminate long lines, and make airports more efficient. Dutch airline KLM’s ‘Care E’ robots take it even one step further. They will not only guide travelers through the airport but also carry their luggage.

## 2. Biometrics — no piece of paper can represent you better than your face

Biometrics are on the way to fully replace the need for manual identity checks. We all know how endless lines at the check-in counter, border check, tax-free shops and boarding gate can kill your weekend holiday spirit. On top of that, flight

delays and cancellations can further add to the confusion. If you are unlucky enough to travel on a Friday, you might have to endure the fact that every three in 10 flights are delayed at the airport, which makes Friday the worst day to travel of the week. In contrast to Fridays, Tuesdays are likely to give you a smoother check-in experience, because Tuesday is the best day to travel with flight departure and arrival with an on-time rate of 75%.

With the introduction of biometrics, long waits might become a thing of the past. There will come a time when we will no longer have to prove our identities. With advanced recognition technology, you can automatically pass all checks and be granted entry into an aircraft without ever having to show your passport and boarding pass. As long as you are on the passenger list and have no outbound restrictions, your unique biological traits, such as iris and fingerprint, will be sufficient in proving your identity to customs and airline staff.

## 3. VR/AR — make the unreal ‘real’

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are the two hottest topics in tech. What would happen if we apply them to air travel?

AR is a type of technology that displays virtual interfaces in the real world, often with the help of mobile or wearable devices. The implementation of AR in the air travel industry has a lot of potential; for example, travelers can navigate their way through the airport more efficiently by using an AR interface on their phone or through smart glasses. Airport staff can also use AR technology to easily verify a passenger’s identity and evaluate their baggage size and weight.

AR can also enhance the flying experience itself. With the use of AR, flight attendants can detect subtle changes

in a passenger’s emotions without even having to exchange words, thus allowing them to adjust their services to better meet their passengers’ needs such as giving medical assistance to a passenger who can’t communicate.

On a similar note, VR can also improve the air travel experience. Using VR equipment, passengers can keep themselves entertained for hours in the virtual world, blocking out the dullness of the aircraft’s interiors. VR has the potential to totally change in-flight entertainment as we know it.

## 4. Supersonic airplanes — super fast

We may not be able to teleport as of yet, but accelerated air travel is already on its way to being the closest thing that we will have to instant travel. Just imagine being on the longest non-stop flight in the world — from Singapore to New York, which lasts 19 hours — and then be able to cut your travel time down to just nine hours. It will make a world of difference.

Long haul flights are exhausting, plus, they are prone to delay. According to AirHelp’s study, more than 50% of all long-haul flights are either delayed for at least 15 minutes or canceled. With the introduction of accelerated air travel, lengthy delays will no longer be a problem — planes will be traveling so fast that most delays will be negligible.

Though supersonic airplanes already exist, they are not available commercially due to the sky-ripping noise they create when traveling faster than sound. In the near future, more mature technology might solve the sound problem and finally bring these high-speed aircraft to commercial aviation.

## 5. Autopilot — smooth and affordable air travel

Our current aviation industry has already implemented a partial automatic pilot system, and it is only a matter of time before we switch over to complete cockpit automation. So what does it mean for future air travelers? The answer is clear: lower organizational costs, more precise ETAs, safer route planning and air traffic management, and a cheaper flight ticket.

## 6. IoT — everything you want right at your fingertips

Internet of Things (IoT) makes devices around us smarter and allows us to interact with them even from a distance. When you are high up in the air, you can enjoy the convenience of adjusting your lighting, seat inclination and many other creative features — controlled entirely from your phone. Once landed, IoT technology will also allow you to track down your luggage using your phone, order it to roll over to you and follow you as you walk through the airport.

## 7. AI — a smarter travel partner

Many companies now use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve and customize your online booking experience. From the flight to hotel booking, AI streamlines the process and minimizes human error — no more lost luggage or booking mistakes with the hotel. Moreover, AI can optimize your search result by scouring every corner on the internet and providing holiday suggestions tailored to your preferences.

The use of an AI-powered chat-box can also take care of any immediate questions that came to mind and are much faster in responding than human customer service. AirHelp is already implementing AI technology to improve air travel — AirHelp’s AI bots can instantly and accurately evaluate cases of flight disruptions. This smart service can determine if passengers are entitled to compensation for their delayed or canceled flights or in instances of denied boarding. Some passengers may be entitled to compensation up to \$700 per person if their departure airport is in the EU, or if their airline carrier is based in the EU and landing in the EU.

Jakub Dziwisz, CTO at AirHelp, shares his vision of the future: “We expect our use of AI to grow so far that we can bring to life a real AI travel assistant that can learn travelers’ preferences to the level of a human personal assistant.”

Sooner or later, AI will not only take your worry of travel disruptions off your shoulders, but they will also assure the whole travel experience is more closely tailored to your needs and wishes.

C&IT

“With the use of AR, flight attendants can detect **SUBTLE CHANGES** in a passenger’s **EMOTIONS** without even having to exchange words.”



Biometrics, AI, and VR/AR may help ease the overwhelming increase in airport traffic.



## JOHNNY QUACH

Johnny Quach, former chief product officer at AirHelp, is an entrepreneur passionate about finding opportunity to create impact. Quach has built and launched three companies in his professional career, and after joining AirHelp in 2017, he doubled the size of the product team while spearheading the company’s AI development and integration, which operates with more than 96% accuracy.



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# 2020 Trends and How to Incorporate Them Into Your Events

BY MEGAN DIAZ

It's that time of year again: professionals across industries are making predictions for how to be successful in 2020; and the event industry is no exception. From technology and sustainability to food options and activities, there are a lot of moving pieces in today's meetings industry and the trends are always changing.

Looking at the biggest trends in 2019 and forward to what's to come in 2020, as director of Business Development at Minneapolis Northwest Tourism, I've rounded up a few tips to help leverage these trends and incorporate them into meetings and events in the future.

## 1. Bring more mindfulness to your meetings

Let's face it, we're all glued to our phones and over-stimulated by apps, social media, the 24-hour news cycle and more. Most attendees will be bringing their own experiences, plus meeting new people and learning a lot of valuable information about their industry, so they could use a break for self-care and to re-focus. Some conferences have added meditation lounges or incorporated mindful breaks, where attendees are truly encouraged to unplug. Some other fun ideas include adding an oxygen bar or offering laughter yoga. Better yet, add a 'puppy cuddle,' and you can combine therapy/self-care and giving back by working with an animal rescue.

## 2. Keep up with the latest food trends

Keto, gluten-free, paleo, clean, etc.; it can be hard to keep up with all the fad diets and healthy eating movements out there; but it's really best to just embrace it and use it to your advantage. Incorporate some of these trends into organized food breaks, by having a keto break or glu-

ten-free break. Offering options like these makes it easy for those who are following those trends or dietary restrictions, but also makes it accessible to those who don't or may be interested in eating healthier in general. It's also important to make sure you are using sustainable practices with any foods served. Are you monitoring how much food you put out and offering compostable utensils? Do you have a plan for how to use/donate any unused food? Is the food locally sourced?

## 3. Bring excitement with new vendors

Conferences and events are a fun time to showcase what's new and exciting. Bring in vendors that are upcoming, especially in technology. I've seen name badge companies, vendors who

make a 3-D cast of attendees and others who put your face on a cookie. Think of it as a fun learning opportunity.

## 4. Make it a meaningful event with ways to give back

Conferences with a cause are all the rage — and for good reason. Everyone benefits from helping out an important and worthy mission. Take the recent Connect Marketplace Conference. During the opening party, they held a special program about the Breast Cancer Research Foundation and provided permanent tattoos for attendees with a donation to the cause. This is a great way to kick off a conference, by inspiring attendees and making them feel empowered. In Minneapolis Northwest, we are lucky to have one of the largest food banks in the nation — Second Harvest Heartland. The location in Brooklyn Park has a new volunteer center, offering numerous shifts for food packing, plus ample meeting space. Check out what's available near your

next event and help your attendees find unique ways to give back and engage in the local community.

## 5. Go green

From choosing a sustainable venue to planning an eco-friendly menu, making it a green event will not only benefit the environment, but will leave you and your attendees feeling empowered about making a positive impact. Start by selecting an environmentally minded community for your event. Look for a community that has more robust infrastructure, services, recycling programs, energy use, public transportation, etc. Once you've narrowed down a community for your event, connect with the area's CVB to get general event recommendations and contacts, along with information on the local vendors' sustainability initiatives and programs.

## 6. Bleisure

Bleisure — travel that combines business and leisure — is becoming increasingly popular, and it's widely predicted to be one of the top travel trends in 2020. In fact, 90% of millennials reported having taken a bleisure trip in the past year in the 2019 National Car Rental State of Business Travel Survey. Understanding this growing trend of blurring the lines between work and play can help meeting planners develop events that allow attendees to get the most out of a business trip, while also leaving time for fun. It also means it's more important than ever to pick event destinations that will entice attendees, including destinations with attractive elements like distinctive restaurants and breweries, natural sightseeing and unique activities.

## 7. Get outside

Who says you can't enjoy the great outdoors and take your next meeting or event outside the conference room? Every event can use some crucial icebreaker or team-building opportunities that offer a change of pace and some much-needed fresh air. Luckily, in Minneapolis Northwest

we have endless acres of nature, miles and miles of biking and hiking trails, and spectacular views of the Mississippi River with plenty of paddling adventures.

## 8. Incorporate more learning opportunities

One of the main reasons for attending a conference is to better oneself and learn best practices, so why not extend that motive and offer additional professional development opportunities? Bring in vendors that can help attendees thrive and reach their future career goals. Speakers or vendors that can help with building resumes, establishing and improving their LinkedIn presence and various additional educational opportunities.

## 9. Work with the CVB

Planners are reaching out to CVBs and using us as a resource. Once you've landed on a city for your meeting, conference or event, I can't stress enough how beneficial it will be for you to connect with the CVB or DMO. In my role as director of Business Development at Minneapolis Northwest Tourism, it's my job to provide meeting and event planners information about hotels, facilities, attractions, restaurants and activities that will best fit your

group. We can help lead you to planning your most successful experience that's within your budget. And, best of all, we're a completely free resource.

## 10. Make it memorable

The keys to an event's success are the takeaways from the attendees. Are they leaving feeling inspired and educated, with exciting new experiences worth sharing? Choose your speakers carefully and only get speakers that will draw people in and make the event more interactive. Offer fun and meaningful activities. Select a venue with a 'wow' factor. Promote your event with creative marketing collateral and social media. Show thoughtfulness by offering goody bags to attendees. Incorporate a fun theme and/or color scheme to match.

C&IT

“Understanding this growing trend of **BLURRING** the lines between **WORK** and **PLAY** can help meeting planners develop events that allow attendees to get the most out of a business trip.”



One piece of advice from the writer is to get outside.



### MEGAN DIAZ

Megan Diaz is the director of Business Development at Minneapolis Northwest Tourism, where she works to connect corporate groups and associations with the appropriate venue and resources for their meeting and event needs. She has an extensive background in hospitality and currently serves as the director of education for Meeting Professionals International (MPI) Minnesota.



# How Does Social Media Impact Attendee Experience?

BY MARISA RUSSELL CAIN



DepositPhotos.com

Everything is social. Remember when daily cocktail parties and post-event surveys were the most exciting — and just about the only — way for meeting attendees and planners to engage with each other for real-time feedback during an event? While the desire to incorporate social interaction still stands, the social media aspect has advanced quickly through the ever-evolving, device-focused landscape and has changed the meetings world tremendously.

In 2020, creating an event with social media in mind is the best way to interact with attendees in a place where they're already spending a significant portion of their time. Of course, we'd like to think spending time fully tuned in at the event is their main focus, but reaching attendees on their mobile devices is extremely effective. Not only is it critical to develop a strong digital marketing plan largely rooted in social media to promote an event of any size, but it's even more essential to have a plan to engage digitally with attendees *during* your conference.

According to a report by Venetian Meetings in Las Vegas, two in three event planners say "they plan to use more technology to power their meetings in the future," and social, many will attest, is a key component. Some are convinced that live events are declining, but research shows they're on the rise. These events are a way for companies and brands to engage their employees in real-time. Incorporating social into that strategy helps event planners create a unique and unforgettable experience for every attendee and makes live events a worthwhile investment for businesses. When planning a big event, consider these ways social makes a difference.

## Social Helps Attendees Engage

Conferences may offer hundreds of different sessions, tracks, speakers, events and activities through which attendees may engage. While it's impossible for an attendee to make their way to every event, social makes it possible for them to

keep up with the conversation and still enjoy key takeaways from the sessions they were unable to experience.

Following along with the conference hashtag, exploring posted photos that include the conference center's geo tag and enjoying a curated social board in the welcome hall are all easy ways for attendees to feel like they get the most out of an event. If you're feeling extra ambitious, provide a list of speaker and exhibitor social handles in your conference program or mobile app to encourage attendees to keep the conversation going online.

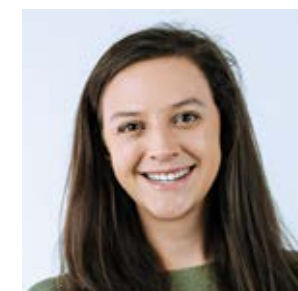
## Social Serves as a Virtual Q&A Forum

Whether attendees are exploring a new city or simply looking for the right hall for their next session, social is an essential tool for information sharing and real-time answers. Social is often the first place to which people turn when they have a question.

Community management is one of the easiest and most effective ways to garner strong social engagement, but it's also a slippery slope for negative comments. The best way to capitalize on this is to create a community around the event hashtag or designate a go-to account for questions. Create a 'cheat sheet' of FAQs, or ensure you have the proper team monitoring your channels.

## Shy About Networking? Social's Here to Help

No conference would be complete without the typical welcome cocktail reception or an evening of networking. While events are largely meant for learning and education, they're often a big class reunion. That's great for the extroverts who love to talk, but it means those who are networking-shy might fall short. Social serves as the perfect place for attendees to convene around the sessions, share thoughts and insights, promote articles they loved around a topic and more without face-to-face engagement. Creating a strong social community around an event gives those introverted attendees an equal way to stay involved.



## MARISA RUSSELL CAIN

As a strategist, Cain manages social strategies and communities for a variety of meetings and travel and tourism clients, such as Crystal Cruises, Promperu and Greater Palm Springs. Before joining Sparkloft, Cain worked with companies like Johns Hopkins University, CNN and Martha Stewart Weddings. She holds a bachelor's degree in Journalism from Hofstra University and a master's degree in Public Relations from Syracuse University. She also has a passion for creating content that tells a brand's story in innovative and compelling ways. Visit [www.sparkloftmedia.com](http://www.sparkloftmedia.com)

## Social Provides Conference Planners With Attendee Data

Want to know how attendees felt about a certain session? Perhaps you're interested in learning how many potential visitors considered participating but ended up staying home?

The social media landscape is a key piece for meeting planners to understand all conversations related to the event before, during and after. Yes, there's always the old standby post-conference survey, but do those who enjoyed the event actually take time to fill it out? Odds are you're only receiving negative feedback, or the positive feedback is the biased opinion of an event planner looking for some extra points!

There are multiple ways to track the online conversation surrounding an event, whether planners utilize in-platform tools or more sophisticated social listening options. This deep data dive will help meeting planners fulfill desired insights in real-time, with the ability to directly respond without relying on future pen-and-paper-based insight.

## Social Keeps the Conversation Going

Social never sleeps. It's the perfect place for your attendees to follow along with post-conference content or virtually engage with colleagues they met after the fun's over. Whether it's a LinkedIn connection or a more informal Instagram follow, users will be sure to engage with fellow conference

attendees on social in the near- and long-term. Therefore, make sure event recap content is implemented into the event's social strategy.

Post-event content opportunities can also assist in polling audiences and are a great way to engage them while the conference is fresh on their minds. It's also a strong chance to get attendees excited for next year's event — and maybe even persuade them to grab the early bird registration!

