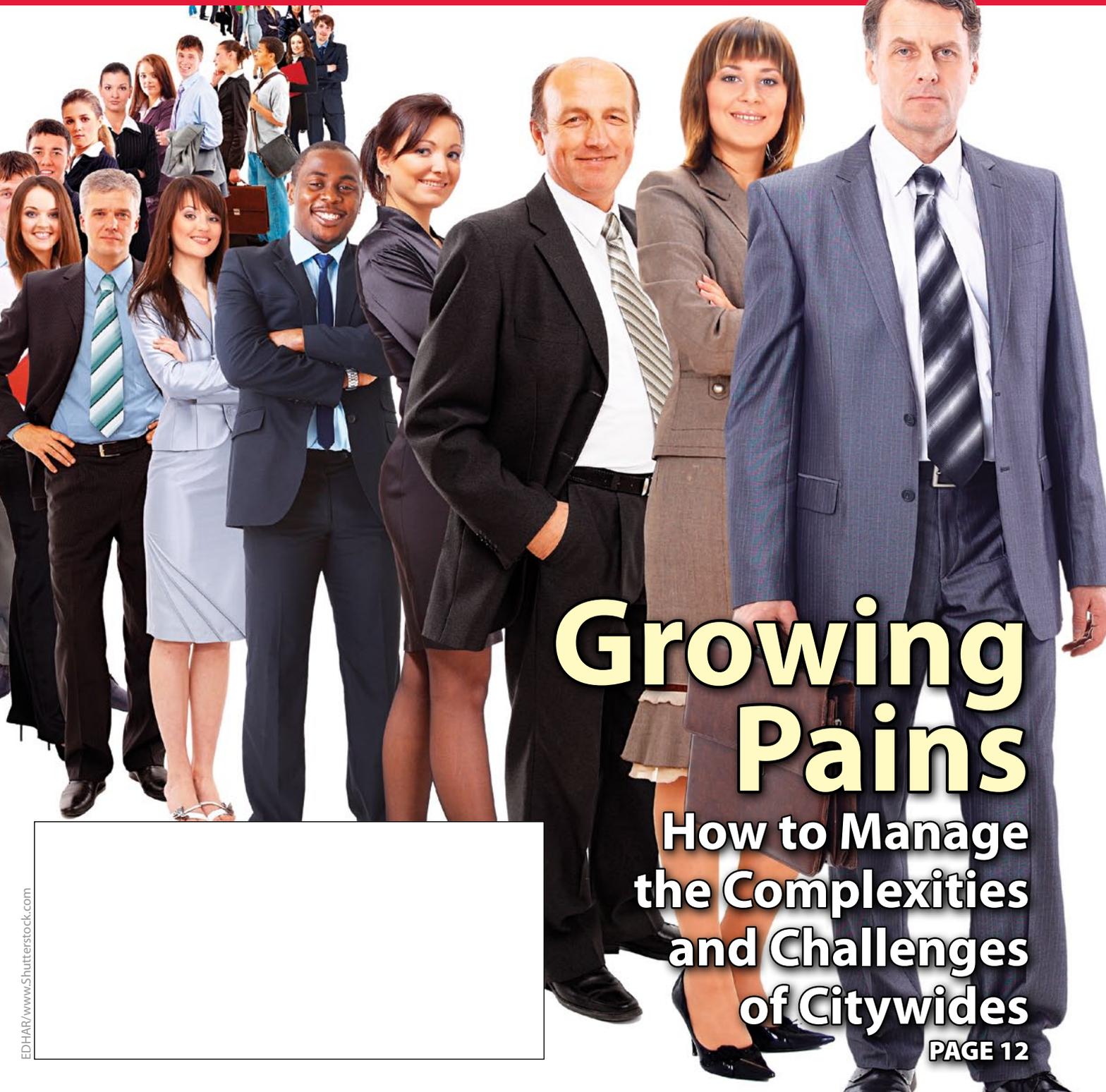


# ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER  
2011

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT



## Growing Pains

How to Manage  
the Complexities  
and Challenges  
of Citywides

PAGE 12

# Customer-centric; *adj.*, placing the customer at the center of an organization's marketing effort



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# ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

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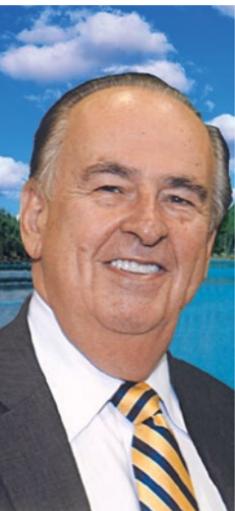
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## Are You Ready?



Henry Ford once said, "Before everything else, getting ready is the secret of success." Getting ready for a first-time citywide event is a little like training for a marathon compared to a 5K fun run. "There have been events where I was working 10-20 hours every day for eight to 10 weeks until the program commenced," says Jeremy Figoten, vice president of meetings at Association of Advanced Life Underwriting in our cover story. Event complexities mount in direct proportion to the numbers of attendees and venues.

Along with the obvious positives of higher attendance at revenue-generating meetings and conventions come the growing pains. It's no small task to transition from a single hotel to a citywide event encompassing the convention center and multiple hotels — with multiple contracts, salespeople, catering managers, union rules and master bills to juggle. In addition, the playing field and ground rules for negotiating the best deals with convention centers are distinctly different from that of hotels. "Everything is more complex at a convention center than a hotel," confirms Ann McLeod, CEM, CAE, director of meetings and expositions for the Society of American Military Engineers. That's why it's critical for planners to come to the table armed with the know-how necessary to execute a successful citywide event — from calculating the value proposition their business brings to the destination and then leveraging it in negotiations...to learning how convention centers operate...to understanding union rules and regulations. Planners can take a good first step in getting ready for a marathon citywide event by turning to page 12.

With hotels the size of convention centers, it's no surprise that Las Vegas is the No. 1 trade show destination. It has the kind of meetings infrastructure that can effortlessly host mega events such as the National Association of Broadcasters' annual meeting with 90,000 attendees. As a result of the economic downturn, smaller associations are now able to book Las Vegas. Planners at the ready can even book short-term meetings at value rates. Phelps Hope, vice president, meetings and expositions at Kellen Meetings, says, "The benefit for the association meetings market of the slump was that Las Vegas opened its doors a little more to some lower room rates and reduced the room to meeting space ratios, which meant they were more amenable to negotiating with midrange associations that traditionally had a tough time getting into Las Vegas." Find out more insider tips on Las Vegas that will keep planners "at the ready" beginning on page 28.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

## ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

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## M Resort Breaks Ground on Pavilion

**LAS VEGAS, NV** — The M Resort Spa and Casino, Las Vegas, NV, is expanding the resort's meeting space to 85,000 sf by adding the M Pavilion, a 25,000-sf ground-level structure accessible from the resort's 17,000-sf Milan ballroom. The M Pavilion, with 40-foot ceilings and space for 2,300 attendees, is suitable for concerts, large-scale galas and more. "Our customers were asking for more space and now with the M Pavilion we're delivering with a venue that will truly be completely flexible, pillar-less and equipped with all the AV connectivity meeting attendees need," says Drew Varga, vice president of sales at the M Resort. The resort offers 390 guest rooms and suites, gaming, seven restaurants and six destination bars, a state-of-the-art spa and fitness center and a 100,000-sf events piazza. [www.themresort.com](http://www.themresort.com)



M Resort Spa and Casino in Las Vegas.