Develop recap content in your social strategy and use social as a way to poll your audience, engage in conversations with them and, most importantly, get them enthusiastic for next year's event.

C&IT

“The social media landscape is a **KEY PIECE** for **MEETING PLANNERS** to understand all conversations related to the event.”



# MEMORABLE VENUES

Brooklyn Bowl in Las Vegas hosts both big-name concerts and private events, with 32 bowling lanes on site and space for up to 2,500 attendees.

BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS

Photo by Erik Kabik / Courtesy of Brooklyn Bowl Las Vegas

## These Venues Are Sure to Leave a Lasting Impression on Attendees

**I** love it when a venue can help create wonderful memories for my attendees,” says Lupe Downing, senior sales event manager at Quo-

tient Technology Inc., summing up why a venue’s unique characteristics matter.

Whether that unique quality derives from the venue’s location, decor, architecture, history, ambience or other attributes, the result is the same. A venue that takes attendees away from the ordinary and into the extraordinary creates memories that stay with them long after the event — and helps them to retain the goals and purpose of the event as well.

As lovely as some ballrooms, pool decks and event lawns can be, they’re all essentially the same, and it doesn’t take even a novice attendee long to experience them as ‘same old.’ That’s exactly why planners are always on the lookout for that singular venue that stands out and elevates an event far above the expected.

### WINE CAVE

Quotient Technology Inc.’s national sales meeting early last year, which included 188 attendees, was set at Meritage Resort and Spa in California’s Napa Valley. To start, the destination and resort were an excellent fit for this group.

“Napa Valley is always an appealing location, especially since my group comes from all over the United States,” Downing says. “And the resort checked off many boxes of things I was looking for to run a successful program. It encompasses everything needed to create a great experience for a large, diverse group. Its amenities, charm, layout and service level make it a top choice for my program.”

And, she adds, “While the Meritage is tucked away in a business park, you would never know it. You truly feel like

you’re in a fancy resort in wine country. It does a great job of marrying wine country appeal and business.”

Downing notes that having two ballrooms available to her was ideal as it allowed for multiple breakouts and varying setups required for different parts of the meeting. “Two ballrooms met the needs of our ever-changing schedule. From a boardroom meeting to a large general session and everything in between, the resort was able to accommodate.”

small stage for the DJ, a dance floor, buffet/bar and selfie wall. “There was white with green ambience up-lighting, and the decor was simple and rustic, with plaid linens and succulent centerpieces.”

The group used A/V for sound, “and there were videos playing on a few LCD screens on poles,” Downing notes. “The wine cave at The Meritage, while being a unique venue, lends itself well for a variety of events. No matter what takes place here, the one constant is its warm and welcoming ambience.”



Lupe Downing, senior sales event manager at Quotient Technology, says her guests were ‘wowed’ by the wine cave at Meritage Resort in Napa Valley.

Within the resort’s 80,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space, Downing says Carneros Ballroom is a favorite. “Carneros Ballroom was my go-to choice as it’s beautiful, well laid out and fit all of my breakout needs as well.”

But Spa Terra and Grand Estate Cave really set the bar high for the meeting. “The spa and wine cave are true jewels of the property,” Downing says. “My guests were wowed by them.”

The wine cave served as the setting for an awards dinner. Approximately 125 guests attended. Downing describes the set-up as a mix of tall and low farm tables, benches and chairs, as well as a

In addition to the wine cave, Downing points out that there are other exceptional spots for different kinds of activities. “We can’t forget bowling at Crush Lounge, the resort’s casual venue with six bowling lanes, and there’s the well-thought-out [tasting] Village across the street,” she says.

She added that her attendees also appreciated, “wine upon check-in, being able to walk in a vineyard and all of the resort’s unique spaces.”

To anyone considering the Meritage Resort and Spa, Downing says, “Absolutely utilize the unique venue spaces. Get creative as to where you host your





Courtesy of Kathryn Gleesing

**The Garden in Milwaukee, Wisconsin was the perfect venue for 450 attendees of an event for a corporate group from Georgia last fall.**

meeting; weather permitting, use the outside venues. Your guests will love it. Crush Lounge and the taco truck for a casual event are a must. There are also several great wineries not far from the resort in Carneros Valley, including Domaine Carneros, Artesa and Etude, all of which can handle large groups, so you're covered."

My goal, she says, "is always to bring this group together in a setting where they can have successful, impactful, motivating meetings while also having an equal balance of taking in the local culture, cuisine and more. The Meritage Resort and Spa has exactly what's needed."

### INDOOR 'GARDEN'

Kathryn Gleesing, MBA, CMP, president and CEO of DM-Connection & Events in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, worked with a corporate group from Georgia last fall. There were 450 attendees and the group was based at the Hilton Milwaukee City Center.

"Milwaukee in a very affordable and accessible destination and is centrally located within a day's drive of 1/3 of the U.S. population," Gleesing says. "Milwaukee provides great value for your meeting dollar with hotel, food and beverage, and top-notch entertainment options, for attendees. With hotel rooms connected by skywalk to

the convention center and additional rooms within a 1/2 mile of the center, Milwaukee has hotel properties to meet any need. There are also more than 200 restaurants in downtown Milwaukee, providing plenty of food options. Fiserv Forum, the new state-of-the art arena and home to the Milwaukee Bucks, hosts many top-name concert acts, and there's also a theater district downtown where you can enjoy a Broadway play."

**The space has a floor-to-ceiling sculpture and a lighting system that will turn the sculpture into any color for the event.**

**KATHRYN GLEESING, MBA, CMP**  
President and CEO  
DM-Connection & Events



The Hilton Milwaukee City Center is connected by skywalk to the Wisconsin Center and centrally located downtown, making it a good location for the group. But when it was time to choose a space for a reception, the choice was The Garden, across the river.

"The venue was chosen because my client wanted a unique space for a reception with the option to take attendees to a restaurant close by. This venue and restaurant are owned by the same group, so it worked out well for the private event. The space has a floor-to-ceiling sculpture and a lighting system that will turn the sculpture into

any color for the event. In this case, my client wanted a gold tone look to complement the decor we selected for the evening reception."

This group, Gleesing adds, "always seeks out unique venues for its event. We were on the hunt a year before the conference to identify and book that unique space, and we eventually found it at The Garden."

It was definitely a success. "The attendees loved The Garden and commented on the decor, lighting and entertainment we had that evening, the Jenny Thiel Trio," Gleesing says. "We used lighting to provide warmth to the room, and added elements in the linens and table decor and furniture to pull in the upscale sophistication theme for the evening. The addition of a light jazz trio for background music really brought the room alive while still allowing attendees to mingle."

Gleesing says staff at The Garden was responsive on the evening of the event and helped make everything run smoothly. "And the waitstaff/bar-tenders at Carnevor restaurant were exceptional and worked well together as each pre-selected entrée was served to the guests"

Gleesing encourages planners to consider The Garden, as well as Milwaukee itself, which she says has many unique spaces from which to choose. "Milwaukee is a hidden gem sitting on the shores of Lake Michigan, otherwise known

as 'The Fresh Coast.' Being home to many famous beer barons, a favorite place to hold a small reception is the historic Miller Caves, an underground area within the MillerCoors Brewery complex. There's also the Capt. Frederick Pabst Mansion, an 1892 historic mansion where many themes and costumes can make your event memorable. And you can hold a street party on the grounds of the Harley-Davidson Museum," Gleesing says.

In addition, she adds, "There's Discovery World, a new pavilion event space where you can have a thunderstorm during your event and

not get wet and Milwaukee County Zoo, where you can have a 'feast with the beasts.'"

VISIT Milwaukee, the city's CVB, also has a list of new meeting and event venues, as well as venues that have recently been renovated or updated. Once you choose a venue, Gleesing advises planners to work with local experts who know the city, including a preferred catering vendor. "They know the venue well and can be a great resource for your event," she says.

### HISTORIC STABLE

In San Antonio, Texas, there are also many venues that could rightly be labeled unique. River Walk is a one-of-a-kind place for an event. But Kimberly Wichern, owner of Brentwood, Tennessee-based Regius Events, has another option that also fits that bill: Pearl Stable. That's where she organized a function for a group of 120 based at Omni La Mansión del Rio. "My client's attendees are primarily West Coast-based, so the San Antonio area is conducive and cost effective for air travel. In addition, the Southwestern climate and River Walk venue allowed for numerous after-hours leisure activities," Wichern says.

With nearly all major carriers offering multiple daily flights into the city, she says, "San Antonio is easily acces-

sible. The Omni La Mansión del Rio is beautifully situated along the popular River Walk, providing access to restaurants, nightlife, shopping and activities all within walking distance. This convenience mitigates much of the additional transportation costs associated with large group meetings."

The Pearl Stable, located north of

**Be sure to take advantage of the available space and layout options to maximize the effectiveness of your meetings.**

**KIMBERLY WICHERN**  
Owner  
Regius Events



downtown, is a 22-acre, mixed-use site that served as a brewery operation from 1883 to 2001. The historic site was a rather grand home to the brewery's draft horses in the late 1800s. The fact that the client was in the international agriculture industry made it a good fit, but the complex has great appeal for other reasons as well.

"As a mixed-use destination, the Pearl Stable offered the attendees a wide variety of on-site dining, shopping and entertainment options while also accommodating the client's specific conference and business needs," Wichern says. "The proximity to River Walk and downtown San Antonio

added another layer of multifaceted entertainment that covered the full spectrum of individual tastes."

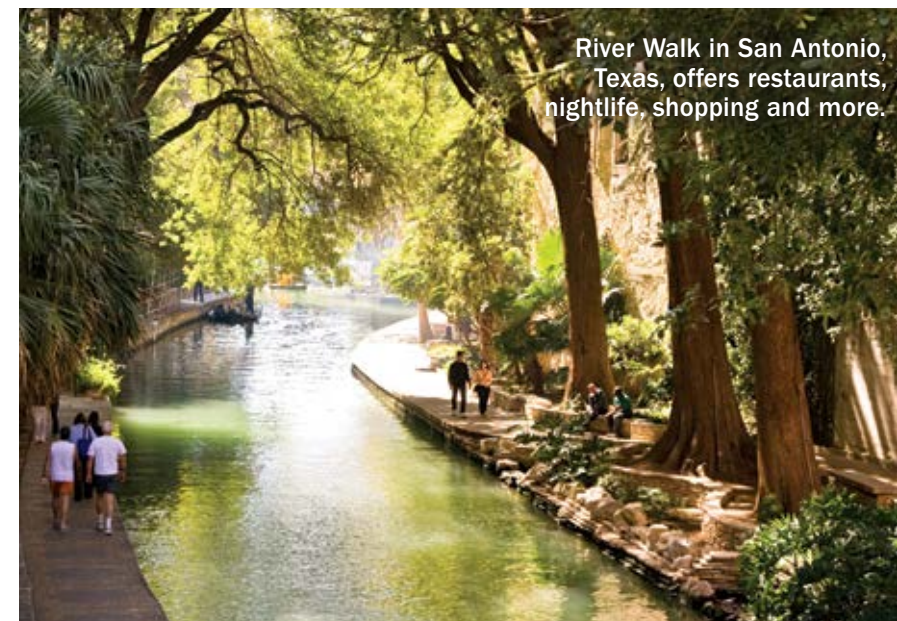
She says the history behind Pearl Stable added to the intrigue and appeal to her client. "This venue was a perfect blend of rustic charm with modern conveniences. The spacious dining areas were complemented by

some of the original fixtures, which added to the allure," Wichern says.

They looked at a number of venues in the San Antonio area, but Pearl Stable checked all the right boxes. "The Pearl Stable stood out as a unique combination of functional dining and mingling areas

with a rustic charm and comfortable feel. It also allowed for a variety of conversation areas to accommodate different group sizes, which made it ideal for my client. I'm always looking for that 'wow' factor for my clients when I plan an event, and The Pearl Stable gave my attendees just that," Wichern says.

The group used the lower-level dining area and the foyer/entry for initial gatherings and networking. Some guests explored the upper level for viewing and photos. "Our clients were very pleased with Pearl Stable, from both a business functionality perspective, and entertainment and leisure perspective," Wichern notes. "We received



River Walk in San Antonio, Texas, offers restaurants, nightlife, shopping and more.

**THE PROXIMITY OF PEARL TO RIVER WALK AND DOWNTOWN SAN ANTONIO ADDED ANOTHER LAYER OF MULTIFACETED ENTERTAINMENT.**





Courtesy of Moonlight Studios

Grand Hyatt, SLS and Rosewood Baha Mar offer attendees an exotic day trip to the private island, Long Cay. Right, Moonlight Studios in Chicago offers an urban chic ambience and can be divided between multiple rooms.

comments about the unique charm and appeal the venue has.”

To planners considering The Pearl Stable, she advises, “Be sure to take advantage of the available space and layout options to maximize the effectiveness of your meetings. Think outside the box when it comes to speakers, presentations or award ceremonies. The Pearl Stable is a unique and impressive venue that Regius would recommend without reservation.”

## MORE UNIQUE VENUES

Happily for planners, destinations across the country and beyond have out-of-the-ordinary spaces. In New York City, there’s only one Grand Central Station, an impressive architectural gem with its vaulted painted ceilings, arches, tiles and chandeliers. Vanderbilt Hall, off the 42nd Street and Park Avenue entrance, is a stunning space ideal for corporate receptions and events. It can be viewable to the public, such as for product launches, or closed off for a very private awards or fundraising affair. It also hosts corporate-sponsored indoor sports events.

Ellis Island and Liberty Island need no introduction as unique settings. Because they are national monuments, working with a local DMC familiar with regulations governing their use is highly recommended. Small groups might choose the conference space overlooking Ellis Island’s Great Hall or the newer Statue of Liberty

Museum. The islands accommodate 50 to 1,200 attendees.

Not only does Baha Mar in the Bahamas have three distinct hotels — Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, SLS Baha Mar and Rosewood Baha Mar — it also has a private island and two yachts. Long Cay is a 15-acre island a short boat ride from the hotels, where attendees can relax in the sun, splash in the sea, get massages, play sports, dine and sip tropical drinks. The island is fully staffed with butlers and attendants — and is ideal for an activity-filled day trip or barefoot-elegant cocktail party. Don’t forget the sunscreen and loosed hats, towels or beach cover-ups.

The 213-foot Eternity I and 65-foot Eternity II can remain docked or sail through the turquoise waters while guests enjoy cocktails and the sublime views. Both can also accommodate single-day or multi-day private trips for groups. Eternity I has a 20-foot pool and every luxury appointment desired — including onboard staff to cater to participants.

Industrial loft conversions may share architectural attributes, but they’re not all the same. The 15,000-sf Moonlight Studios in Chicago’s West Loop neighborhood provides an urban chic ambience with exposed brick walls and high ceilings and can be divided between multiple rooms. The largest space is 6,000 sf. Complimentary basic lighting, traveling I-beam crane system, high-capacity rigging system, catwalks and Wi-Fi are available.

Greenhouse Loft in Avondale is

the choice for groups with sustainability as a priority. With LEED Platinum certification, it’s Chicago’s most sustainable meeting and event venue. Hardwood floors, refurbished vintage furniture and soaring, floor-to-ceiling windows provide an inspired backdrop. The glasshouse and loft portions together accommodate 250 attendees for a reception or 200 theater-style. The 8,000-sf outdoor garden can be reserved for private events after 5 p.m.

Brooklyn Bowl in Las Vegas is undeniably cool with its vintage design and 32 bowling lanes. The space accommodates up to 2,500 attendees and there are VIP areas if privacy is key. No fancy dining here; it’s all about comfort food with fried chicken and traditional sides. Production capabilities are state-of-the-art.

At The Neon Museum, the huge collection of iconic Las Vegas signs is the unique backdrop for business events. The facility can handle up to 250. If you book the outdoor ‘boneyard’ space, you’ll have access to a security team.