## Renaissance Orlando at SeaWorld Completes Renovation

**ORLANDO, FL** — The Renaissance Orlando at SeaWorld, a 781-room aquatic-themed resort with a prime location directly across from SeaWorld, completed a \$35+ million renovation project, which included an update to meeting rooms and 65 suites, a new 8,000-sf function lawn, an expanded pool area and more. With 185,000 sf of flexible function space, the property transformed its second-floor meeting space, which now boasts 23 breakout rooms of various sizes, ranging from two executive boardrooms to a 2,000-sf meeting room with an air wall. Also, the Atlantis Kitchen, an interactive, open kitchen is now available for group functions, dinners, cooking classes, demonstrations and more. The kitchen, which features the latest cooking equipment and techniques, can accommodate up to 50 guests or can expand to 200 for reception events. The resort is an official hotel partner of SeaWorld, an alliance that affords registered guests a variety of exclusive, value-added benefits. [www.renaissanceseworld.com](http://www.renaissanceseworld.com)

## Tinley Park Convention Center Expansion Celebrates Grand Opening

**TINLEY PARK, IL** — The newly expanded Tinley Park Convention Center, 30 minutes southwest of downtown Chicago, hosted a grand opening celebration on September 14 for meeting planners and local officials. (Left to right) Tinley Park Trustees Patricia Leoni, Brian Mahar, and David Seaman, MID-CON Hospitality President Reva Stillman, Trustee Gregory Hannon (partially obscured), Tinley Park Mayor Edward Zabrocki, Trustees T.J. Grady and Thomas Staunton, and former Trustee Michael Bettenhausen gathered for the ribbon-cutting ceremony. The convention center features 70,000 sf of meeting and event space with 18 breakout rooms and 58,000 sf of clear-span exhibit space. MID-CON Hospitality manages the village-owned Tinley Park Convention Center. [www.tinleyparkconventioncenter.net](http://www.tinleyparkconventioncenter.net)



## ACOM Is Now Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA)

**PRINCETON JUNCTION, NJ** — The Association for Convention Operations Management (ACOM), an organization serving the



Blanc

event and convention services industry for more than 20 years, rebranded as the Event Service Professionals Association (ESPA). In addition to a new logo, ESPA refreshed the website, updated member communications and expanded content and sessions for the Annual Conference set for January 6-8, 2012 in San Diego, CA. "We have created a new name and brand that accurately embraces the diversity of the roles our members play and their evolving responsibilities in their venues and cities. The meetings industry continues to evolve and this new direction will enable our organization to stay current with our membership and industry trends, while broadening our membership base to professionals that manage all types of events, not just conventions," says Eric Blanc, ESPA president. [www.espaonline.org](http://www.espaonline.org)

## Marta Hayden Appointed Interim CEO of Monterey County CVB

**MONTEREY, CA** — Marta Hayden, CMP, took over the reins of the Monterey County (CA) Convention & Visitors Bureau



Hayden

(MCCVB) as a national search is underway to replace John Reyes, the former president and CEO. A veteran of the hospitality industry, Hayden brings more than four decades of experience at premier destination marketing organizations such as the Sonoma County Tourism Bureau and Newport Beach Conference & Visitors Bureau. From 1979-1999, Hayden served as director of sales for the Monterey Conference Center. [www.seemonterey.com](http://www.seemonterey.com)

## New Hotel to Be Built Next to Pennsylvania Convention Center

**PHILADELPHIA, PA** — Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter and the Parkway Corporation announced that a new Hilton Home2 Suites hotel will be built adjacent to the Pennsylvania Convention Center. Slated to open in summer 2013, the Home2 Suites will add 246 new hotel rooms to the downtown market. Mayor Nutter says, "By the time this project opens, we will have added more than 1,000 new rooms to the Center City hotel market in order to meet the demand for additional hotel rooms generated by the convention center expansion and the continued growth in our tourism market. This hotel will help to ensure the hospitality industry continues to play a central role strengthening our regional economy." The hotel will feature more than 2,000 sf of meeting space and 9,750 sf for ground-floor retail and restaurants. [www.phila.gov/smartchoice](http://www.phila.gov/smartchoice)

## Disney's Aulani Offers New Meeting Options

**KAPOLEI, HI** — Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa, celebrated its grand opening in September. The resort is situated on a lagoon along the coast of Oahu in Hawaii and offers 840 rooms, suites and villas, a conference center and 50,000 sf of ballroom/meeting space. "In Hawaii we've created more than a hotel," says George Aguel, senior vice president for The Walt Disney Company. "Aulani is an experience that immerses attendees in the rich culture and stories of the islands. It's unlike any other resort in Hawaii and offers an inspired setting for groups, whether the event is an important business meeting or an incentive program." Aulani's 14,000-sf conference center is strategically located to provide a casual oasis for meetings and other private events. Additionally, the 50,000 sf of ballroom/meeting space and outdoor event lawns is ideal for opening and closing galas, entertainment functions and other special events. Planners have access to the based Disney Institute for a wide range of content, ranging from teambuilding programs and keynote presentations to workshops and multiday programs. [www.disneymeetings.com](http://www.disneymeetings.com)



An aerial view of Disney's Aulani.

## New Tools Enhance Emergency Management and Security at Morial Convention Center

**NEW ORLEANS, LA** — The Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, the sixth largest convention center in the nation, recently acquired new tools to help emergency management and security efforts. One of the major items is the Global Electric Motorcar (GEM), a street-level electric vehicle. Equipped with an electric power cot, cardiac monitors, advanced life-saving equipment and a medical bag, the GEM functions as a miniature ambulance. The convention center's exclusive medical provider, New Orleans EMS, the sole 911 provider of Emergency Medical Services in Orleans Parish, will be able to quickly deploy the vehicle from three permanent medical stations located throughout the convention center and maneuver through the building in response to medical emergency calls. New Orleans EMS provides pre-hospital emergency care to convention attendees during shows as well as convention center employees and vendors. New Orleans EMS is equipped to provide service in cases where response time is critical: advance cardiac life support, advance pediatric life support, pediatric emergency care and pre-hospital trauma life support. "The GEM allows us to take the emergency room to the patient," says Cedric Palmisano, EMT-P, special events and detail coordinator, and EOC liaison with New Orleans EMS. "It provides the patient with a seamless transition to the city ambulance. Once the city ambulance picks up the patient, the same protocol of care is continued."

The GEM is the most significant piece of equipment the convention center was awarded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security via the City of New Orleans Department of Homeland Security. [www.mccno.com](http://www.mccno.com)



Brad Weber

*Rather than waiting for the economy to improve — and hoping your members wait with you — go out and ask them what they expect from their annual events and make sure your organization can deliver on those expectations.*

## How to Put Your Own Event Stimulus Plan Into Action

The meetings industry is in the crosshairs. While some organizations report growth in meetings revenue, most association executives anticipate attendance to be the same or decrease slightly for the coming year. This outlook is no surprise considering many employers are sending fewer attendees to meetings. However, as Albert Einstein said, "In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity."

The Convention Industry Council's study "The Economic Significance of Meetings to the U.S. Economy" shows that meetings within the United States annually contribute \$106 billion to the gross domestic product and are responsible for the creation of 1.7 million jobs. Although the economy may still be sluggish, meetings and events clearly have an impact on the U.S. economy, and many of SmithBucklin's client organizations are seeking ways to enhance the growth and success of their events.

One of the biggest challenges is transforming the standard three-day annual event into a revenue generator that attracts attendee interest year-round. Here are some examples of how organizations are thinking out-of-the-box to create new and continuous sources of revenue from their events.

**Keep the meeting going 365 days a year.** When the Independent Oracle Users Group (IOUG) wanted to extend its conference content

to a year-round format, IOUG streamed access from its annual meeting to virtual audiences, which provided live audio from approximately 40 sessions. The live, virtual conference offered a less expensive alternative to the registration fee of the in-person event and allowed attendees to customize their experience by selecting and paying for access only to the portions of the conference in which they were interested. In addition, the virtual conference alleviated budgetary, time and travel constraints that many people experienced in the face of a challenging economy. For those who were unable to travel, the virtual conference allowed them to access the high-quality education and information offered by IOUG. Plus, the content was recorded, archived and available in an on-demand format on the Web. This resulted in a 20 percent boost in annual revenues and year-round content for members.

**Demonstrate relevance to increase meeting attendance.** For many organizations, expectations become more complex with each passing year. Board members and other leaders want to see growth in the bottom line, while members want more value from the membership dues. Dscope (the Digital Solutions Cooperative), an independent global community of graphic arts business owners and technical professionals who use HP Indigo and Scitex equipment and related solutions, proved that satisfying both concerns is

possible. A few months back, Dscope heard from its members that they needed a way to showcase the value of digital printing. To respond directly to its members' needs, Dscope formed a taskforce that eventually led to the development of its Power Pack program, which provides a variety of selling techniques that members can incorporate easily into their company's marketing campaigns. The program helped Dscope demonstrate its value and relevance to its members, improve customer satisfaction and drive attendance for the organization's annual meeting.

**Look at what has been done and do it better.** Many organizations are re-examining their business models and looking for new ways to enhance value for exhibitors, sponsors and attendees. Ask the question, "If we were launching this for the first time, what would it look like?" For example, in the case of the Bank Insurance and Securities Association (BISA), significant regulatory changes affecting the banking industry left many professionals unable to attend conferences in the interest of saving money. To help alleviate this situation, the BISA team secured a sponsorship program that funded the hotel stay of attendees at its annual conference. This generated a growth in attendance of more than 26 percent as compared to 2010 and made 2011 the second-largest conference in the event's history.

Seeking ways to demonstrate and drive

innovation, the North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers' (NAFEM) team assisted in the creation, development, execution and marketing of the "What's Hot! What's Cool!" new product gallery for The NAFEM Show, a biennial event. Open during all show hours, the gallery generated publicity before, during and after the show while addressing the needs of attendees to see the most innovative equipment and supplies for foodservice operators. The product gallery featured 113 new products from exhibiting companies, a 45 percent increase in products compared to the 2009 show.

The meetings industry, like so many others, faces a time of reduced spending and simultaneous demands for increased proceeds and innovation. Rather than waiting for the economy to improve — and hoping your members wait with you — go out and ask them what they expect from their annual events and make sure your organization can deliver on those expectations. Innovative thinking may transform your event and generate additional revenue, even in a down economy. AC&F

**Brad Weber** serves as executive vice president of SmithBucklin's Event Services unit. He is a 25-year meetings industry veteran and oversees all of the company's convention, trade show and event management service offerings. SmithBucklin is the world's largest association management and professional services company.

# Successful Tech Strategies



Linda E. Schwartz

*Does your conference website entice visitors and pull them in, or is it basically an electronic brochure?*

## Come Into My Website, Said the Association to the Visitor

The past decade truly witnessed a revolution in the way attendees register for conferences. In the “old days” members mailed hard copies of registration forms. Then came the next great tool — the fax machine — prompting exclamations of, “Wow! I can just put my hard copy on this machine and voilà! It goes to the registration department within seconds!” Now, it is very common for most conference registrations to be made online, and some organizations have stopped printing and mailing conference brochures altogether.

Whether you use a mix of print and online or online only, your conference website is crucial to the ultimate success of your meeting. Internet-savvy consumers approach each website with a very critical eye and often make the decision to stay on the site or leave within mere seconds. Does your conference website entice visitors and pull them in, or is it basically an electronic brochure?

See how three different organizations enhanced their annual meeting websites, resulting in increased registrations and revenue this year.

**Dscoop (Digital Solutions Cooperative).** Tina Chang, marketing manager, worked on Dscoop’s conference microsite for its February 2011 Annual Conference in Orlando. The site was created in WordPress, which provided an interactive function for session and partner company descriptions. On both pages, visitors could click on a session or company name and expand it to read more. This

facilitated the ability to see a large amount of information with minimum scrolling required. The site also incorporated a Twitter feed to display the conversations started by the Dscoop handle, @myscoop, along with a countdown timer for the event.

Google Analytics measurements were used to compare the effectiveness of this year’s site to last year’s.

Dscoop Website Analytics	2010	2011
Number of visits	16,500	22,000
Number of page views	54,000	66,500
Number of registered attendees	1,800	2,400

For the 2012 meeting, Chang is investigating a site that renders well on a mobile phone, along with enhanced functionality that would allow attendees to create their own schedules online.

**FICP (Financial & Insurance Conference Planners).** Nicole Nelles, marketing senior coordinator, helped plan FICP’s first-ever conference microsite for the organization’s June 2011 Education Forum in San Diego. After having hosted all event information on the registration company’s website for several years, this year FICP chose to create a microsite hosted and managed internally by the marketing staff. The event theme was central to the site; FICP was able to use member photos and other information and to make changes to the site quickly, rather than submitting requests

to the registration company. This structure allowed the team to proactively make additions and alter the marketing messages based on the type of member inquiries and comments appearing in FICP’s social media areas. The site was so well-received that Nelles and the marketing team already are working to create a similar site for FICP’s event this fall.

**Cosmetologists Chicago (America’s Beauty Show).** Tim Hendrickson, senior content coordinator, launched a new conference website for America’s Beauty Show (ABS), held in Chicago in March 2011. Hosted by Cosmetologists Chicago (CC), membership consists of creative salon professionals who respond positively to less text and cleaner visual content. To make the site more visually appealing, Hendrickson incorporated a large flash piece on the home page and cut the overall site content by approximately 50 percent. The new site highlighted information that was more practical and tool-based, such as registration, and featured simplified navigation. CC is a group that participates heavily in social media, so the social media icons and content were positioned prominently, resulting in a large and ongoing spike in Facebook “likes” and Twitter followers.

The site improvements helped to drive record attendance at this year’s show, along with the largest-ever number of online registrants. An added bonus was greater exhibitor partici-

pation in digital and email advertising, further enhancing ABS’ revenue.

Hendrickson is already thinking about the 2012 site, which he plans to make more of a destination in and of itself by offering unique content and additional user tools for members.

Everyone has a favorite — and a least favorite — website. Aside from the products and/or services being offered, favorite websites tend to be easy to navigate and always have something new or interesting to see. The worst thing your conference website can be is static: If it looks the same 90, 60 and 30 days before your event, it’s time for a change! Even a few tweaks like changing the content on the site’s home page, featuring different speakers, adding new photos and links to speaker videos or podcasts, and adding details about the location, can help keep a site fresh. Plus, search engines give preference to sites that are updated more frequently.

Remember, your conference is the second destination for members and other attendees; your meeting website is the first. If the first destination isn’t enticing, chances are your online visitors won’t get to the second.