Located downtown, MEET Las Vegas accommodates up to 1,000 and offers plenty of tech options, including digital media displays and excellent Wi-Fi connectivity. The three-story, 40,000-sf venue can be customized to a planner’s specifications, meaning a group can use it more than once and have a different experience each time.

The 1,500-acre Presidio in San Francisco offers glorious close-up views of the Golden Gate Bridge. A former mili-

Brooklyn Bowl in Las Vegas; Presidio Officer’s Club in San Francisco; The USS Midway Museum in San Diego.

tary post, many of the Presidio’s original structures remain, and a golf course is among the amenities. Planners have multiple unique spaces to choose from, including the Golden Gate Club, Log Cabin, Commissary and Presidio Officer’s Club. Built in 1949, the Golden Gate Club’s options include a buyout of all 8,587 sf accommodating up to 845 attendees, or booking individual spaces range from 300 sf to 2,736 sf. The Log Cabin was constructed in 1937. Rustic with a Spanish red-tile roof, this popular venue accommodates up to 200 standing, 150 for a banquet. There’s also a classroom, theater and boardroom, along with outdoor space.

The James R. Herman Cruise Terminal at Pier 27 has been the setting for many spectacular events. The massive terminal can accommodate up to 4,000 cruise ship passengers, but when no ship is in port, it serves as a nearly blank canvas for whatever theme, decor or entertainment a planner can imagine. Multiple entrance lobbies allow for multiple events; security screening equipment is available for high-security functions, and there are mobile check-in booths. Highly flexible, the space can be divided in multiple ways.

In San Diego, the USS Midway Museum’s most impressive space is the massive 4-acre flight deck rising 50 feet above the water and featuring a 360-degree panorama, restored naval aircraft and remarkable history. Attendee capacity is up to 4,000 for receptions, up to 1,200 for seated functions. Indoors, the hangar deck gives attendees the opportunity to climb into a variety of cockpit exhibits and experience a flight simulator. It accommodates 150 to 1,500 depending on the format. Multiple conference and breakout rooms can also be booked in the ship’s meeting center.

Setting a function in a unique space enhances any event. It takes a little research, but the good news for planners is that it’s possible to find them in nearly every destination. **C&IT**





# Meetings with an **EDGE**



## *Cruises Offer the Amenities of Meetings on Land, But Are Often Better for the Bottom Line*

BY DAVID SWANSON

**M**eeting planners who've handled the logistics for a meeting or incentive program know how challenging it can be to assemble the many and various pieces for a successful event. Between room blocks, transportation, dining venues, meeting rooms, A/V requirements and activities to appeal to a multifaceted group, fitting together the puzzle pieces requires a commitment of time, energy and money.

But cruise-based programs streamline many elements of event planning. And, by assembling the disparate functions under one umbrella, logistics can be contained and budgeting is more predictable. Meeting planners we've spoken to say that such bundling also usually leads to cost savings over comparable land-based meeting options.

No wonder a growing number of companies are finding that corporate events at sea sometimes offer an edge over traditional land-based programs.

### THE CRUISE ADVANTAGE

"The No. 1 advantage of a cruise incentive over land is the inclusiveness of the product," explains Karen Devine, CITP, CEO and founder of Chicago-based 3D Cruise Partners. With a background in hotel, DMC and cruise events, Devine founded her company 15 years ago and specializes in cruise solutions for the meetings industry. "It doesn't matter if it's a mass-market line or luxury. The food is included, some or all of your drink is included, A/V is included and there's function space you don't have to pay for."

Devine continues: "And, you don't need to





**The 2,018-passenger Norwegian Spirit was recently reimagined with all new cabins, restaurants and bars.**

worry about losing your participants. You choose the intensive itinerary and bring everybody together in a space and then let them go off on their own. If the client wants a more port-intensive itinerary, they can do that; if it's more of a meeting group than an incentive, you can choose an itinerary with a couple of sea days."

The advantages of a cruise aren't limited to meeting planners. Devine says the participants love them.

"Your participants will unpack once, but they'll wake up somewhere different every day," she adds. "You're giving them multiple experiences, even on a three- or four-night cruise."

For an incentive program organized on behalf of a national flooring company last year, Devine worked with Silversea, chartering Silver Muse, the line's newest ship, with capacity for 596 passengers. Featuring eight different restaurants, cabins that start at generous 334 sf, and with a high ratio of crew to passengers, Silver Muse is among the most luxurious ships sailing the seven seas. A twin, Silver Moon, will arrive later this year. "The client needed close to 300 cabins,"

**La Terrazza on the Silver Muse, which recently hosted an event for a national flooring company.**



Your participants will unpack once, but they'll wake up somewhere different every day.



**KAREN DEVINE, CITP**  
CEO and founder  
3D Cruise Partners

Devine says. "One of the beauties of Silversea was their ability to cut and customize a Caribbean itinerary." The client wanted a five-night itinerary, rather than seven nights, as is customary in the Caribbean, and wanted to sail out of San Juan, an embarkation port that avails a greater variety of nearby islands than the Florida ports. "Of course, to do this, we needed to book about 18-20 months ahead of the operation, just prior to them publishing their schedule."

She continues, "Something that Silversea excels in is the flexibility they show toward group and charter events — the willingness of the onboard crew to customize. The secret is the willingness of the client to allow the ship to do what it does best."

Most cruise ships built today do not have a single space where all passengers can congregate — even the theater

and main dining room are not usually designed to accommodate all passengers at once. This can be a problem for a chartering group that wants to gather all passengers at one time.

"Although Royal Caribbean ships have conference centers, most ships don't," Devine explains. "So you're looking at using a lounge space or theater. Make sure they block that space — usually during contract."

Devine continues, "One of things we had to do with Silver Muse was identify a space that fit everybody, and the only space was the top deck. The client had hired a decor and entertainment company that caters to ships to design an incredible, beautiful deck event. The challenge: What if it rained? Well, just as we were setting up, it poured. Somehow, we were able to move the entire event inside. But then, after the rain stopped, the crew moved all of the event decor back out onto the deck for an after-party, with all the centerpieces and florals."

In terms of cost, how do cruise programs compare against traditional land-based events? Devine says the important comparison is bottom line.

"You can't look at room rate against cruise fare," Devine suggests. "Take it to the bottom line, look at the inclusiveness. A cruise includes all your food, all your entertainment and, in some cases, your shore excursions. There aren't many hotel programs that are going to

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## CHARTERS, MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

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provide all that. On an apples-to-apples comparison, the cruise is going to win every single time.”

## MEETINGS AT SEA ON THE RISE

In its annual State of the Industry report, Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) announced that the number of passengers projected to cruise in 2020 will reach 32 million, up almost 30% over the last five years, fueled by a growing supply of new and bigger ships.

That value-added proposition Devine cites is helping the industry sell an increasing number of cabins to the corporate and incentive market, according to industry insiders.

A record 25 new ocean cruise ships will debut in 2020, according to Cruise Industry News. These range from Scarlet Lady, the first of three 2,860-passenger ships for Virgin Voyages, to the inaugural ship from The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection, Evrima. From luxe, Zodiac-equipped expedition vessels, like Ponant’s 180-passenger Le Belot and its twin Le Jacques Cartier, to crowd-pleasing Carnival Cruise Line’s 5,200-passenger Mardi Gras debuting this fall. But with so many brands, where does one start?

“Choosing a cruise is like match-making,” suggests Jeffrey Broudy,

president of Philadelphia-based United Incentives Inc., a company that has been in the group incentive space since 1984. “It requires a deep understanding of the clients and cruise lines culture, values, benefits, proximity and style. In essence, it is a decision to align brands.”

He continues, “In the incentive space, while there may be a meeting, the experience is a reward. It’s an exchange for extraordinary perfor-

In the incentive space, while there may be a meeting, the experience is a reward.

**JEFFREY BROUDY**  
President  
United Incentives Inc.



mance. Our goal is to actively engage our participants in a way that reinforces the brand promise of their sponsor. Even while surrounded by 4,000 of your closest friends, on cruises there is a greater sense of community, surprise and shared experiences that drives home the value of achievement.”

A recent project for dealers had Broudy seeking an aspirational destination, along with a cruise line that would amplify that experience. The solution? An Alaska itinerary aboard Celebrity Solstice last summer.

“The typical cruise features a good itinerary, embarkation port, pricing and accommodations,” Broudy says. “Based on timing, we needed a round trip out of Seattle — a ship with the facilities to have multiple private cocktail receptions and a large general session, and very strong F&B and CSM teams that understood the value of corporate groups. Once we identified the cruise lines with the physical requirements, we had to narrow down the choices based on the brand alignment. And nothing speaks to brand alignment as clearly as culture. Our experience is that Celebrity Cruises is a brand both humble and hungry, which aligns nicely to our client’s persona.”

Adds Broudy, “We didn’t want to charter a smaller ship and felt Celebrity Solstice would make our 700 participants feel special, heard and accommodated.” The 2,850-passenger ship offers six different restaurants, eight bars, and lounges ranging from a sunset perch to an ice-topped bar, plus a lush Canyon Ranch spa and sprawling fitness center. The 12-year old ship, which alternates seasonally between various regions of the Pacific, is due for an extensive renovation next year.

Unique elements of Broudy’s program for this global luxury brand included fitting in general sessions with heavy audiovisual requirements within the ship’s rigid structured entertainment program. “This effort requires a deep knowledge of tech and onboard equipment among clients, planners, cruise line operations and ship operations,” he says. “Another unique requirement we had was securing and scheduling a custom, invitation-only entertainment experience. Celebrity succeeded on both counts.”

Broudy continues, “One thing I love about Celebrity Cruises is how they reward a ship’s crew with cash

**An Oceania ship sailing into Sydney, Australia. The company is planning a two-year, \$100 million refurbishment of its six-ship fleet.**

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bonuses based on the sailing's total passenger satisfaction rating, as well as recognizing the individual crew members with rewards and recognition. In this way, all passengers are served well instead of those who are just tipping heavily. Celebrity Solstice is a great ship, and the customer-facing experience defines the cruise, not necessarily the 'wow' public spaces or gadgetry."

He adds, "Participants come home and talk about how they felt. — a measure very much on the agenda for Celebrity Cruises."

In 2018, Celebrity debuted the well-received Celebrity Edge, the line's first new ship in six years. This spring, a sibling arrives — Celebrity Apex, another ship that will continue many of the design concepts that made the 2,910-passenger Edge a hit — innovative accommodations that meld indoor and outdoor living, a terraced pool deck, rooftop garden, and a 'Magic Carpet' on the right side that is a tender boat access and a dining option. Both Edge-class ships, like most of the Celebrity fleet, have dedicated meeting venues — in this case, the 1,970-sf Meeting Place,



**Norwegian Encore's Vibe Beach Club.**  
The 4,000-passenger ship is the largest in the Norwegian fleet.

situated to provide ocean views. The space can be configured for general sessions, conferences, banquets or cocktail seating, and is equipped with top-notch audiovisual technology.

### MORE NEW INVENTORY

Regent Seven Seas Cruises is about to launch its second Explorer-class ship, Seven Seas Splendor, to be christened by godmother Christie Brinkley.

The ship continues the opulence exhibited aboard Seven Seas Explorer, which arrived to much fanfare a few years ago. Splendor will similarly boast about a \$5 million art collection featuring works by Picasso, Miro and others, lavish suites, including the 4,443-sf Regent Suite, and a Culinary Arts Kitchen with 18 stations for hands-on gourmet cooking demonstrations. A sixth Explorer-class ship will arrive for the Regent fleet in 2023.

Regent is but one jewel in the crown of Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings.

Oceania Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) round out the company's complete inventory, for a total of 28 ships. Each of the lines cater to a unique audience, and Katina Athanasiou, Norwegian's chief sales officer, works to match planners with the right brand and ship for their audience and budget.

A two-year, \$100 million refurbishment of the entire six-ship Oceania fleet will be completed this year, when Nautica comes out of dry dock following a reimagining designed to create a more modern, sophisticated and airy feel. Also on the horizon: two new, \$650 million ships, the Allura-class, have been ordered. The 1,200-passenger ships will be delivered in 2022 and 2025.

NCL's largest ship ever, the 4,000-passenger Norwegian Encore, arrived last fall and, following a brief building hiatus, the line will have six new ships debuting annually again starting in 2022. During Norwegian Encore's inaugural call to NCL's private, 270-acre Bahamian island Great Stirrup Cay, the company introduced Silver Cove, an oceanfront lagoon with a Mandara Spa and 38 air-conditioned beachfront villas. The villas range from

**Symphony of the Seas has four conference rooms with seating for up to 369 and three theaters with seating for up to 1,411.**

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## THE NUMBER OF PASSENGERS PROJECTED TO CRUISE IN 2020 WILL REACH 32 MILLION.

The 700-passenger Regent Seven Seas Voyager stops at ports of call in Barcelona, Venice and the Caribbean.

studios to one- and two-bedroom villas, each equipped with a full bathroom, daybed, club chairs, TV with on-demand entertainment and outdoor patio and lounge seating.

Terry Purcell, senior account executive, CIS, CIPT, MBA at Maritz Global Events, was tasked with overseeing an incentive program for a manufacturing group last year. The size: 1,650 attendees with a variety of ages — from young children to those at or near retirement. Fortunately, Purcell had two full years of lead time for planning, choosing Royal Caribbean based on a past successful experience.

“This group used Allure of the Seas 10 years ago and they gave the ship high marks,” Purcell says. “The newer Symphony of the Seas offered enhancements including specialty restaurants new Broadway entertainment, state-of-the-art technology, ice shows and activities that would entertain any age group.”

Symphony of the Seas is not quite a twin of Allure — the new ship is slightly larger, holding 5,518 passengers, the largest capacity at sea, meaning Purcell’s group represented about a quarter of the overall passengers. Symphony of the Seas has four conference rooms holding up to 369 guests, plus decks, lounges and three theaters with seating accommodating up to 1,411, mean-

ing there were plenty of places for the participants to gather.

“Royal Caribbean permitted several buyouts of the Boardwalk,” Purcell says. “They provided exclusive ice shows, a private Broadway show, a performance in the Aqua Theater, plus exclusive use of the Solarium for receptions. This meant the group was together daily, so that leadership could express their thanks for their loyalty.”

Purcell says the exclusive access provided by Royal Caribbean even allowed ample time for branding each event, highlighting the sponsoring company of the incentive program.

Adds Purcell, “The attitude of the ship’s leadership was ‘All hands on deck,’ to assure that even the smallest detail was not overlooked. Since this program was in its planning stages for 24 months, there was seamless support, including from the corporate office, to assure no communications were lost between land/ship during such a long process.”

Devine says that such intensive planning, coupled with on-board research, is critical to a successful cruise event.

“It can be incredibly intimidating,” Devine says. “Where do you start? How do you even know where to start?”

She continues, “The most common comment I hear planners come back with ‘They wish they had known the onboard experience better.’ Some don’t do a site inspection. When you get on a ship and the ship sails away, you’re on a city by itself.”

Devine adds, “It’s ideal to sail, but people don’t always have the time for

that. But you can do a day visit. Go on the ship when it’s in port — meet the people, see the spaces, have lunch, get a feel for the F&B and get an idea of the service level. Then, you can’t say you didn’t know what the ship was like. Frankly, push the buttons. If you see something you like, like a function space, or a special cabin, or something on the menu, ask for it. So much can get accomplished in a five- or six-hour day visit.”

### OTHER CRUISE LINES

Crystal Cruises offers eight ships across its luxury fleet, which includes: two ocean liners, Crystal Serenity and Crystal Symphony; four river ships, Crystal Bach, Crystal Debussy, Crystal Mahler and Crystal Ravel; one yacht, Crystal Esprit; and one expedition ship, Crystal Endeavor.