**Linda E. Schwartz**, senior director, marketing and communication services for SmithBucklin, an association management company headquartered in Chicago, has worked with associations and their members for more than 30 years.



# Growing Pains

## How to Manage the Complexities and Challenges of Citywides

By Mickey Murphy



**Kathie Canning**  
Deputy General Manager  
Orange County Convention Center  
Orlando, FL

**A**nyone who works on a bomb squad has a tough job. So do lion tamers, hockey goalies and salt miners. Add association meeting planners to this list. Think not? A lion tamer has to deal only with a few big cats, a hockey goalie with a little rubber puck. However, an association planner has to plan, budget, stage and manage giant events in huge, out-of-town facilities that can involve tens of thousands of attendees. Disappoint even one of them, watch just one thing go wrong, and the planner will hear about it.

Thus, most association meeting planners go into overdrive when they plan and organize their large citywide affairs. This has been the case more than once for Jeremy Figoten, vice president of meetings, Association of Advanced Life Underwriting (AALU), an organization of 2,000 members, which is headquartered in Falls Church, VA. "There have been events where I was working 10–20 hours every day for eight to 10 weeks until the program commenced," says Figoten.

Eight to 10 weeks of nearly 20-hour days? This clearly is a killing grind. Does this mean association planners get to take it easy during the remainder of the year? Fat chance. "We are always in an active planning mode for our events," says Figoten. "For example, AALU is now booked through 2013. Our 2009 meeting was held during the first week in May. But we began our planning work on the 2010 meeting in February. If you are an association planner, you are always planning or managing one large meeting or another."

### MOVING UP TO A CONVENTION CENTER

Such activity represents a lot of intense planning and managing. But clearly, this type of concentrated effort is necessary. Citywide meetings for associations are huge, complex and demanding undertakings. Most times, such events are held at convention centers, which present their own unique challenges for association planners. These can make planning and managing a meeting at a hotel seem like a walk in the park in comparison.

"Going from a large convention hotel to a convention center definitely represents a major transition," says Kathie Canning, deputy general

manager, Orange County Convention Center (OCCC), Orlando, FL. "The biggest issue is that the association planner is now dealing with multiple properties and multiple contracts. When the association is small enough to fit in a hotel, it's much simpler. The planner has only one sales manager, one catering manager and one master bill to worry about.

"However, when the association gets big enough to go to a convention center, the planner must now arrange a convention center contract, an F&B contract, hotel contracts, possibly transportation contracts and additional contracts," Canning says. "I think that all of these contracts

represent the biggest challenge an association planner must face when holding his or her event at a convention center. This is a difficult assignment. However, it means the association is growing, and that is always positive."

When it comes to convention center contracts and business, Canning certainly knows whereof she speaks. She has been working in an executive capacity at the OCCC for more than 25 years. This is an impressive professional credential. The OCCC is the second largest convention center in the United States. Its building footprint is a gigantic 7 million sf in total, with more than 2 million sf of exhibitor space, 74 meeting rooms and 235

## Destinations Refresh and Renovate to Attract Association Meetings Business

In many destinations, CVBs are seeing a flat market driven by changing patterns in booking and attendance.

"Citywide meetings are flat, year over year," says Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau. In addition, the number of room nights historically associated with each meeting has dropped about 20 percent, Goodling notes. And it's not a lingering after-effect of a recession-battered meeting industry. It's also about current concerns over the state of the economy, he says.

In Greensboro, NC, the market for association meetings is a little better than flat, says Greensboro CVB marketing assistant Derek Allman. He characterizes it as "about the same as usual" — but without any timeline.

However, one change in the market that bodes well for destinations hungry for new business is a shortened booking pattern that is driving a lot more meetings on much shorter notice, says Goodling.

Associations are booking more, smaller meetings on shorter notice, he says. "There are more groups coming in short-term than there were a year ago," he adds. "And that delights me." In fact, based on current projections, Long Beach will double its association meetings over the next 12 months.

In Greensboro, Allman also sees meetings booked in narrower windows. But major association meetings continue to be booked years in advance, he says.

From a supplier perspective, a fresh look for the destination is imperative as the market recovers but competition remains fierce. "Long Beach is in the midst of a major transition," he says. "The Hyatt Long Beach is undergoing a \$20 million room renovation that will be completed in March. The Westin is undergoing a \$10 million room renovation. The Long Beach Marriott has completed a \$4 million meeting room renovation.

But the big news for association planners, Goodling says, is at the Long Beach Convention Center. "We're halfway through a \$4 million renovation," he says. "Everything has been greatly upscaled and repositioned — more like the lobby of a boutique hotel." Improvements include more comfortable furniture for lounging and interacting. "We're finding more planners are looking for that kind of 'social' environment today," Goodling says.

Allman agrees that new product is one key to success these days.

"Greensboro has an abundance of new offsite venues," Allman says. "The Greensboro Coliseum Complex features two brand new venues. The ACC Hall of Champions is a sports fan's haven. The 78,323-sf indoor Greensboro Aquatic Center (GAC) just opened in August 2011, is a state-of-the-art facility featuring leading edge concepts in aquatic design. Meeting attendees can also stroll through the brand new Gateway Gardens, featuring artwork from local sculptors and more."

Both Allman and Goodling say they expect their cities to be very competitive in a "new normal" environment that no one has really figured out yet.

— John Buchanan

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Anita Cerana, CMP  
National Convention Sales Manager  
St. Louis Convention and Visitors  
Commission, Washington, DC

*“I think that planners these days have to be right on top of their data mining. All of this information...is going to help planners get the best deals possible from everyone.”*

breakout rooms. The facility has nearly 900 massive events with an estimated 12.9 million attendees booked through 2029.

#### DATA MINING

So how can association planners negotiate the best convention center and other contracts for their groups? “I think that planners these days have to be right on top of their data mining,” says Anita Cerana, CMP, national convention sales manager, St. Louis Convention and Visitors Commission, based in the Washington, DC, area. “They have to know what their history has been in their previous cities in terms of their room blocks, how many rooms they picked up, how much they spent on food and beverage, how much they spent on AV and so on. All of this information can help reduce their rental rate at

a convention center. Indeed, this type of information is going to help planners get the best deals possible from everyone. Some planners are on top of this data, but others are not.”

#### CONVENTION CENTERS ARE NOT LIKE HOTELS

One routine grievance planners have with convention centers is that they are inflexible when it

comes to negotiating better terms. Often, this is due to governance and related restrictions under which many convention centers function. It also has much to do with how convention centers operate financially.

“Planners need to understand how a convention center generates its revenue,” says William R. Tirone, CMP, assistant general manager, Branson Convention Center, Branson, MO. (Hilton manages the Branson Convention Center, its first foray into this market.) “A convention center is not like a hotel. It does not have guest rooms from which to generate revenue. The convention center is simply meeting and event space. It derives its income from the rental of this space. Hotels are more willing to discount meeting space because they generate their primary revenue from guest room rentals. This obviously is not the case for convention centers.

“We had a group that moved from one of the hotels in the area to the Branson Convention Center,” says Tirone. “Based on attendance, they felt they could meet certain food and beverage minimums that would give them the convention center space for free. So we negotiated with them on this basis. Unfortunately, they didn’t hit the agreed F&B minimums. As a result, they ended up having to pay more for meeting room rental than they were accustomed to at hotels.”

By the same token, convention centers can

## Ten Tips for Working With Convention Centers

Planning, organizing and managing an association event at a convention center is considerably different than setting up and running such an activity at a hotel, even a large one. Here are 10 valuable tips meeting planners should consider to work most efficiently with any convention center. These edited suggestions are courtesy of Bana Yahnke, CAE, CMP, director of marketing and membership, Family Career and Community Leaders of America, Reston, VA.

1. Your convention services manager (CSM) is your new best friend.
2. Ask numerous questions, especially on labor issues.
3. Include the convention center staff in overall conference planning.
4. In this regard, make sure that all staff, including your audio-visual company, is involved in such meetings.
5. Be clear in all communications to the convention center staff.
6. In your communications, add in the smallest details regarding meeting rooms, general session halls and exposition activities, even if these details may seem mundane.
7. Hire a general service contractor. This professional resource can save you money.
8. Actively monitor all minor details, such as shipping and receiving, business centers, cash sales, food and beverage minimums, and so on.
9. Always thank the convention center staff at the end of your event. Do this in a public fashion. This simple act will strengthen your future relationship with the facility.
10. And as always, the planner should make sure to have fun at the event. When the planner is cheerful and upbeat, the local staff will follow his or her lead.

— MM

sometimes provide their meeting and event space at low or even no cost. This can occur if the association will be bringing a major convention to the city that will provide a positive economic impact across the board for numerous local venues and merchants. “In this sense, the convention center functions as a loss leader for the community,” says Tirone. “The increase in local tax revenues from added spending by convention attendees will offset any loss experienced by the convention center.”

Cerana details how this works in some destinations: “Local hotels normally absorb the cost of the convention center in the form of a rebate added to their hotel room rates, which in many cases still allows for attractive rates even with the rebates built in. Or the convention center derives its revenue through audio-visual and F&B minimums, or through both of these methods. So while the rental technically is ‘free,’ it essentially is being paid for in another way.”

#### CONTRACTS THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

What makes meetings and events at convention centers more complicated than hotels concerns much more than multiple contracts. When planners hold events at convention centers, they must stay on top of innumerable details. For ex-

ample, because convention centers do not generate any revenues from sleeping rooms, many end up charging for almost everything else, even including such items as trash removal and water. Planners who do not pay attention to such details are liable to be in for a series of unpleasant surprises later. Plus, many of these services can be more expensive at convention centers than at hotels.

“Everything is more complex at a convention center than a hotel,” says Ann McLeod, CEM, CAE, formerly ASAE’s director of exhibitions and registration. “In a convention center, the planner must deal with multiple points of contact, but at a hotel you have one essential person.

“If planners do not have experience with exclusive contractors and exclusive service providers that often come with convention centers, a lot of their fees can be more expensive, and they have to pay a lot more money,” says McLeod who is currently the director of meetings and expositions for the Alexandria, VA-based Society of American Military Engineers. “Exclusive contracts can involve such things as rigging — the hanging of items from ceilings. The whole thing about exclusivity is a huge issue.”

Typical exclusive contractors at some convention centers include electrical, security, catering and so on. “Legitimate reasons exist for exclusiv-

## Learn the Value of Your Business

Association meeting planners have a new tool to help them learn the value of their business. Planners who work with DMOs that use the new Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) Event Impact Calculator, will be one step closer to more effective negotiations. The Event Impact Calculator, which went live in September, has been adopted by more than 67 CVBs throughout the U.S. The calculator is designed to provide DMOs exclusively with a more credible and destination-specific method for understanding and quantifying the impact of face-to-face events on their destinations.

Christine Shimasaki, managing director of empowerMINT.com and the Event Impact Calculator, says, “This is the first time we’re utilizing a tool of this level as well as one that uses numerous data sources. This will become the new standard for the way the impact of events are measured in our industry, at the local level.”

Robert Donovan, vice president of meetings and travel services for the American Hospital Association, agrees. “Knowing the value of your business is really important because it helps you think through the value proposition,” says Donovan. “If you think that your meeting is worth \$100,000 and you find out it’s worth \$1.6 million, that makes a big difference (in negotiating power). We’re all about knowing what our volume is, how much business we do and what our business is worth.”

For an example of how DMAI’s Event Impact Calculator was used to quantify the impact on DMAI’s Annual Convention in New Orleans, visit [www.meetingplanningpartners.com](http://www.meetingplanningpartners.com). For more information on the Event Impact Calculator, visit [www.destinationmarketing.org](http://www.destinationmarketing.org).

— AC&F



William R. Tirone, CMP  
Assistant General Manager  
Branson Convention Center,  
Branson, MO

***“But at convention centers with unions, there can be explicit rules about who can and cannot do your material handling, booth decoration and so on. The planner needs to know about all of these details up front.”***

ity,” says Cerana. “In St. Louis, you can bring in your own audio-visual person, but when it comes to electricity, liability issues preclude groups from bringing in their own electricians.

“An exclusive local electrical contractor is going to know everything about power issues at his or her convention center, and is going to be covered by convention center insurance,” Cerana explains. “When the building has an exclusive electrical contract, the liability for the caliber of the

work is the building’s responsibility rather than the planner’s. This protects the planner from potentially unskilled or inexperienced workers.”

#### **UNDERSTAND UNION RULES**

When organizing their events at convention centers, association planners must quickly become knowledgeable about any applicable union rules and regulations. These seldom are key planning factors at hotels. But failure to stay

on top of such issues can become a major problem for associations that meet at convention centers.

“The planner must know if the facility is union or non-union,” says Tirone. “At many hotels it is OK for the bellmen to bring in your materials. But at convention centers with unions, there can be explicit rules about who can and cannot do your material handling, booth decoration and so on. The planner needs to know about all of these details up front.”

“Understanding the labor rules can be a challenge,” says Bana Yahnke, CAE, CMP, director of marketing and membership, Family Career and Community Leaders of America, headquartered in Reston, VA.

“They are different at every facility,” says Yahnke. “At one event, we had to hire a 24-man crew of highly experienced craftsmen for simple chairs setup. After years of experience in many different cities we don’t run into this type of problem too often now. The second time around we went back to the same city. We were able to negotiate with the facility. As a result, we saved \$22,000 on chairs setup alone.”

The general service contractor (GSC) that the planner hires can come in handy regarding all

applicable labor and/or union rules and regulations. This professional can advise planners on how to set up and dismantle booths, handle rigging and signage and so on. The GSC can keep associations out of trouble when they meet at convention centers.

#### **FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN**

With all of the often confusing union rules, liability issues and numerous other tangibles and intangibles, moving an association event from a hotel to a convention center can be an intimidating experience for many planners. “I think it is fear of the unknown,” says Cerana. “Most planners are totally familiar with hotels. But this often is not the case regarding convention centers.” In addition, since convention center events are much bigger than hotel events, there are many more things that can go wrong. The infamous Murphy’s Law says that if something can go wrong, it will go wrong. Planners must therefore account for all contingencies.

“It’s all about the details,” says Yahnke. “For example, let’s say the planner trucks the association’s entire show shipment to the convention center, but didn’t check on its shipping and receiving rules. However, if the association ships its materials too soon, the convention center may be unable to accept them at the dock. The group will then have to wait until its move-in date. As a result, it ends up paying a warehouse fee. These are details that planners can easily miss.”

Another problem that can occur at a convention center concerns a lack of available meeting rooms. Planners may mistakenly assume that because they are dealing with giant convention centers, available meeting and event space will not be a problem for their dates. This can be a false assumption, even for the largest convention center facilities, including the humongous Orange County Convention Center in Orlando. “Believe it or not, some of the big shows use more meeting rooms than we have available, so they may need to go to a nearby hotel,” says Canning.