Want to take a river cruise along the Danube in Budapest or the Rhine in Amsterdam? Crystal’s river cruises offer tantalizing excursions in some of Europe’s most beautiful and historic cities. Enjoy the Serenity or Symphony on ocean cruises from Quebec City to Miami or from Rome to Barcelona.

In a nod to sustainability issues, Crystal has eliminated plastic straws across its entire fleet of ocean and river ships as well as Crystal Esprit. Crystal is also committed to preserving and serving the communities they visit. The cruise company has partnered with Clean the World, the toiletry recycling program that fights deadly illness in sanitation-challenged communities. **C&IT**

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Kingsmill Resort offered a nice mix of activities for the 300 attendees of Snow Companies' annual Employee Appreciation Party.



# GOLF & SPA RESORTS

THRILL  
ATTENDEES  
WITH AN  
UNFORGETTABLE  
GOLF & SPA  
EXPERIENCE

BY MAURA KELLER

With the ongoing frantic pace of life, corporate professionals continue to seek ways to alleviate stress and rejuvenate their minds, bodies and spirits. As a result, many meeting planners are considering golf and spa resorts as the ideal venue. Not only do these locales offer exemplary meeting spaces, but they also provide ample amenities to work and play.

For Sheri Trotter, senior vice president of Programs & Special Events at Williamsburg, Virginia-based Snow Companies, Kingsmill Resort, in Williamsburg, offered her 300 attendees what they wanted in a resort for the company's annual Employee Appreciation Party.

"We are a local company and we needed an exceptional venue for such a special event to honor our employees for a job well done," she says. "The water view is magical. It provides a certain level of peace when on breaks or when having a meal and, after hours of meetings, that is a great respite. And it automatically comes with every package."

Kingsmill has two 18-hole golf courses — The River Course and The Plantation Course — and offers the Golf Channel Academy. The Spa at Kingsmill offers facials, massages, body wraps, and salon and beauty treatments, as well as wellness and body treatments.

"Kingsmill is a location where your group will get the business done and will be able to relax as well," Trotter says. "The amenities offered, the environmental beauty and the attention to detail from all aspects makes a well-rounded meeting/event."

She adds, "We used a considerable amount of the event space at Kingsmill. The flow is exceptional, ambience is lovely and the service is always spot on. Now, let me tell you about the food. It isn't your typical conference facility food; it is so much more. It is fresh, creative, plentiful and always good, really good. The culinary crew is very good at what they do."



Craig Dooley, president at SDI Meetings and Incentives, says golf and spa resorts offer a memorable experience for meeting attendees. As Dooley explains, every meeting and event, no matter the size, requires the basic components — the building blocks to make it productive and valuable for the attendees and the organization.

“The environment in which you wrap those basics are what make good and productive meetings/events great and memorable experiences, and resorts with golf and spa services allow the planner attractive ways to do just that,” Dooley says. Regardless of destination, two of the more popular activities tend to be the spa — and by extension the trendier ‘wellness’ — and golf, so resorts that offer them can help to increase attendance with one or both of them appealing to the attendees.

Krista Emmons, CMP, operations manager of Meetings & Events at Travel Leaders Corporate, has planned both high-level leadership conferences and incentive groups at golf and spa resorts. As such, Emmons says that if leisure activities are incorporated into the meeting or event, hosting an event at a golf/spa resort can help reduce costs as the events are on property, eliminating additional costs of transportation.

“In addition, golf/spa discounts, inclusions and additional concessions can be negotiated during the contractual phase,” Emmons says. If leisure events are optional, the location provides easy access for free time activities for attendees or for potential guests who are not participating in the official program.

Sarah Pinkowski, CMP, meetings manager of the Meetings & Travel department at Enterprise Holdings Inc. in St. Louis, Missouri, recently held an event at Rosen Shingle Creek in

deliver in every area of their hotel. Their meeting space is ample and allows us to deliver content in a comfortable learning environment. And their culinary and banquet teams work seamlessly together to deliver exceptional dining experiences to large groups. They have fantastic guest rooms, various restaurants, unique shops, a relaxing spa and a beautiful golf course — the total package. In addition, we are able to keep all of our attendees under one roof due to their expansive footprint.”

With the help of Rosen Shingle Creek and Hello! Florida teams, Enterprise Holdings designed two evening events. One took place after the awards ceremony on the Gatlin Terrace, the other took place in the pool areas. “The Rosen’s outdoor areas, exceptional staff and delicious food and beverage options achieved our goal of allowing attendees plenty

of time and space to connect with each other but also gave them the chance to get outside and enjoy the beautiful fall Orlando weather,” Pinkowski says.

Pinkowski stresses that golf and spa resorts tend to have unique spaces to host a variety of events with varying group sizes. In the past, Enterprise Holdings has arranged golf tournaments and spa activities for different audiences and meetings. “We’ve included a chipping or putting contest with an outdoor reception,” Pinkowski says. “Having these options on property gives variety to our planned activities, and saves time and money in transfer fees versus other off-site options.”

Golf and spa resorts are great destinations for meetings and events mostly because they offer built-in connection activities. Heather Pilcher, CSEP, CMP, CEO and executive producer at Blue Spark Event Design, says her clients consistently tell her that if you can spend 5 1/2 hours on a golf course

**Rosen Shingle Creek hosted 650 attendees of an event for Enterprise Holdings Inc., which has arranged golf tournaments and spa activities.**

The environment in which you wrap those basics are what make good and productive meetings/events great and memorable experiences.

**CRAIG DOOLEY**  
President  
SDI Meetings and Incentives



Photo by Jason Brown

**Venues that offer golf and spa amenities make networking a breeze — especially on the golf course where friendly competition can strengthen connections.**

with a potential or current customer, you provide an opportunity to make a stronger connection with them. “It’s important to help your attendees bond over a common experience, whether it be getting refreshed or relaxed in a spa together or by lifting the competitive spirit at a game — that even the most unathletic folks can play,” Pilcher says. “Plus, there’s always driving the golf cart if you want to connect, but don’t want to play. Whether the event is small or large, both activities are great options for conference attendees.”

## GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL

Having a meeting or event at a golf resort sets the tone for a meeting. As Carolyn Davis, CMP, owner at Strategic Meeting Partners LLC in San Diego, California, says, compared to a meeting in a downtown convention hotel, a golf- or spa-oriented event speaks volumes as to what an attendee can expect. “These resorts lend themselves to a more health-conscious meeting,” Davis says. “They speak to wellness through exercise and relaxation.”

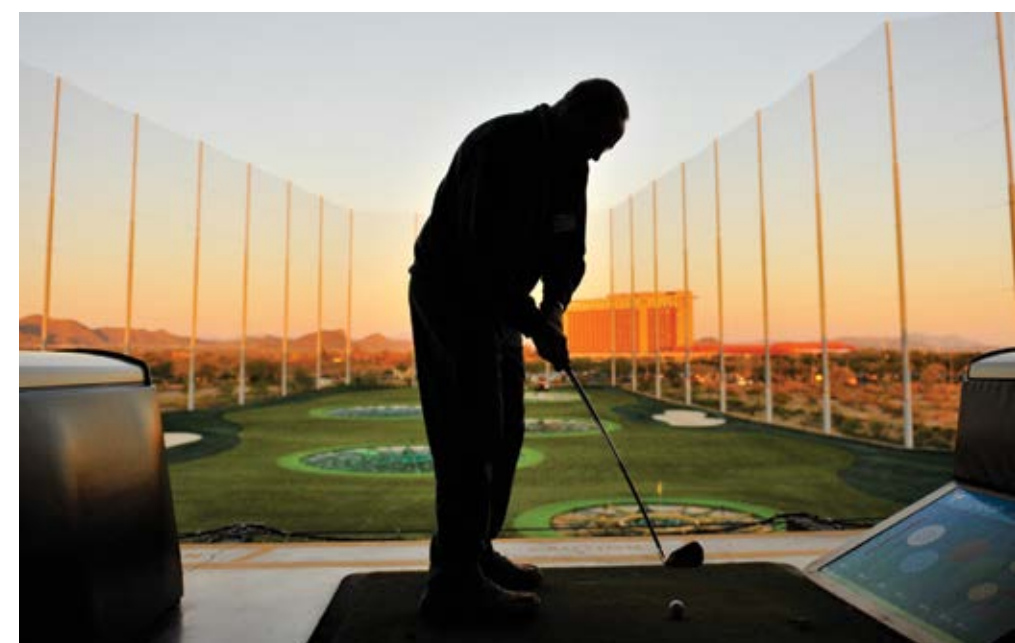
One such resort is Sea Island, a golf resort in Georgia that has been providing memorable golf experiences since 1928. In addition, the island resort offers 42,000 sf of flexible indoor meeting space for groups from 5 to 500, as well as a wealth of outdoor meeting venues. Two of Sea Island’s golf courses — Seaside and Plantation — are the site of the PGA Tour’s RSM Classic.

“Courses are beginning to understand the dynamics of meetings and events, and are tailoring their offerings to accommodate differently skilled players and non-golfers in the mix,” Davis says.

Twice a year, The OrthoForum, a national physician specialty organization, holds conferences to allow attendees to engage in activities that advance each group’s presence in its local and regional market through



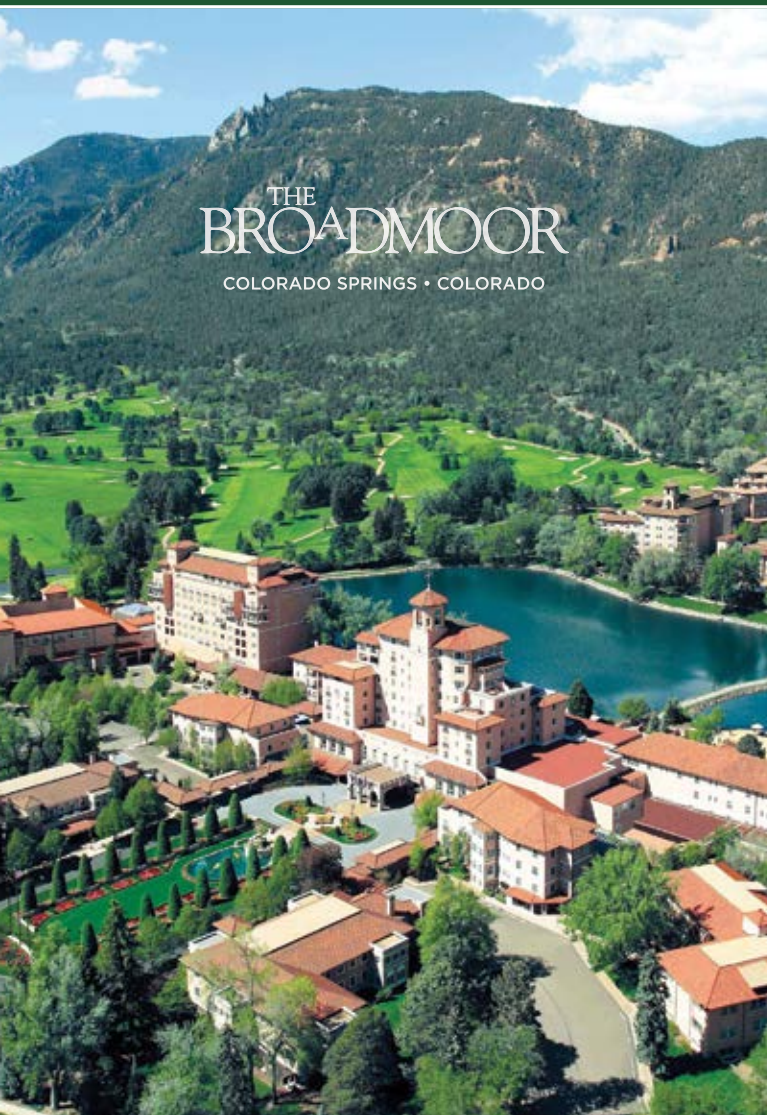
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### **Activities— Variety**

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### **Accommodations— Choice**

Our 400 rooms and suites ensure we have a room type to meet your needs from The Cloister, nestled between the Black Banks River and the Atlantic Ocean to The Lodge, overlooking golf and the ocean, to The Inn, our select-service property. Or for those seeking outdoor adventure, we offer Broadfield, our 5,800-acre sporting club.





Sea Island offers 42,000 sf of flexible indoor meeting space for groups from 5 to 500. Two of Sea Island's golf courses — Seaside and Plantation — are the site of the PGA Tour's RSM Classic.

benchmarking, innovation, business ventures, networking and best practices.

According to Tina Cakmes, director of conferences, The OrthoForum is a loyal customer of The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel, California — having a conference at the resort annually since 2014, with attendance ranging from 200 to 500. “The OrthoForum members always prefer first-class accommodations, top-notch service starting from pre-conference planning, to ease of check-in, excellent banquet service and unmatched customer service,” Cakmes says. “The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel always exceeds our expectations.” As Cakmes explains, after long days in meetings, these types of resorts provide Ortho-

Forum attendees with many options to relax and enjoy the beautiful surroundings of a golf/spa resort.

“This allows them to be refreshed

Kingsmill is a location where your group will get the business done and will be able to relax as well.

#### SHERI TROTTER

Senior Vice President, Programs & Special Events  
Snow Companies



and productive for the next day,” Cakmes says. “We have always enjoyed using a golf/spa resort for our meetings, even though we sometimes alternate to a city location. We find that the hustle and bustle of the large city can take

away from the focus of the meeting, and even affect attendance at our evening social events.” Cakmes suggests meeting planners take advantage of what the resort has to offer in their planning. For example, Laguna Niguel has such spectacular weather that “The OrthoForum is able to plan all of our meals outside, looking over the California coastline.”

Because of its ocean proximity, The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel features spa treatments borrowed from the ocean to restore balance and nurture the body. The spa features marine collagen, sea salt, smoothed beach stones and seaweed among other natural ingredients.

There is also a collection of top golf courses located around the resort, though many guests choose to play at the adjacent Monarch Beach Golf Links only minutes from the hotel. Among the few ocean courses in the area, Monarch Beach offers a Scottish links-style course designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr. that presents players with sweeping ocean views.

Located about 90 minutes north of Los Angeles, and tucked within the Topa Mountains, lies the Ojai Valley Inn — a favorite among meeting planners looking for an exquisite golf/spa meeting venue. The resort recently introduced The Farmhouse at Ojai Valley Inn, a 20,000-sf epicurean event center, connecting world-class food culture, indoor/outdoor settings and various events.

The Ojai Valley Inn's year-round

activities include golf on the George C. Thomas Jr.-designed 18-hole championship course and unlimited use of the resorts' driving range, a full-service tennis center with four hard courts, and swimming, or lounging, at four heated swimming pools and whirlpools. The Inn's 31,000-sf day spa is the focal point of the resort and boasts two pools, a fully equipped workout room, mind and body studio, spa boutique and an artist's cottage.

The Southwestern U.S. offers a wealth of spa resorts that have made a name for themselves within the corporate and incentive travel industry. Once such property is The Phoenician, a Luxury Collection Resort, Scottsdale. Together, The Phoenician and The Canyon Suites at The Phoenician — the property's AAA Five Diamond/Forbes Five Star boutique hotel on the resort grounds — can accommodate meetings of all sizes and needs. Combined with the resort's breathtaking setting at the base of Camelback Mountain in Scottsdale Arizona, the property is able to host signature events designed to exceed each group's expectations year after year.

And to make the attendee experience that much better, The Phoenician and The Canyon Suites recently completed an extensive three-year transformation — the largest in the resort's 31-year history. The property was refreshed, with a redesigned main lobby, lounge, pool area, guest rooms and retail corridor; new restaurants; a premiere, three-story Phoenician Spa; a new, two-story construction, The Phoenician Athletic Club, featuring a 4,600-sf fitness center with tennis and pickleball courts, and a restructured 18-hole golf course.

Redesigned and rerouted, The Phoenician Golf Club is an 18-hole

course that creates more of a contiguous pattern of play and showcases the beauty of Arizona's Sonoran Desert. There is also a new Club Car featuring the ‘Shark Experience,’ which allows golfers to stream music, live sports, news and entertainment and Greg Norman golf tips. The Phoenician Golf Club also offers updated locker rooms and a refreshed 19th Hole snack shop.

It's important to help your guests bond over a common experience, whether it be getting refreshed or relaxed in a spa together or by piping up the competitive spirit at a game.

#### HEATHER PILCHER, CSEP, CMP

CEO & Executive Producer  
Blue Spark Event Design



Boulders Resort & Spa Scottsdale, Curio Collection by Hilton also offers top-notch golf and spa amenities. Its two courses — the 6,811-yard North Course and the South Course, at 6,726 yards — feature boulder formations and other natural, Sonoran Desert terrain that offers challenging play for golfers of all skill levels. In addition, players can get a lesson taught by expert PGA- and LPGA-certified instructors. Attendees looking to relax via a shamanic tipi, meditation labyrinth, organic garden and/or reflecting pond should visit the 33,000-sf spa, which offers 24 treatment rooms, a spa café and learning center.

## MAKING THE MOST OF A GOLF-SPA EXPERIENCE

As the golf arena continues to evolve, golf course owners and operators recognize the need to customize their offerings to help make golf events memorable for all involved. Set in the Cheyenne Mountains, The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado makes a concerted effort to entice all members

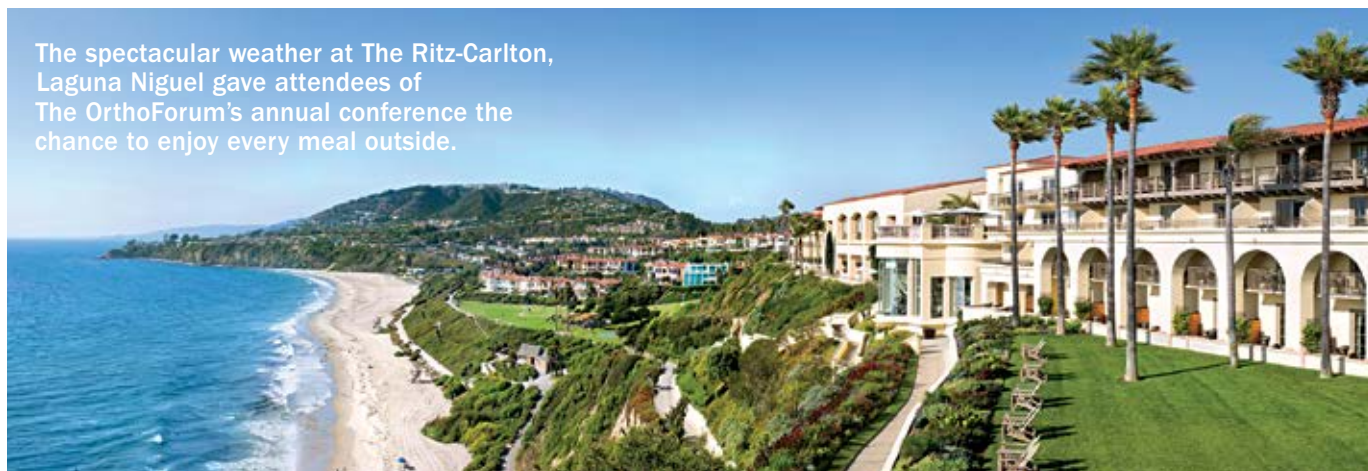
of a group — golfers and non-golfers alike — to participate in various activities to make a memorable experience for all. Recently, The Broadmoor announced that they would soon be offering a luxurious trade show and exhibition hall. Set to debut this spring, the more than 110,000 sf of exhibition space and associated breakout rooms will continue The

Broadmoor's reputation of being a top destination for events.

Of course, The Broadmoor's two iconic golf courses are ranked among the best in the world. Designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. and Donald Ross, these award-winning courses are ideal for golfers of all levels. And, after a round or two of golf, attendees can enjoy visiting together in the 185,000 sf of event space within The Broadmoor's exquisite meeting areas.

Paulina Curto, manager of the Meetings & Events team at Cvent, says that golf/spa resorts continue to be popular options for meetings and events simply because they typically offer

The spectacular weather at The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel gave attendees of The OrthoForum's annual conference the chance to enjoy every meal outside.



The three-story Phoenician Spa offers a boutique, nail lounge, drybar, the Tranquility Suite and a rooftop pool complete with cabanas.





such a wide range of unique offerings and activities. Additionally, many attendees like to blend their business events with their leisure travel — ‘bleisure’ — and booking a venue that caters to a family or leisure vacation can encourage greater event attendance.

“For larger groups, golf/spa resorts offer more options and greater flexibility in accommodating a wide array of needs and schedules while, for smaller groups, these types of resorts often host exclusive experiences like private tee times, custom fitness classes or spa parties — ‘sparties’ — where smaller groups get the VIP treatment in a private area of the spa. The options are endless,” Curto says.

So how can meeting planners make a golf and spa experience not only productive but also pleasant? Dooley suggests the following:

- Pre-block spa and golf tee times to allocate to your attendees.
- Use the event’s web registration system to gather interest and finalize participation.
- Negotiate spa and golf discounts for your group.
- Identify optional wellness activities related to the spa that can be offered as group activities, such as yoga or meditation sessions.

Also, check any routine maintenance for golf courses, especially if considering a shoulder or low season. Are they aerating the course? Reseeding? And if the property is holding a tournament, what are the fees? For the spa, ask about the number of treatment rooms. If you have a large group and going to the spa is going to be a part of the event, make sure the property can accommodate your needs during



Photo courtesy of Paulina Curto

your time frame.

“Know your audience,” Pinkowski says. “If this is something that would further engage your attendees, then it becomes a great opportunity to collaborate with the venue’s team. Relay your goals and objectives and allow them to create ideas that will work best with the space based on what they’ve done in the past. They are most

As an event planner, it’s hard sometimes to remove our preferences from the planning and sourcing process.

**PAULINA CURTO**  
Manager, Meetings & Events Team  
Cvent



familiar with all the options available to you so keep communication open when changes happen so that they may adjust accordingly. And give them your vision but allow room for the ideas to grow in order to fully impact the attendee experience.”

Curto says it is important to compare group size with resort size. If you’re hosting a smaller group, you don’t want them to feel overwhelmed in a huge

Planners who select venues with a spa say there is no better way for attendees to relax after a long day of meetings and classes.

resort and, on the flip side, you might not want to host thousands of people at a boutique resort that may not be able to accommodate everyone’s unique needs.

“Look at offerings and accommodations. If you’re hosting a group that is more focused on wellness, are the spa offerings unique

enough and do they offer enough treatment rooms to accommodate your guests?” Curto asks. “If they are a more active group, are there enough tee times, fitness classes, etc., to support all attendees?”

And don’t forget to look at shoulder season or off-season opportunities. Room rates can skyrocket during a resort’s high season, and golf/spa appointments can be more difficult to schedule. If your event dates are flexible, ask about off-season rates. During a slower time period, your guests will enjoy a more exclusive VIP experience on-site and have greater flexibility in scheduling the activities that fit within their agendas.

“Don’t forget about the attendee experience. As an event planner, it’s hard sometimes to remove our preferences from the planning and sourcing process,” Curto says. “While we may think a golf/spa resort sounds like a great idea, if the event is more about getting business done and prioritizing face-to-face meetings, then any golf and spa offerings really don’t matter and the focus should be on finding a venue that has an incredible event space that supports more engaging and impactful meetings.” **C&IT**

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Lisa Messina, vice president of sales at Caesars Entertainment, says, "There's been a collective movement within business in general to support women rising up."

# No Glass Ceiling?

## How the Meetings Industry Is Empowering the Next Generation of Female Leaders

BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS

**T**he meetings industry is overwhelmingly populated by women. So why are there still gender discrepancies in so many areas of the industry?

At IMEX America 2019, part of Smart Monday was devoted to the organization's She Means Business initiative, and, yes, men were invited to participate. Topics included lessons from influential women in business, the gender pay gap and the still-in-place glass ceiling. Women spoke on why diversity and inclusion matter and the challenges of balancing career and family. One session, 'What I Wish I Knew Then,' focused on how to get more women into leadership roles, noting that the already small number of female Fortune 500 CEOs dropped from 2017 to 2018.

Recently, Bizzabo released its gender diversity study, which found, among other things, that, in spite of women's dominance in the events industry, 66% of all speakers are men. Some countries had even worse numbers, and the tech segment of the industry is the worst with 76% of speakers being men. Why does the gender breakdown of speakers matter? Because speakers are the acknowledged experts and leaders in their fields, and women should be in that mix too, experts say.

All of these studies and education sessions should be applauded. But, perhaps, the place to start is at the beginning.

How can the industry empower young women today so they're ready to change the dynamic tomorrow — or sooner?

### THE PATH TO EMPOWERMENT

Linda McNairy, global vice president of American Express Meetings & Events, says there are several ways companies can empower young women:

- "Aligning and introducing the next generation of women to mentors within our industry. Females can benefit from both male and female mentors, and I recommend both.

- "Fostering organizational cultures where all voices and points-of-view are valued — even those outside our industry. As an avid fan of innovation, I recently sat down with the CEO of a start-up meetings tech company who is in his 20s and never worked in our industry. It was fascinating to hear his views of how he's designing a technology solution for our industry. Collaboration at all levels is key and I believe women often do this more naturally.

- "Continue to emphasize the business impact of our industry. Sadly, some still perceive it as 'party planning,' which is unfortunately augmented by the higher number of females in our industry. It's vital that the next generation of women can articulate the business impact of the industry and the value we're delivering.

- "Championing social responsibility and supporting key women's causes

and movements, such as International Women's Day.

"Empowering the next generation begins with the ability to recognize and develop top talent across the organization," McNairy says. "There are always team members who are eager to learn as much as possible and take on additional responsibilities while remaining collaborative. It's key that leaders spot these individuals and provide them with professional development opportunities and experiences that will be both challenging and rewarding."

Michael Dominguez, president and CEO at Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI), thinks the industry must be proactive and outreach in new and creative ways. "So many organizations are focused on what this generation needs and we need to find better ways of bringing that voice into the conversation," he says. "We have so many seasoned professionals who have much to offer in terms of challenges and approaches for this next generation. We need to work together to determine a better way to formalize a connection and mentor programs to capitalize on this experience. A mentor program would impact both men and women, and it's imperative that we focus on behavior and leadership skills that will shape future leaders."

Jessie States, CMP, CMM, director of the MPI Academy, points to three key elements that support empower-



ment of women — and others. “Businesses that successfully empower young leaders offer:

- Mentorship programs with diverse leaders who authentically and transparently teach and coach the next generation.
- Professional development opportunities and funds that fuel future-ready and senior-level skills.
- Access to evidence-based leadership, diversity and inclusion training programs.”

Beyond that, she continues, “Organizations should offer flexible schedules and focus on productivity rather than face time. “Doing so can empower women to grow professionally without impacting their family decisions,” she notes. “Also impactful are active mentorship programs and human resource materials and policies that reduce conscious and unconscious bias.”

And diversity, States says, doesn’t just help individuals. “Our industry’s businesses, organizations and non-profits should also ensure diversity of employment at all levels, for a variety of people — not just women. The more diverse an organization, the more profitable it is. It’s not just the right thing to do; it makes business sense.”

Lisa Messina, vice president of sales at Caesars Entertainment, thinks the industry is going in the right direction. “At Caesars Entertainment specifically,

we have an initiative to ensure that 50% of our director-level positions and above are occupied by women. Other hospitality companies and organizations have similar initiatives,” she says. “Within the last three to five years, I’ve seen a large movement of female-focused seminars, workshops, education and conferences. There’s been a collective movement within business in general to support women rising up — networking groups, learning from trailblazers, mentorship programs — things that did not exist or weren’t readily available to us even five years ago.”

Like most experts, she points to work-life balance as critical to empowerment. “First and foremost, I support anybody who has the baseline desire to start a career path in hospitality. If they desire to grow and achieve positions like mine, I will figure out a way to support them, even if it’s differentiated from my own personal desires and needs.”

Messina has firsthand experience making that work. “Most of the 11 women who directly report to me are working mothers and, in some instances, the financial head of the household. Respecting these women and the fact that they essentially have two careers is crucial. Additionally, providing them the tools, resources and support to function at those two jobs is critical. That allows you to open a larger pool of applicants and talent. If you say,

‘I’m not going to be flexible, pick one’ or ‘I’m not going to allow time off when you need it most,’ then you’re going to shut off a highly talented pool of women.”

That said, Messina echoes States in noting that this type of flexibility is good business, too. “You must make sure to support women in whatever those passions outside of work are. For example, one of my direct reports is an aspiring pro golfer. She has produced at the workplace, so what do I care if she takes time off in the summer to practice golf? I’m glad I can provide that sort of benefit to my team because I think I get better people as a result.”

Regardless of how the industry is performing on empowerment, States says there’s always room to improve. “Our industry’s leaders should continue to ensure that they elevate women’s voices in the industry and within their own organizations. If we look around the boardroom or C-suite and there are no women, there’s likely an endemic or unconscious bias that should be addressed. Start the conversation at your organization about the lack of women in leadership positions in our industry and beyond. There are a record 33 women CEOs of Fortune 500 companies this year — cause for celebration, of course — but still less than 10%. The problem isn’t just in meetings, hospitality and travel, it’s pervasive in business. That doesn’t mean our industry can’t or shouldn’t be the one to step up and be part of a positive solution.”

#### HOW EMPOWERMENT IS STYMIED

Lack of empowerment is often rooted in company culture. “If young men and women don’t feel valued,” McNairy says, “if they’re in a company that doesn’t focus on professional growth and work-life balance, I’ve seen them become frustrated and not perform to their full potential. And some organizations may not encourage a diverse management or leadership team, which could make it more difficult for a young woman to advance.”

Candie Beane, DMCP, vice president of business development of Hosts Las Vegas, a Hosts Global member, agrees there

## EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION BEGINS WITH THE ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE AND DEVELOP TOP TALENT ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION.

**LINDA MCNAIRY**  
Global Vice President  
American Express Meetings & Events



are multiple reasons young employees don’t feel empowered — but there are ways to counteract them. “It could be lack of self-confidence, self-limiting beliefs, or feeling intimidated or fearful to speak up and act. Looking back on my career, I realize that I was recognized by leadership when I confidently provided my honest opinion, even if that meant going against popular opinion. Today, I encourage others to do the same.”

Yet, young workers often aren’t listened to, despite the diverse and unique experiences they bring to the table, which can lead them to disengage,” States says. “Employees who are heard, acknowledged and empowered are much more likely to buy-in and work for the common good of their colleagues, their businesses and their clients.”

#### WHAT YOUNG WOMEN CAN DO

McNairy thinks learning from failures is important, and businesses need to allow that to happen. But, perhaps most important is helping the next generation understand and be comfortable with who they are. “It’s a balance,” she says. “You need to learn, grow, challenge yourself and adapt; yet, all of these behaviors must take place within the authentic person you are. I’ve worked with emerging leaders who felt they needed to be ‘different’ to lead people and, suddenly, when put in that role, they lose the essence of who they naturally are. It’s critical that we embrace our own authenticity as we improve ourselves along the way.”

McNairy advises young workers to

knowing what you’re going to contribute. The greatest lesson about having that seat is that it can’t be about you.”

#### THE POWER OF MENTORING

The importance of mentorship can’t be overstated. “I wouldn’t be where I am today without my mentor,” Beane says. “Good mentors teach you more than the responsibilities of the job. They teach life skills that help you navigate our ever-changing industry, like how to lead and challenge others to get the best out of them and how to embrace change even when you want to resist. They give you the autonomy to make critical decisions and provide guidance and support along the way. Mentoring creates confident future leaders and is an incredible opportunity to pay it forward.”