The OCCC executive also points out that even something so mundane as walking distance in large convention centers can become a problem for the attendees of groups that meet at such facilities. “The length of our west concourse is half a mile, so transportation and logistics can be a

problem for associations and their attendees,” says Canning. She advises association planners that one of the most helpful things they can do when they plan their convention center events is to communicate that all attendees be sure and bring comfortable shoes with them.

“Another sometimes overlooked detail is adequate branding,” says Canning. “Let’s say the ‘Association of Bottle Washers’ has their annual 3,000-person convention at our convention center. That is a relatively small convention for us. Therefore, such a group must ensure that it has enough banners and signage so their event will not be overshadowed by a larger group that meets here at the same time.”

#### **COMMUNICATION IS KEY**

More than perhaps any other factor, successful convention center events depend on clear and consistent communications. Planners must ensure that everyone — convention center management and staff, vendors, contractors and the association planning team — operates with the

same basic information. “Many convention center problems develop because of a lack of clear communications up front,” says Canning.

Clear and comprehensive communications begin with the RFP, which spells out precisely what the association must obtain for its event. “The planner should put together a great RFP,” says Tirone. “It should detail exactly the association’s event specifications and criteria. It should also forecast the economic impact of the convention on the community. A great RFP leads to a great contract, which leads to a great event.”

“Effective communications are vital at every stage of the event planning and management process,” says Yahnke. “Communicating clearly and completely with the convention center staff and all other parties is extremely important. Planners can never provide enough detail or ask enough questions.”

Yahnke says: “I am a firm believer that if the convention center staff and everyone else are all on the same page, the association conference will run like clockwork.”

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# Integrated Event Marketing

## Leveraging Technology to Connect and Engage Attendees



By John Buchanan



Catherine Lincoln, CAE  
Senior Manager, International/  
Humanitarian Foundation  
American Academy of Otolaryngology  
Alexandria, VA

*“It’s interesting to me that the doctors and other people who find us at Facebook are oftentimes not even on our radar. And then they start to follow us and engage with other physicians all over the world. That is very exciting.”*

For more than 60 years, associations have marketed their annual conventions and other major meetings based on a few simple facts, such as that they attracted a well-defined, industry-captive audience, provided important education and career-development content and fostered networking. Over the past decade, however, the Internet has eroded that traditional dominance when it comes to content. Technologies such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter have enabled networking on a scale never before imagined. As a result, the very definition of a well-defined, industry-captive audience has changed.

Meanwhile, social media has revolutionized the entire notion of how associations should market their events. The challenge is how to integrate traditional marketing practices with social media, to arrive at a strategy driven by new synergies.

For example, Catherine Lincoln, CAE, senior manager, international/humanitarian foundation, at the American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery (AAOHNS) in Alexandria, VA, uses print advertising in the association’s two

monthly magazines, as well as its newsletters, to promote her annual meeting, which draws 9,000 attending physicians and other medical practitioners and experts from all over the world to a North American city each September.

In addition to the association’s publications, Lincoln also relies on a sophisticated, segmented email marketing program. But, she points out, the consistent success AAOHNS has with its annual conference and other major events is a result of compelling and widely acclaimed content, not a particularly well-applied marketing tool.

Association marketing experts are unanimous in their agreement with that essential point.

However, says Michael Faye, president of Chicago-based association marketing firm AssociaDirect, in today’s market, winning content is only half the battle. The other half is a truly integrated marketing campaign that leverages all available technologies and other key capabilities.

By Faye’s current standard, an integrated event marketing plan should include a microsite tailored to the individual meeting; a PURL or “personalized URL” campaign that targets and exploits known characteristics of individual attendees; a segmented email campaign; and a text platform based on mobile phone technology.

With currently available technology, Faye says,

any association meeting planner can use a PURL platform. The process is fully automated and reasonably inexpensive. It allows association planners to create 15,000 or more personalized websites that are tied to a database of detailed information on the individual tastes and preferences of all prospective attendees.

By targeting content to individual constituencies, planners can increase their registration ratio and, in effect, create a sub-tier of attendees who otherwise would not have been enticed to come to the meeting.

The next technological battleground, Faye says, will be mobile platforms that can connect and engage attendees 24/7, while still relying on PURL, email and texting tactics. Now, however, Faye and other observers see association meeting planners who are falling farther and farther behind the curve, rather than aspiring to the cutting edge.

### SEG MARKETING

“It’s amazing to me in 2011 that anyone is still having the conversation about whether they should segment their membership and market to specific niche audiences so you can tailor messages to those specific audiences,” Faye says. “A lot of associations are still sending one big ‘preview mailer’ and the same registration packet for their conventions to all members.” That is an obsolete model, with the law of diminishing returns at play, Faye says.

At the same time, says MaryAnne Bobrow, CAE, CMP, CMM, CHE, managing partner of independent association management company and meeting planning firm Bobrow & Associates in Citrus Heights, CA, some tried-and-true marketing tactics of recent years are under siege. “For example, with new technologies comes new levels of anti-spam prevention,” she says. “So, you have to start to wonder if your email broadcasts, which we have all relied so heavily on, will get categorized as known spammers. That’s an issue that some email broadcasters are struggling with right now.”

### PUSH VERSUS PULL

As more and more people rush to opt out of the relentless onslaught of unsolicited daily communication, the concept of opting in for something is revolutionizing the practice of event marketing.

Therein lies the unique appeal and power of social media. It is the very antithesis of traditional “broadcast” marketing. Instead of “pushing” information, it

“pulls” a customer into a two-way conversation with clear benefits for both parties.

Despite its obvious appeal, however, social media also has created a backlash from meeting planners who are resistant or even afraid of it.

“We are in a classic 80/20 situation, where I would say that 20 percent of the association members of the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) have embraced social media and some of that 20 percent are doing it superbly,” says Joyce McKee, CEO of McKinney, TX-based association convention marketing consultancy Let’s Talk Trade Shows. McKinney was also co-chair of the IAEE Social Media Task Force that last August released the white paper “How to Properly Use Social Media to Enhance and Promote Your Event.” (see page 20). “Then you have the other 80 percent, who are either dabbling in it or who are considering it and trying to figure out what to do with it,” she says.

Frank Skinner, account executive, marketing and information systems, at association management company Kellen Company in Atlanta, questions that assessment. Among Kellen’s 80-odd association clients, about half are engaged in the use of social media, Skinner says.

A study from the Center for Exhibition Research (CEIR) last fall found that 72 percent of exhibition marketers expected to have a digital marketing strategy in place by the end of the year. Forty-four percent reported that they intended to build up their internal digital talent and capabilities.

Regardless of the percentages, what all experts agree on is that most association meeting planners who are using social media are using it only marginally well — at best. That’s because of a fundamental misunderstanding of just what social media is, and what it’s supposed to be doing.

“There is major confusion about this idea of a two-way channel,” says McKee. “Meeting planners are perplexed, because in the past their job has been to fix problems. They’re used to fixing a specific thing, like the air-conditioning in the room or a meal. They’re not used to having a conversation with a community of attendees. And a lot of them just haven’t learned yet how to be fluent in that conversation.”