She continues, “My approach is to always be open and available, patient and a good listener. I ask mentees questions to learn their thought process and provide support to encourage their confidence. I challenge them to think differently and find alternative solutions to issues, and I hold them accountable when needed. I also genuinely care about their growth and success, which ultimately fosters a relationship built on trust and respect.”

McNairy calls mentoring “vital” and also encourages mentees to invest in a personal coach. “Most highly successful people I know have enjoyed the benefits of having a mentor and are more than willing to pay this back to those developing their own careers. I’m extremely grateful for the many mentors and my personal coach who have helped me along the way,” she says. “I make it a point to be a mentor to help empower young women. My door is always open if they need advice or would like to develop a more formal mentor/mentee relationship. I’m inspired by the courage and confidence so many young women in our organization have.”

States notes that mentoring is critical for young leaders as they look to not only hone leadership skills but to develop the cross-function abilities of

## I WAS RECOGNIZED BY LEADERSHIP WHEN I CONFIDENTLY PROVIDED MY HONEST OPINION, EVEN IF THAT MEANT GOING AGAINST POPULAR OPINION.

**CANDIE BEANE, DMCP**  
Vice President of Business Development  
Hosts Las Vegas





## ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD OFFER FLEXIBLE SCHEDULES AND FOCUS ON PRODUCTIVITY RATHER THAN FACE TIME.

**JESSIE STATES, CMP, CMM**  
Director  
MPI Academy



tomorrow's professional. "My team is primarily women, and I encourage them to apply smart goals to their careers as well as their jobs. I ask where they want to be in the next three to five years — even if that's sitting in my seat; what net-new skills they want to adapt, accelerate or acquire, and how I can help their growth. I empower them to be problem solvers, agents of change management and strategic thinkers to elevate the critical skills necessary as they move into leadership roles."

If young leaders don't find these types of programs at their organizations or within their networks, States says professional associations are an ideal platform for experimenting and growing, including leadership roles on the boards of local and regional chapters and international boards of directors.

One professional association invested in mentorship is MPI. Says States, "MPI's membership is largely women in business — be that corporate, association, government or NGO. Our business is the growth of women and we take that role seriously. From the recent codification of our women's community and our future-ready skills training to our Women in Leadership and Meeting and Event Strategist certificate programs, we strive every day to elevate the role of women in business. Key to this are our Certificate in Meeting Management offered by Indiana University's Kelley School of Business and the master's degree program MPI

supports at San Diego State University."

Dominguez has been fortunate to have many mentors in his journey up through the industry. "I talk to this often as there have been many mentors in my life. But a gentleman named Brad Poncher with Hyatt Hotels pulled me out of F&B operations, which was nine years of my career, and drove me into sales. I can confidently say that we would not be having this interview if it weren't for Brad."

Mentorship, many also note, is a two-way street. "Time is the greatest gift we can give," Dominguez says. "I've always had a policy where anyone can get on my calendar. Those conversations are for advice both personally and professionally. The rewarding part to this approach is that the learning and fulfillment are reciprocal."

Paul Van Deventer, MBA, president and CEO of MPI, puts it this way: "I've been blessed to have a number of inspirational and influential mentors and have invested a lot in nurturing my network. Being in a position to pay-it-forward and help others with their careers and professional growth is both personally fulfilling and central to building a meaningful legacy, so I welcome opportunities to mentor and educate those who seek guidance and advancement."

Messina also calls herself blessed to have had so many people in her personal and professional life who are a part of who she is today. "I try to make

every interaction a learning experience, whether I encounter you in a brief meeting or work with you over a long period of time."

### TODAY'S SUCCESS IS A FIRST STEP

Although many steps are yet to be taken, changes are in place. "When I was coming up as a young salesperson, many reporting up in organizations saw only men in leadership positions," Messina says. "Men were the vice presidents of meetings and exhibits. Men were the directors of sales and marketing, essentially controlling all aspects of big convention hotels. Now, when you look around the country, on the customer and supplier side, we're seeing women occupying jobs that were not available to them 10 years ago. When you get more women into those roles, you end up recruiting that way."

Messina is proud of what Caesars Entertainment does on that front, but says there are others, too. "That's something that stands out compared to even five years ago; the mindset of corporations has changed. We're now doing whatever we can to ensure that women have opportunities, not only at the entry level but also the bigger roles."

And, she adds, those changes don't just benefit women. "The way we approach work-life and allow for balance is beneficial to all. It's come full circle to help men as well, as Caesars Entertainment and other hospitality companies now offer paternity leave."

Dominguez notes that while some organizations have made strides, others need more support. "I do believe there are differences in different sectors of our industry due to scale, maturity of the organization and formalized programming. Many larger organizations are doing really great work and making impact in this area. Since our industry is made up of many independently owned and small businesses, I think there's an opportunity to share these lessons and structure to help support more businesses."

With all of the industry willingness to support future female leaders, perhaps a look back on this issue in a couple of years will show that things have moved forward significantly. **C&IT**



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# VIRTUAL SECURITY

**Don't Allow Cybercriminals to Hijack Your Event**

BY MAURA KELLER

**C**ybercriminals come in all shapes and sizes — and from any number of demographic backgrounds. But what they're looking for is simple: They want access to personal information and data they can use to extort payment, infect computers with malware and other fraudulent purposes, such as identity theft and financial gain.

And, within the meeting and events arena, cybercriminals can easily take advantage of an unprotected network where there are multiple users connected to the same network. Open Wi-Fi networks, such as those found at a meeting or convention, allow cybercriminals to easily distribute malicious software to everyone connected in the blink of an eye.

According to Paul Lipman, CEO of the consumer cybersecurity company BullGuard in Redwood Shores, California, many conferences do not require passwords on conference Wi-Fi, which leaves anyone who connects open to hacks. "Additionally, even if a password is used, many times the password is easy to guess or is shared via paper or in a brochure with attendees," Lipman says. "Any person at the conference — even if they are not an attendee and are just in the lobby or close enough to pick up a Wi-Fi signal — can easily ask an attendee to give them the password, and many attendees would offer it to be friendly." They could, in fact, be giving a fraudster or hacker easy access to the network and leaving anyone who is accessing the Wi-Fi open to having their data and other personal information at risk for a potential hack or breach.

Unfortunately, the security technology within the meetings and events industry hasn't changed much in recent years, and it certainly has a long way to go. Andrew Tyler, senior consulting engineer at Kelser Corporation in Glastonbury, Connecticut, was recently at a conference — a cybersecurity conference of all things — and the conference organizers provided an unsecure, general access wireless network.

"There was no preregistration for this network and the password was distributed freely to attendees. Most attendees wound up using the hotspots on their phones," Tyler says. "More events need to implement Wi-Fi registration and access tracking to help secure wireless network users."

Indeed, meetings and events planners and the software they utilize continue to be adversely impacted by security and safety threats. As Douglas C. Williams, president and CEO of Los Angeles-based Williams Data Management, explains, cybersecurity is always top of mind considering the very nature of the meeting business and the fact that so many attendees are connecting to unsecured event Wi-Fi networks. "For many years, security technology was tied to a firewall. And the firewall handled all security issues," Williams says. "Since then, cybersecurity threats have grown exponentially, so that the firewall design can no longer handle security threats alone. New technology is being developed to handle those parts of security that easily bypass the firewall."

## Embracing Protective Measures

Cybersecurity used to be viewed as an 'IT problem' but, as the threats have changed, meeting planners need to evolve into a multidisciplinary cybersecurity management team. The good news is that meeting and event attendees recognize the amount of data and information that can be gleaned from any size event and are eager to embrace cybersecurity measures.

Likewise, meeting planners are increasingly becoming aware that if a crime is committed using a specific internet access network, then the person or organization offering the service could be liable. "As a result, meeting planners are looking to solve liability issues stemming from providing unsecured or unmanaged wireless networking services that could well be used for illegal purposes," Tyler says.

One of the best approaches to convince clients and other decision makers



**Andrew Tyler, senior consulting engineer at Kelser Corporation, talks to a group about cybersecurity.**

that funding directed at cybersecurity is essential is by developing and following a 'best practices' cybersecurity framework. Secured and regulated access, as opposed to open guest access, is a huge trend in network security, and conferences and events are a perfect example of a setting where this is a must. "There are a number of systems that make it easy for individual attendees to have their own login credentials for the network. If this isn't the case, the conference Wi-Fi and anyone using it is vulnerable," Tyler says.

In addition, Dave Warnick, COO at CMIT Solutions of Upper Cheseapeake — Columbia in Bel Air, Maryland, says there is a big trend in the meetings environment in the ability to have secure wireless communication and

connected and cloud-based than ever before. Vendors want to have the ability to demo their web-based products and pull up promotional materials at kiosks or show videos. They expect the event sponsors to provide a reasonably secure internet connection."

One key step to take in securing the digital environment is for planners to ensure there is a WPA2 password on the Wi-Fi used at a conference. Lipman says meeting planners should also recommend attendees use a Virtual Private Network (VPN) solution as another layer of protection.

"VPNs enable consumers to safeguard their online privacy — flying under the radar and surfing the internet in stealth mode while retaining complete anonymity via military-grade encryption," Lipman says. "VPN works by hiding a consumer's origin IP address, preventing others — including ISPs and government organizations — from monitoring their online browsing activity, which websites they visit, what they download, or which services and applications they use."

Attendees should always ask for the official convention Wi-Fi login details and the regularly changing password, and not assume the first 'public Wi-Fi' to pop up in their search is the correct one to use.

Even if a password is used, many times the password is easy to guess or is shared via paper or in a brochure with attendees.

**PAUL LIPMAN**  
CEO  
BullGuard



have it with adequate bandwidth for everyone demanding it. What's more, meeting planners are worried about their participants and concerned about their own technology, particularly if accepting credit cards during the event.

"This requires PCI compliance, meaning a minimum security stance needs to be maintained," Warnick says. "Today's demonstrations are more



“To keep themselves even more protected, attendees could be encouraged to use their own personal VPN on their laptops, tablets and phones to protect themselves from potential cyber attacks,” Lipman says. “It’s actually really simple for hackers to set up a fake malicious network and pretend to be ‘Free SFO Airport Wi-Fi network’ or ‘Starbucks Wi-Fi.’ A personal VPN allows conference attendees to avoid putting themselves at risk while connecting to an unknown network.”

And, in the event that an event planner suspects some sort of breach may have happened, attendees should be notified so they can run anti-virus and other software to ensure their laptops, tablets and mobile phones have not been hacked.

Lipman says they should also take measures to change their passwords across their email, financial and social media accounts — and that their passwords are extremely difficult with a variety of letters, numbers and special characters. They should also keep a close watch on their financial accounts and credit, and consider putting a block on credit requests or inbound requests for credit.

At a recent security conference Tyler attended, it appeared that the wireless access network was set up and left to run. It did not appear to be actively managed, which is what Tyler would recommend. “Any public access internet service should be monitored

and managed for malicious activity or inappropriate browsing,” Tyler says. “There are tools that can assist with this so that it is not a major drain on the event staff’s time.”

In fact, rather than assuming your event hasn’t attracted the attention of cybercriminals, assume that it has. “Don’t provide an open, unmanaged network,” Tyler says. Regulate who

The problem will continue to grow, and everyone must continue to evolve with the problem.

**GEORGE BALDONADO**  
President and CEO  
Oasis Technology



can log on, manage the environment, make it clear to attendees the service has no guarantee of privacy, and that it should be treated as a hostile environment for all users.

### Mistakes to Avoid

One of the common mistakes Warnick sees meeting planners make is not ensuring there is adequate security around critical technology, such as credit card processing capabilities. Planners should make facility operators accountable to provide adequate secure connections for planners, vendors and participants alike.

“Planners should also require the facility to provide separate Wi-Fi SSIDs for the event planners, ven-

dors and participants,” Warnick says. “This allows some segregation of data types and can allow you to at least limit access to certain types of data to a lower number of people.”

Robert Siciliano, security awareness expert and CEO of Safr.Me, says there is still a significant lack of security awareness training amongst associations, meeting planners and attendees.

“For example, many are still using the same password across multiple accounts. This allows criminals to gain access to email and various databases which, in turn, facilitates various frauds and schemes,” Siciliano says. “When being approached by various vendors with different solutions designed to solve

a problem, meeting planners should check in with other industry partners to determine if the various vendors and their solutions have provided value for the investment.”

George Baldonado, president and CEO of Oasis Technology in Camarillo, California, says the most prevalent mistake he sees meeting planners make is looking to old technology to solve the new challenges. “The solution no longer resides with a single department, device or simple plan,” Baldonado says. “IT professionals and meeting planners often do not want to adopt new approaches, devices, procedures or mindsets.”

Baldonado suggests the solution to this entire problem is a company and group effort that requires the buy-in cooperation of the entire enterprise.

“A layered approach is the most effective. The approach needs to combine several devices, plans, training and vendor cooperation to solve the problem,” Baldonado says. “The problem will continue to grow, and everyone must continue to evolve with the problem.”

Many conferences do not require passwords on conference Wi-Fi, which leaves anyone who connects to the Wi-Fi open to hacks.

So, as the cybersecurity issue continues to take center stage, meeting planners are looking to get their arms around how big the problem really is and how much impact it has on their job, the company, their clients, financial risks, their own future and the future of cybersecurity. And, once a meeting professional has policies and procedures in place, they need to train, test and drill partners, and others, on those policies and procedures to instill confidence in the meeting planners and in the systems themselves.

Of course, partnering with cybersecurity professionals is paramount to ensure the safety and security of an event. When evaluating partners, keep in mind that cybersecurity professionals need to have a broad range of skills beyond IT, including business process, vendor management, physical security, threat awareness and business continuity management, not just disaster recovery. As such, recruitment strategies should include security organizations, such as the International Association of Privacy Professionals. For privacy in particular, meeting planners should also look at professional associations because that’s where they will find qualified people who have the ability and expertise to hit the ground running.

### On the Horizon

Significant strides are continually made to improve cybersecurity technology to meet the changing needs of the meetings and events environment. Just as would-be thieves become more adept at their efforts, so too do the cybersecurity systems used to stop them. It pays for meeting professionals to do their homework and learn about the technological options available for their specific situation.

So what does the future look like for the cybersecurity of meetings and events? Rafael Moscatel, managing director at Compliance and Privacy Partners in Los Angeles, says securing



Courtesy of IMEX

private data is turning out to be one of the top concerns for planners in 2020, especially in light of the EU’s adoption of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), as well as stateside laws like the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA). “These new regulations have tightened the access rules around gathering information and the use of attendee data for marketing and promotional purposes,” Moscatel says.

Many are still using the same password across multiple accounts. This allows criminals to gain access to email and various databases.

**ROBERT SICILIANO**  
Security Awareness Expert and  
CEO  
Safr.Me



“There are very real penalties for misuse of this data, and we should expect stricter regulations to follow.”

As a result, it won’t be long before open versions of internet access services will be found to be of little value to the educated public. Tyler thinks that, in the meetings and events industry, it will soon become the norm for users to be required to register for Wi-Fi at events and give specific device details to gain access.

In addition, new tools using augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI) are already finding their way into meeting and events, and helping engage attendees and enhance overall event security. “The best advice is for meeting planners to share what has worked for them and others that

New tools using artificial intelligence (AI) are already finding their way into meeting and event technology, helping enhance overall event security.

are engaged in this cybersecurity battle,” Moscatel says.

Tyler says, “Users will have to acknowledge that access is at no charge, use it at your own risk, and that the environment is managed and monitored. These steps will make it easier to catch cybercriminals who will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.”

And take note that threats are becoming more sophisticated. “It is likely future malware will spread through devices at an event just like the flu would through the participants,” Warnick says. Those in the events industry are going to have to anticipate that and utilize technology to mitigate that risk, or face exposure through reputational and possible financial risk.

“Unfortunately, large data breaches continue to occur as a result of the ‘It-can’t-happen-to-me’ syndrome, which means industry leaders who aren’t taking decisive action and putting necessary systems in place become high-value targets,” Siciliano says. “And until additional security awareness training becomes a fundamental part of doing business, the meetings industry will continue to be targeted.”

Experts also hope that cybersecurity in the meetings and events industry will switch from a reactive posture to one that is proactive, allowing organizations to better combat threats to data security. “The need for dedicated, excellent, flexible, well-rounded cybersecurity experts will only continue to grow,” Williams says. “Product, software and service development also needs to fold security into their design. New security testing measures also need to be developed and incorporated. I see that this market will also become segmented into different areas as it continues to grow. No single person or department will ever have all of the answers.”

C&IT





# GOING GLOBAL

## Properly Prepared Planners Can Avoid Causing an International Incident

BY MAURA KELLER

**G**oing global successfully is part art, part science — and a lot of hard work. In a world without boundaries, companies with international meetings and events must contend with a complex set of requirements. As a result, globalization of meetings has created an enormous need for contacts, knowledge and guidance in the international arena.

Of course, businesses that choose to ‘go global’ with their meetings face myriad strategic decisions as they contemplate their multinational meeting and event experiences. Meeting experts agree that there is no one right way to go global. Strategies will vary with the unique opportunities and environment surrounding each company, meeting or event being organized.

According to Jennifer Nelson, director of Business Development and Global Event Services at American Express Global Business Travel – Meetings & Events in Jersey City, New Jersey, global meetings involve higher levels of logistical coordination — visas, local regulations and police, etc. That can potentially take away time and attention from the attendee experience aspect of the event, which remains on top of the list for event planners.

“An unfamiliar foreign location with little or no existing local network can be a major roadblock in ensuring a high-quality event, the importance of which cannot be understated to engage attendees,” Nelson says. “However,

when possible, meeting professionals should rely on their local network of supplier partners in these destinations to help navigate potential issues.”

As Nelson explains, what can make the process more challenging is planning in the midst of economic and political uncertainty, and in an environment where foreign relations can change so quickly.

“Although we can’t predict the future, planners should try to avoid planning meetings in countries or regions that are more vulnerable, or are experiencing tensions with their own base country, to mitigate risk,” Nelson says.

Everything from dietary preferences to business etiquette is important to keep in mind as you navigate foreign cultures.

**SAM MARKS**  
CEO  
Coworker.com



In some cases, accessibility of a global destination can also be a challenge if it relies heavily on airlift into the prospective host city. Seasonal schedules need to be accounted for as well, as this does impact budget. Additionally, as Nelson explains, when reviewing destinations, depending on the size of the event, venue sizes and hotel capacities can be challenging in some destinations. A larger group may be limited to first-tier cities based on the established infrastructure.

“Providing a more valuable experience for attendees remains a struggle

across the globe,” Nelson says. “Meetings spend is expected to rise this year, according to the American Express Meetings & Events 2020 Global Meetings & Events Forecast, but we’re still not clear if it will keep pace with demand or rising costs — which means meeting planners will continue to be required to do more with less.”

Aside from air and venue challenges, planners must consider transportation issues, as the movement of a large number of attendees between hotels, venues and convention centers is always a challenge. “Planners must consider the best way to move large groups by

understanding a destination’s traffic flow and if there are restrictions on vehicle size in certain international cities,” Nelson says. “Depending on the size of the group and the number of vehicles required, a city may require police escorts to help with transit.”

Jo Kelly, events operations director at CR Worldwide, says one of the main factors to consider is logistics. Getting people and equipment from one place to another has its challenges. “For example, if you have to ship equipment across countries or continents it can get ‘stuck’ in customs and add to time and cost. For people logistics, there are visa considerations for delegates and attendees, which includes allowing plenty of time to get visa applications approved ahead of time,” Kelly says.

In addition, working with different currencies offers challenges aplenty. If you have a global budget in one cur-





rency with meetings or events taking place in different countries with different currencies, then budgeting, forecasting and reconciliations can be a bit of a challenge, and there should be a plan to organize this system.

CR Worldwide recently held one of Europe, the Middle East and Africa's (EMEA) largest data-storage conferences for a client that delivers software, systems and services to manage and store data. Their annual conference aims to engage customers, partners and tech teams as a single community to fuel business growth.

"As Germany was the brand's biggest market in EMEA, it was a desirable destination to hold the annual four-day conference," Kelly says. "Berlin was the ideal location as it was easily accessible for delegates from across the EMEA region." There were 3,600 attendees

from 62 different countries, and 92% of attendees downloaded the event app, in a move toward digitalization.

The four main components implemented within the conference were general sessions featuring keynote presentations from executives and external speakers; large scale, live instructor, presenter-led training on technical and solution developments; exhibitions with more than 100 key partners alongside the client's own field experts; and networking opportunities with peers, partners and leadership.

"Expectation versus reality in certain areas of the world can be difficult, mainly in terms of the quality of products and services, especially with the pressure of maintaining consistency of quality and events across geographical regions," Kelly says. "Additionally, there are areas that are not as equipped to

**Hosting meetings and events around the globe is important, but there are a host of logistical issues to consider in the planning stages.**

handle conferences or events as others."

Sam Marks, CEO of Coworker.com, a platform for finding, booking and reviewing coworking spaces in 171 countries worldwide, says two of the biggest challenges with international meetings are time zone changes and cultural differences. As Marks explains, in a world where we are beginning to expect instant services, such as same-day shipping, it is growing increasingly difficult to wait patiently for responses when you are working in different time zones. Coworker.com has partnered with TEDx, offering TEDx event planners the option to partner with coworking spaces in the worldwide network to not only host their events, but also to help with planning and promotion.

"Even with the best planning, organizing global events can come down to last-minute execution because of the various time zone differences of the participating parties," Marks says. Additionally, getting used to different cultural intricacies can prove to be quite challenging. Everything from dietary preferences to business etiquette is important to keep in mind as you navigate foreign cultures."

Every culture and place has its own

**The best way to avoid problems when planning a meeting in a foreign country is to seek help from the local CVB.**



unique traits. Depending on where you come from, a lot of things add complexities, including language, politics, religion, geography, food and drink or in some cultures, no drinks.

This is why Marks says it is so important to hire local help, or you may not think twice about hosting a wine tasting event in a Muslim country or serving beef to Hindus.

"As an example, our friends at Kilo-watt Events have a story about working with a scaffolding company in Abu Dhabi, and the workers would only wear sandals," Marks says. "In the U.S., OSHA requires steel-toed boots and harnesses in this type of setting. Without proper planning, these rule sets can lead to big trouble for global event planners."

In addition, there are certain global locales that are far more challenging than others to host a meeting. For example, for people coming from the U.S., organizing an event in the MENA region — the Middle East and North Africa — can be more difficult because many of the countries require obtaining a visa before arriving. Make sure to know the local policies about permissions before organizing an event. Also, be ready to compromise. Make a list of what's really important to provide to the meeting participants, and what's desirable but not crucial. Be flexible with the terms that are not crucial for the success of the meeting.

## MAKING EVENTS MEMORABLE

A truly memorable global event is made when all the elements that make a meeting fall into place with balance. The complete experience starts with boarding the plane and ends with the hotel checkout. That's why it's also important to offer cultural activities for attendees to experience.

Considering the logistics involved for both meeting planners and attendees who need to travel to international events, it is imperative the meeting or event itself is as memorable as possible. That said, the key to making global events more memorable is to create a



© visitBerlin, Photo: Dagmar Schwelle

unique or personalized experience that deeply resonates with attendees.

"When it comes to international meetings where attendees are likely experiencing a new destination, pulling in local customs and traditions can spark a connection and offer a once-in-a-lifetime experience," Nelson says. "Creating highly personalized experiences with the help of evolving technology and hotel and airline suppliers can also make events truly memorable." For example, small things, such as using first names for app notifica-

**Berlin was the ideal location to host 3,600 attendees from 62 different countries for a data storage conference for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa regions.**

ibility in destination, venue, experience design and attendee engagement — offering new opportunities to connect in real and personal ways with their target audience.

Kelly suggests that personalization and multisensory experiences are key to engage and excite attendees. Unique activities, once-in-a-lifetime events and embracing new technology will help take attendee experiences to the next level.

"Start by creating content that tells a story and can relate to the attendees," Kelly says. "Provide plenty of networking opportunities with speakers, peers and, more importantly,

executives/VIPs. Getting valuable face-to-face time with influential people is key to memorable experiences. You can also incorporate 'surprise' elements along the way by giving them something they don't expect at the event to create that element of surprise and an 'I-wasn't-expecting-that!' factor."

A few common mistakes Nelson says meeting planners make when it comes to orchestrating international events include the following:

Expectation versus reality in certain areas of the world can be difficult, mainly in terms of the quality of products and services.

**JO KELLY**

Events Operations Director  
CR Worldwide



tions, to hotel rooms offering preferred amenities or a favorite snack, can make attendees feel more valued. Effective post-event engagement can also be accomplished using a mobile app that allows attendees to give feedback through polling.

Another strategy Nelson suggests event managers adopt is to plan smaller meetings to both meet their budgets and engage more deeply with customers. Smaller events allow for more flex-



A cosmopolitan location such as Hong Kong would not typically present issues; however, the protests there have been going on for months.

- Overspending. This could be due to not proactively managing the event budget and keeping track of expenses or even last-minute production changes, such as additional hours for A/V crew, added equipment like lighting and cameras, etc.

- Failure to determine when traditional holidays/PTO may be occurring in a destination, as this would impact service levels leading up to and during the event, as well as attendee participation.

- Failure to check the availability of common resources in the destinations. For example, the destination city may not have an office supply store that you can access easily.

- Not working with local networks to understand cultural nuances and to provide local language support

Jamie Gelbtuch, founder of Cultural Mixology, says it is important for meeting planners to keep up with current events. For example, a cosmopolitan location such as Hong Kong would not typically present issues; however, the protests there have been going on for six months.

“It’s only been about six weeks, but Santiago, Chile finds itself in the same situation,” Gelbtuch says. “And France is notorious for strikes that shut down transportation systems, museums, etc. It’s impossible to foresee events such as these, but it’s important to keep your finger on the pulse of local situations so that you can adapt event plans as necessary.”

In addition, planners need to pay attention to any communication restrictions in the meeting location. For example, VoIP services such as Skype and WhatsApp are not permitted in the UAE for voice calls. Common social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and sites such as Netflix and Google, is blocked in China. “Sometimes, a VPN network can get around these restric-



tions, so be aware of each country’s laws,” Gelbtuch says. “VPNs are legal in the UAE, but not in China, where you will incur a fine.”

## LOOKING AT THE FUTURE

The future of global meetings and events depends largely on the future of global business. Meeting professionals, when surveyed in American Express’ 2020 Global Meetings and Events Forecast, are very optimistic about the meetings and events industry when looking to 2020.

As Nelson explains, while economic and political uncertainty is surging, making the global business environment more tense, meeting professionals are predicting the industry will remain steady into 2020. Time will tell how these factors will impact the volume and scale of global events.

For the meetings and events industry globally, like many other industries, sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) will be growing priorities. “Our 2020 Global Meetings and Events Forecast reveals that increased awareness of climate change is influencing destination selection for global meetings,” Nelson says. “Meeting professionals in several regions, particularly in Europe, are choosing

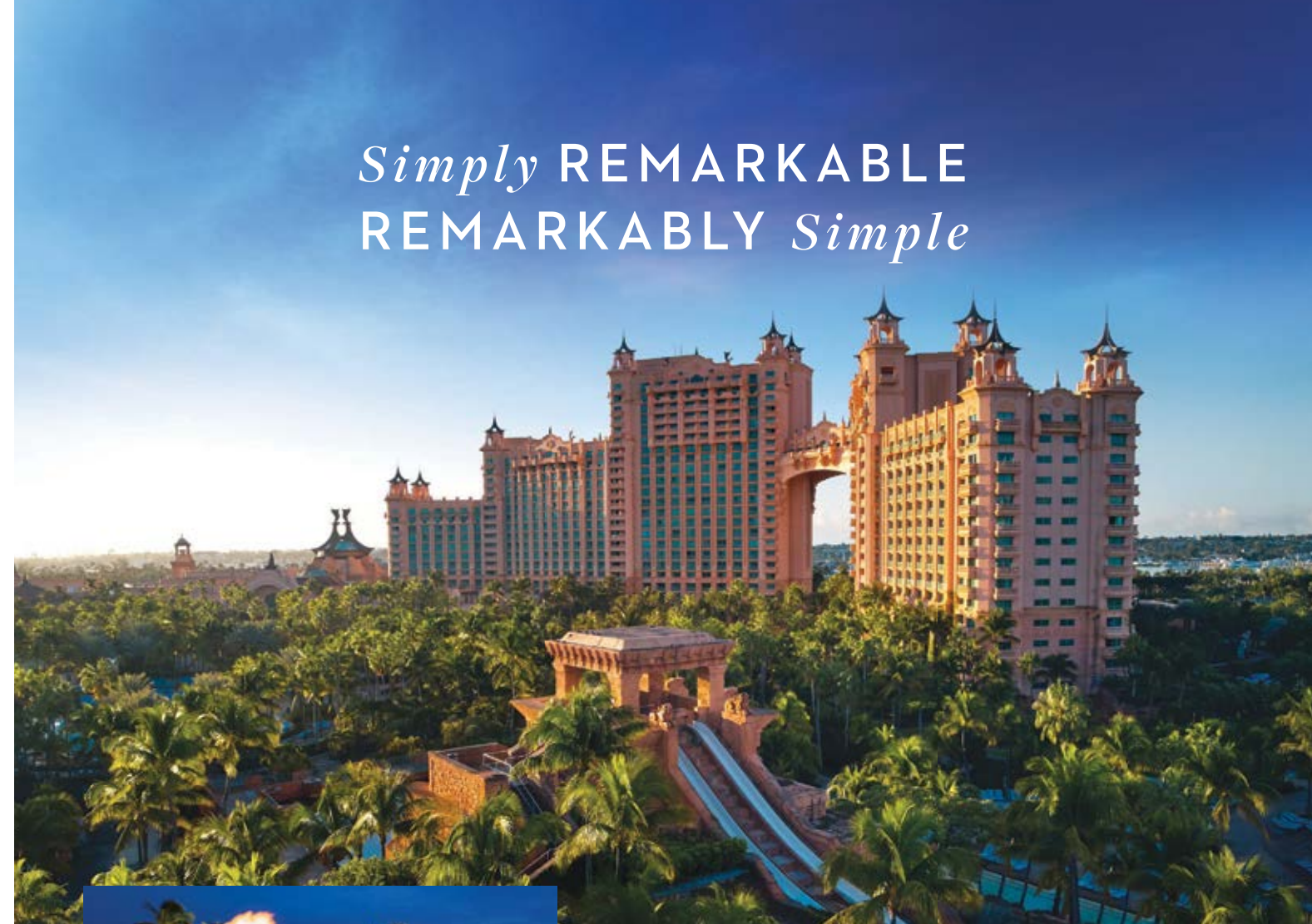
to hold events in local destinations that attendees can get to by train rather than air.”

From a meeting planner’s standpoint, a continued focus for international meetings will be improving on-site experience and providing more value with restricted resources.

And technology is obviously making it possible for people to connect in unique and remote ways, but this has also made real, human, face-to-face engagement even more valuable in this digital era. Of course, with the rise of the remote workforce, many companies realize that, even though they can get business done remotely, it’s essential to have face-to-face meetings once or twice a year.

“I think there will always be a need to get people together to build relationships and connect face-to-face. However, with budgets being cut, pollution and sustainability issues, and the speed at which technology is able to advance, more and more meetings will happen digitally via ‘online-based’ content/live links,” Kelly says. “In the very least, there will be an increasing mixture of live and digital touch points. Technology advances continue at such a fast pace year-after-year, and we see this continuing in the future.” **C&IT**

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# ATLANTIC CITY



Atlantic City Skyline

## Upgraded Hotels, Infrastructure Improvements Keep This Destination on Planners' Lists

BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS

In the past few years, Atlantic City has seen many changes as new hotels have opened, infrastructure improvements have been made and significant renovations of a number of properties have been completed.