Michael Faye  
President  
AssociaDirect  
Chicago, IL

*“It’s amazing to me in 2011 that anyone is still having the conversation about whether they should segment their membership and market to specific niche audiences so you can tailor messages to those specific audiences.”*



Joyce McKee  
CEO  
Let's Talk Trade Shows  
McKinney, TX

***“(Planners need to immerse themselves in the technology and these tools so they have a better idea of what they can do and can’t do in that world. Then they can start directing their voice to their audience.”***

Related to that common shortcoming is a common mistake, McKee says. “I shudder when I see this,” she says, “but as soon as they decide to do it, planners just go off and hire somebody to do their Facebook page and their tweeting, rather than being actively involved. They delegate it. But what they need to do is immerse themselves in the technology and these tools so they have a better idea of what they can do and can’t do in that world. Then they can start directing their voice to their audience.”

**SUCCESS STORY**

In terms of using social media to enhance awareness of and attendance at a major meeting, AAOHNS and Lincoln have already seen major results from their efforts. Although the association’s longstanding and proven marketing plan for its annual conference assures basic numbers each year, Lincoln wanted a more effective way to reach out to and attract international attendees.

Beginning 2½ years ago, as a relatively early adopter of social media, Lincoln and her communications department created a LinkedIn account, Facebook page and Twitter account. She also launched a high-quality blog aimed specifically at the promotion of the annual meeting, with a focus on its world-class content and highly credentialed presenters.

“What I’m really excited about,” Lincoln says, “is the opportunity to have a specifically international

component of that blog. And now we’re looking at doing it in Spanish, as well as English, because a lot of our attendees come from Spain and Latin America. Those are major markets for us, along with Mexico.”

What has pleasantly surprised Lincoln is that social media does indeed take on a life of its own when done right. “It’s interesting to me that the doctors and other people who find us at Facebook are oftentimes not even on our radar,” she says. “And then they start to follow us and engage with other physicians all over the world. That is very exciting.”

The bottom-line benefit to AAOHNS is an entirely new stream of enthusiastic attendees not reached by traditional marketing methods. “And the response has been from a wide area,” says Lincoln. “That includes South America, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, including Pakistan, and Southeast Asia. And these were places in some cases where we didn’t even know anyone was interested in us or our annual meeting.”

In turn, Lincoln has watched as allied medical organizations around the world have embraced the AAOHNS social media initiative and migrated content to their own websites. That has provided yet another new way to reach a global audience with common goals and shared professional interests.

**MASTERING THE FUNDAMENTALS**

Meeting planners who want to wade into the waters of social media should first understand a single principle, says Jeff Hurt, director of education and engagement at association marketing firm Velvet Chainsaw Consulting in Dallas: “Using social media

platforms for traditional marketing strategies will fail,” says Hurt, who served as a member of the IAEE Social Media Task Force. The successful use of social media requires a completely different mindset, Hurt says and other experts agree.

It also requires a simple element often overlooked in the excitement over new technology. “In order to use social media, the first thing a planner needs is a strategy,” says Michelle Bruno, president of event marketing firm Bruno Group Signature Events in Salt Lake City. She also was co-chair of the IAEE Social Media Task Force and co-author of its white paper with McKee. “You can have all the tactics and tools you want, but they won’t bring success unless they’re tied to a specific strategy and the goals of the association.”

At the core of that strategy should be the goal of genuine engagement and open, ongoing conversation with attendees, exhibitors and other stakeholders, with the shared objective of collaborating on a more successful convention or meeting. And therein lies the rub. Hurt says that associations’ longtime business model has been to push out information that sells memberships and attendance at an annual convention. “The truth is that most associations don’t do a very good job of listening to their members,” Hurt says. In the era of social media, the most successful events are those planned from the bottom up, with content directed by attendees’ feedback and ongoing conversations. Like any conversation, it goes two ways: Associations that deliver cutting-edge content and a positive overall experience at their meetings will see their success accelerated by social

media. And, associations that aspire to anything less than empowered attendees at meaningful events will have a problem.

In the longer term, it will be nearly impossible to attract and engage younger attendees without the effective ongoing use of social media. “That’s the real issue that associations are struggling with right now,” Faye says.

Given such daunting considerations, planners should understand that it will always be a “work in progress,” says McKee. “It has the elements of trial and error built into it.” To be successful, she says, a planner must pursue “a constant process of testing and analyzing, testing and analyzing,” she adds. “There is no one right way to do it. And all associations are different. Each one has to figure out what really works for its audience.”

Fortunately, says Bobrow, formidable resources are now available to planners who want to use them to master social media. As primary learning tools, Bobrow recommends the association-specific information and learning resource [www.socialfish.org](http://www.socialfish.org), as well as the broader [www.mashable.com](http://www.mashable.com).

“Planners who want to learn should use the various resources at those two sites and sign up for their daily email reports and tips,” Bobrow says. “Then you just have to ask the question, ‘How much of this is right for my association?’”



MaryAnne Bobrow, CAE, CMP, CMM, CHE  
Managing Partner  
Bobrow & Associates  
Citrus Heights, CA

***“Planners who want to learn should use the various resources at (socialfish.org and mashable.com) and sign up for their daily email reports and tips. Then ask the question, ‘How much of this is right for my association?’”***

# 11 Key Social Media Strategies

The International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) provided a snapshot of the use and benefits of social media in marketing association meetings and conventions in a white paper published last August: “How to Properly Use Social Media to Enhance and Promote Your Event.” Co-authors Joyce McKee and Michelle Bruno identified 10 key strategies.

- 1. Establish your goals.** Common objectives include increasing attendance, obtaining more client mindshare, increasing traffic to online properties and getting feedback from attendees. Establish clear goals and a method for measuring results.
- 2. Focus** on social media platforms that your attendees already use, such as LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter.
- 3. Leverage the social networks of your attendees and exhibitors to drive attendance.** In addition to establishing a presence on the relevant social media platforms that attendees use, enable attendees to network with their peers on event-centric social networking platforms provided by third-party developers.
- 4. Take social media to the show floor** by using mobile devices and large-screen monitors.
- 5. Leverage show content to drive social networking after your meeting.** Provide relevant information such as summaries of presentations, news, educational programming and videos that drive attendees to your website.

- 6. Reward your most active followers.** Provide premiums such as complimentary event passes, gift cards and other small gifts to motivate attendees to share information and insights with their peers. Sharing builds the brand for your event.
- 7. Choose the right tool to measure your success.** Use both free and paid tools to measure the results of your social networking campaign. Determine precisely whether your initiative is meeting your specific goals.
- 8. Build your followers.** Leverage existing databases of attendees, exhibitors and prospects to increase the number of followers on a specific platform such as LinkedIn. Use email marketing to introduce attendees to the platform and make content visible outside the basic database.
- 9. Know what is going on out there.** Monitor the conversations about your event by using free or paid tools such as Monitter for Twitter or EventBuzz.
- 10. Invest time, human resources, money and patience.** Development of a successful social media program takes time. It never happens overnight. In addition to an organized internal approach, reach out to exhibitors, vendors, speakers, presenters, active volunteers, young professionals and retired members to broaden your base of interest and support.
- 11. Think long-term.** In the future, successful, ongoing social media initiatives will be driven more by private-network technologies now coming into the market than by a LinkedIn account or Facebook page. Such event-specific social media networks will empower meeting planners to engage attendees and prospects in meeting-related conversations 24/7/365. — JB

# International Meetings Extraordinary Experiences in Extraordinary Places

By Stella Johnson



Lindsay Griffiths  
Director of Network Development  
International Lawyers Network  
Westwood, NJ

*“I’ve learned that you’ve got to be able to roll with the punches and keep a smile on your face so that your delegates don’t know that anything is going awry. Also, keep a sense of humor about it all. It gets straightened out.”*

Associations are amazingly resilient. They manage to “keep on keeping on” as the expression goes, despite the recent global economic woes.