Perhaps no change has been more notable than the announcement last fall that Jim Wood, president and CEO of Meet AC, would be leaving the organization at the end of 2019. Wood had been with Meet AC since 2014, serving as its first CEO and very successfully driving convention business to the city. Under his tenure, the city saw year-over-year growth in meetings and conventions even as the gaming industry struggled.

Matt Doherty, executive director of Atlantic City's Casino Reinvestment Development Authority and chairman of the Meet AC board, had this to say about Wood and his legacy: "Jim has been a driving force in continuing to position Atlantic City as a top destination for the meetings and conventions market. We wish Jim and his family the best in the future."

Meet AC has not yet made any announcements about a new CEO, but the organization itself will continue to serve the meetings industry just as efficiently and effectively as it has the past six years.

### NEW & IMPROVED

There have been several flag changes at the city's hotels in the past couple of years. In mid 2018, Revel re-opened as Ocean Casino Resort Atlantic City with 1,399 guest rooms, a Topgolf Swing Suite, fitness spa and expansive, flexible indoor and



Harrah's Resort Atlantic City is updating the 416-room Marina Tower, which will be known as Laguna Tower when the refresh wraps up in the spring.

outdoor event space. At the same time, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City opened in the former Taj Mahal Casino space, following a \$500 million investment.

Meetings in Atlantic City overall are very affordable and offer some of the best pricing with hotel room rates, and food and beverage costs.

### LARRY HUTTINGER, CMP

Owner and Director  
Destination Philly A.C.



True to the brand, entertainment is a focus, but that doesn't mean meetings, dining and gaming take a back-

seat. It's all there, plus a high-appeal factor for planners and attendees.

Speaking of appeal, Harrah's Resort Atlantic City completed a full renovation of its 597-room Coastal Tower,

and is now focused on a \$24 million investment in updating the 416-room Marina Tower, which will be known as Laguna Tower when the refresh wraps up. Completion is scheduled for this spring.

That's all part of the \$300 million investment Caesars Entertainment has made in the past four years across all three of its

Atlantic City properties, which include the Harrah's, Bally's and Caesars brands, plus the Waterfront Conference Center.



## Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City was the ideal venue for executives from Texas Roadhouse.

Ron Baumann, Caesars Entertainment's regional president, says the company will be "thrilled" to introduce the new Laguna Tower to guests, noting that Caesars Entertainment has spent more than \$86 million over the past three years just on upgrades to rooms and suites.

Tropicana Atlantic City has also been on a renovation roll. Following the major renovation of its North Casino Tower and Havana Tower, the hotel just completed a major renovation of the South Tower Casino.

Tropicana also purchased the former Chelsea hotel, renovating it to serve as the property's fifth tower. Then, construction started on a sky-bridge to connect the main hotel to the new Chelsea Tower. The sky-bridge is now complete and, in less than five years, the Tropicana has been transformed.

Planners who haven't seen Tropicana Atlantic City in the past couple of years haven't seen the Tropicana Atlantic City.

Atlantic City may not be the first city that comes to mind when think-



ing about sustainability, but the Atlantic City Convention Center (ACCC) should convince planners and their groups to change their thinking. Last year, the center, which completed a \$9 million renovation project, achieved LEED Gold certification, thanks to changes in lighting, preventive maintenance and plumbing, among other areas.

In addition, an expansive recycling program was launched. Groups dedicated to meetings with sustainable elements should definitely consider Atlantic City.

## NOTHING BEATS THE BOARDWALK

And there's much more that's new to consider. The famous Atlantic City Boardwalk now runs for a continuous 7 miles. Along the way, groups can have a year-round Beach Bar experience at Fins Bar, which recently opened at Resorts Casino Hotel as an addition to the property's Margaritaville Land-Shark Bar & Grill. It adds 150 seats to the space. The new bar's biggest draw may be its 2,300-sf boardwalk deck, to say nothing of the new portable stage for live entertainment.

Also on the boardwalk is one of the city's beloved historic venues, the Jim Whelan Boardwalk Hall. It recently underwent a \$10 million renovation that's now complete, giving groups yet another updated space in which to host events and functions.

And then there's the Orange Loop, a thriving area of new restaurants, live music venues, coffee spots and more that might make attendees feel like they've wandered onto a life-size Monopoly board. The Orange Loop is defined by Tennessee Avenue, St. James Place and New York Avenue, familiar streets to Monopoly fans and colored orange on the game board. Fun fact: Monopoly was invented in Atlantic City. The Orange Loop is located close to the beach and Boardwalk.

## STILL COST EFFICIENT

In spite of all the growth and many millions of dollars in investment, Atlantic City remains an incredibly afford-

able destination for meetings, and offers planners and groups hotels to match any requirement and budget.

For Deb Wheelahan, senior manager of Melillo Region Administration with restaurant group Texas Roadhouse, Hard Rock Atlantic City has much to recommend it. Last summer, the senior manager for one of the company's Regions brought the executive team to the hotel for a quarterly business meeting.

"The location is within driving distance for about 75% of the Region's team, which made it an attractive venue. The casino and good restaurants added to the attraction," she says.

The casino, in fact, was very much a factor in the decision to meet at Hard Rock Atlantic City. It provides a great entertainment option but the group found the casino a big draw for another reason: "Those on the team

who are smokers — we are in the restaurant industry after all — appreciated that Hard Rock AC's casino offered more options than all other casinos in the area, yet none of the areas smelled 'smoky,'" she says.

Other gaming properties have not been nearly as accommodating, and I have booked several over my many years.

**DEB WHEELAHAN**  
Manager, Melillo Region Administration  
Texas Roadhouse



The staff, too, gets high marks. "The staff is easy to work with and very accommodating," she adds. "I feel like whenever I have a meeting at this location, they go above and beyond what others do in their position at other resorts and hotels. They're easy to communicate with, quick in their responses and extremely

accommodating of our requests as we tend to be high maintenance."

She gave the hotel high praise. "Meeting spaces were great, staff was awesome and hotel rooms were very nice. Having the casino close by was

a great feature, and having restaurants nearby for breakfast and a couple of dinners was great, too. In addition, some of my team utilized the pool area and cabanas and loved them. Finally, having the Boardwalk just steps away was also convenient," she says.

The group had daily meetings during which lunch was provided, and Wheelahan notes that they used the provided A/V as well. "The A/V team was easy to work with and gave great service, and everything was to our satisfaction. My team enjoyed the catered lunches, which makes me happy as I have to choose it for them."

# IT'S TIME TO BREAKOUT

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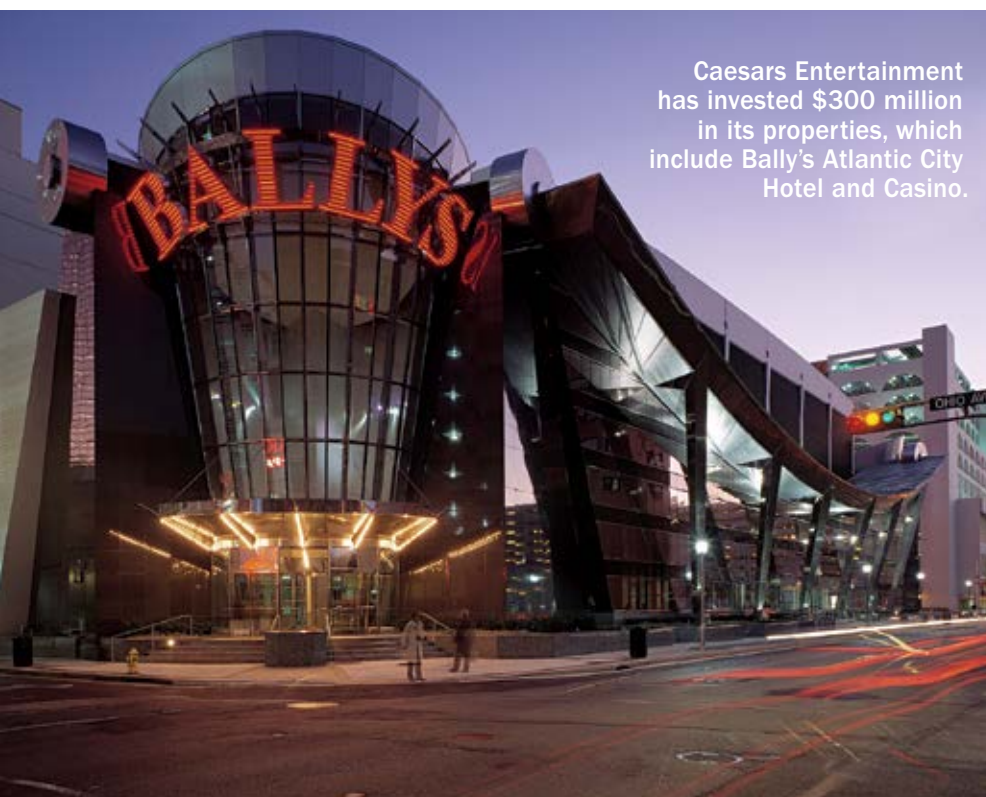
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Caesars Entertainment has invested \$300 million in its properties, which include Bally's Atlantic City Hotel and Casino.





Ocean Casino Resort Atlantic City offers 1,399 guest rooms, a Topgolf Swing Suite, fitness spa and flexible indoor and outdoor event space.

It's not unusual for meetings to have some challenges, but that was not the case here. "We had no issues at all and I will be contacting them again for some of our meetings this year," Wheelehan says.

Hard Rock Atlantic City's ability to accommodate Wheelehan's requests and needs sets it apart in her mind. "Other gaming properties have not been nearly as accommodating, and I have booked several over my many years with the company; as many as four per year at times," she says.

She thinks planners considering the Hard Rock Atlantic City will likely find the same experience she has. "If you choose this property, you should not have any issues at all," she says.

Larry Huttinger, CMP, owner and director of Destination Philly A.C., a destination management company, has used many of the city's casino hotels for client meetings and events, including Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, Harrah's and Hard Rock Atlantic City. But it's the city's affordability that he considers a top selling point for groups.

"Meetings in Atlantic City overall are very affordable and offer some of the best pricing with hotel room rates,

**Resorts Casino Hotel's LandShark Bar & Grill has a 2,300-sf boardwalk deck that offers attendees fantastic ocean views.**

and food and beverage costs," he says. "Compared to areas such as North Jersey and the Greater Philadelphia markets, the value in Atlantic City is there in all aspects, including low prices and complimentary meeting space.

He adds, "All the casino hotels, along with the larger hotels, offer four- and five-star rated accommodations; yet, compared to downtown Philadelphia hotels, Atlantic City is about 30% to 40% less."

Just as important, the city is easy to reach. "The airport most used is Philadelphia International, though a

local airport — Atlantic City International — serves numerous markets as well," Huttinger says.

The Philadelphia airport is only about one hour away, which Huttinger says compares favorably with many U.S. cities, even those with closer airports when you factor in traffic and its resulting added travel time.

But the main thing Huttinger wants meeting planners to know is that Atlantic City has diversified greatly in recent years. It's not just about casinos and hotels. Most corporate groups want a full experience, Huttinger says, "and that often means experiencing the outdoor spaces during weather-friendly months. In Atlantic City, we have many months during which the weather really adds a wonderful backdrop and helps to create a memorable event. Between April and October, the opportunities are generally solid to get outdoors to explore."

And though he notes that the months of March and November can, at times, allow for groups to be outdoors, it's not something planners can count on. "March and November can be dicey," he cautions.

## MANY ENTERTAINMENT OPTIONS

The city offers multiple options for groups beyond the hotels and casinos, and Huttinger encourages plan-

ners to explore them. "Depending on the expectations and contract with your hotel partner, getting your group beyond the four walls of the hotel can really lift the spirits and add excitement," he says. "These experiences can include local bars in the newly established Orange Loop, or heading to the city's local distillery, which is located right in town."

He advises trying at least a couple of different local places to give attendees a true sense of place. "Go to two local places, with one being on the Boardwalk for ax throwing," he says. At the other, "consider learning the secrets of making chocolate, then pairing it with infused cocktails."

The fact is, as Huttinger points out, Atlantic City today offers a wide range of experiences that can engage attendees. "Consider body, mind and soul by going to a local yoga studio for a customized session for all your attendees," he says.

The experiences recommended here, he points out, are ideal for smaller sized groups — those no larger than 15 to 20 attendees. But that doesn't mean larger groups can't benefit from Atlantic City's diverse offerings. Rather than these groups going out to the providers, Huttinger suggests, the providers can go to the larger groups.

Team building is another group option in today's Atlantic City, and can serve as a way to get groups out and exploring the destination.

"Taking groups into a team-building setting to see the sights and explore the city can be done in a number of ways," Huttinger says. "One popular format we use is creating customized races and engaging all attendees as they travel to different parts of the city to see, taste and drink their way into a memorable time in a competitive environment."

And, of course, there's corporate social responsibility (CSR). Huttinger advises planners to consider giving attendees the chance to work on a CSR project "when taking a break from a grueling meeting schedule. We have offered this with groups coming to Atlantic City who want an oppor-

tunity to do something during break times, and we've also offered it to planners during FAM programs."

One popular option, he says, "is to complete the tasks necessary to create hygiene kits, travel kits and basic winter kits for cold weather. All of these will support individuals who lack basic items in their current living situation. This can be set up near morning or afternoon breaks and also as an activity during receptions."

Finally, Huttinger says, planners should ask hotel partners which features and spaces their groups might be able to use during the course of a meeting. "All hotels in Atlantic City can accommodate groups small or large," he says. "But each also offers unique features beyond the meeting space. For example, most can offer use of lounges, restaurants and even theater space when they are not in use by the public."

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## ON THE MOVE //



MATTOS

Gateway Canyons Resort & Spa, in Gateway, Colorado, has appointed **Tim Mattos** as its new director of sales and marketing. Mattos brings more than two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, including various leadership positions. He will oversee all marketing campaigns and revenue strategies for the property in his new role.



PRICE

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate has announced it has two new senior sales managers — **Randi Ferlito** and **Daniela Price**. Ferlito and Price will maintain relationships with key accounts and generate new group business for the hotel near Orlando, Florida. Both have had experience working with Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort prior to their new positions.

BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, has appointed **Estelle Mapp** as its new director of sales and marketing for Costa d'Este Beach Resort & Spa, a Gemstone Collection property in Vero Beach, Florida. Mapp brings nearly 15 years of professional hotel sales experience to her new role.



LARKIN

The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay is pleased to welcome **Clodagh Larkin** as the California oceanfront resort's new director of meeting and events. Joining the resort from The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba, Larkin brings dynamic international experience within The Ritz-Carlton portfolio.

JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort & Spa, in Orlando, Florida, appointed **Tami Corday** as its new director of event management. Corday has a background in the hospitality industry and has worked in food & beverage, catering, event planning, hospitality management and customer service.



JORDAN

JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort & Spa in Orlando, Florida has named **Jamie Jordan** as its new director of sales and marketing. Jordan brings more than 26 years of hospitality leadership experience with Marriott International. Jordan will be creating and executing a marketing plan to lay a foundation for the hotel's success.

Royal Sonesta Boston appointed **Blake Herring** as its new director of sales and marketing. He will be responsible for leading sales, catering and marketing efforts. Herring brings more than 10 years of hospitality industry experience, having worked in sales, revenue and administration.



AVILA

Fontainebleau Miami Beach has expanded its sales team, adding new members **Elizabeth Wilde** and **Giancarlo Avila** as director of national accounts. The new staff members will be responsible for bringing in large groups and conventions to the iconic Miami Beach resort. Wilde has more than 20 years experience and will be overseeing group leads from Florida and Latin America. Avila will head up group leads from Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont. **C&IT**



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