International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) CEO Martin Sirk notes: “While corporate meetings have been subject to incredible volatility over the last three years, associations have kept on meeting, even if they’ve had some pressures on attendance and sponsorship. We’ve seen that the international association sector has been the most resilient in the whole of the global meetings market. In general, we’ve noticed far more U.S. based associations paying attention to their global strategies, and part of this inevitably involves meetings that are either stand-alone, organized in partnership with local members or sister/rival associations, or through commercial third parties.”

Furthermore, Sirk observes that as knowledge continues to expand exponentially in many fields, it naturally follows that associations have to keep up with this dynamic process. “It’s this reason, more than any other, that makes me optimistic for the future of association meetings,” he says. And, by that Sirk means domestic and international.

## EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCES

Nowadays, an association planner can easily build a solid case for hosting conferences over-

seas. The most obvious reason: Meetings abroad boost membership attendance and may lead to increased membership as well. Other evidence points to the fact that global destinations:

- can be a matter of convenience and fairness for international members and sister chapters;
- allow association chapters to play host on a rotating basis;
- pump the economies of chapter organizations;
- provide the opportunity for attendees and their families or guests to enjoy pre- and post-convention vacation time;
- and fortify association ties that bond in ways that only traditional or exotic locations can.

Last, but not least, conferences in international destinations give planners the opportunity to create extraordinary experiences in extraordinary places, which amplifies the overall meeting experience and makes the event more memorable and productive.

## LOSE THE RUSH, RUSH ATTITUDE

But, planning a meeting in Lisbon, or any other global destination for that matter, is not the same as planning a gathering in Los Angeles or New York City. For example, New York City-based International Lawyers Network (ILN), a global organization of 91 law firms from 66 countries, held its 23rd annual meeting of 89 members and 30 guests at the Olisippo Lapa Palace in Lisbon, Portugal, a five-star, 19th century garden estate hotel overlooking the Tagus River, where they enjoyed luxurious accommodations as well as a welcome reception, general sessions and gourmet-style meals in rarefied surroundings that were, quite simply, not of the everyday world.



Photo courtesy of International Lawyers Network

New York City-based International Lawyers Network, a global organization of 91 law firms from 66 countries, held its 23rd annual meeting in Lisbon, Portugal. Delegates gathered for a group photo after lunch in Cascais, a picturesque coastal town and former fishing village in the suburbs of Lisbon.

“We rotate where this meeting is held between the Americas and Europe (and periodically Asia), because we like to give our law firms the opportunity to host the event,” says Lindsay Griffiths, ILN’s director of network development. “Our Portuguese member firm had indicated an interest, so we decided to hold the meeting in Lisbon.”

Since one-third of the attendees were guests, Portugal was a great choice, too, because it afforded so many sightseeing opportunities — one of the built-in perks of international destinations. During the gathering, guests went on a tram ride to Alfama to visit St. George’s Castle and the Casa do Leao. They lunched at Cozinha Velha outside of Lisbon, and followed that with a visit to Sintra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the National Palace.

“Dinner that evening for the entire group was at the Seteais Palace, also outside of Lisbon,” Griffiths says. “The following day, the companions went to Ribeira Market, but lunch for the entire group was at Porto Santa Maria, and then attendees had a choice between returning to the hotel, spending some time at the beach or taking a tour of Cascais.”

According to Griffiths, a highlight of the program was lunch at Porto Santa Maria, accented by ocean views and delicious food, and the evening at Foz Palace, a glamorous gala affair.

Griffiths reminds planners that they are working within someone else’s culture. “So, if you’ve got that rush, rush attitude of the states, you’re going to be easily irritated by the lack of response you get in a foreign country. At the same time, it’s important to understand that if you have a lot of U.S. delegates in your group, they may be expecting

things to be done as they are domestically, so it’s important to help them in managing their expectations as well.”

But, planners beware. “Things will go wrong, in any foreign country,” cautions Griffiths. The main culprits are cultural and linguistic, and often the time difference as well. “When we’re planning a meeting in Asia, for instance, I almost never have a phone call with the hotel or events planner. It’s all done via email,” she says. “Although for conferences in Europe, I can call first thing in the morning if necessary.”

Griffiths advises planners to research cultural differences in advance to avoid problems down the road. A few years ago, while planning a meeting in Thailand, she sought the opinion of local event planners and vendors, and quickly discovered that asking someone’s opinion on a given subject in this part of Asia was the equivalent of asking them to change whatever was being discussed. “This is how they are asked to make changes, so they would just change the program without my confirming it,” she says. “Until I caught on, I was extremely frustrated about how things sometimes transpired.”

“I’ve learned that you’ve got to be able to roll with the punches and keep a smile on your face so that your delegates don’t know that anything is going awry,” she advises. “Also, keep a sense of humor about it all. It gets straightened out.”

Having a solid team back home helps a lot, too. Griffiths’ ILN research department lets her know that when working in Asia, one must always present his business card with both hands and accept business cards the same way. “But, not only that,

you also look for several minutes at the card and don't immediately put it away," adds Griffiths.

"Additionally, in Thailand, when writing an email, address everyone as Khun. So, I would write "Dear Khun First Name" whenever I sent an email. This went a long way in showing them that I respected their culture, and that's very important when conducting business in Thailand or anywhere else."

### COMMON OBSTACLES

Katie Elsberry also views cultural and language barriers as common obstacles when conducting business in an international destination.

Elsberry, the manager at KCA, a Chandler, AZ-based association management company, says she prefers communicating via email. "This way, you also have a paper trail. Just be sure to be very detailed and very direct.

"Also, when dealing with foreign contacts and vendors, always be wary when speaking verbally to anyone that replies 'yes' to everything you say. So often 'yes' only indicates that they understand what you are saying or that they are following along in the conversation — not that they will follow up on what you are discussing with them. This also happens with the response 'OK.'"

However, convening in global destinations affords a great opportunity to strengthen the meeting agenda by choosing a city that has some connection to the purpose of the event. For instance, one of KCA's clients, Manufacturing Enterprise Solutions Association (MESA), a global community of manufacturers, producers, industry leaders and solution providers, recently held an event in Düsseldorf, Germany.

According to Elsberry, the fall European Conference draws end users, systems integrators,

solution providers and industry thought leaders. Attendees learn best practices, share trials and successes, network with industry colleagues and help set the priorities for MESA's deliverables throughout the year. The 2010 conference drew 110 attendees from 17 countries.

Düsseldorf, Germany was chosen because MESA wanted to grow their membership in Germany, and Düsseldorf is dotted with manufacturing plants. "Düsseldorf was also easily accessible from other major European cities and not as expensive as a tier-one city," adds Elsberry.

The meeting sessions, exposition, "walking" dinner (six-course meal served butler-style in exposition hall) all took place at the Swissôtel Düsseldorf/Neuss. The hotel also provided lodging for the majority of out-of-town attendees.

For all of its conference clients, and especially during these times of social and political unrest,

KCA prepares a risk management plan and, when traveling abroad, checks with the state department in advance. They also print local emergency information on the back of all attendee name badges and require attendees to provide an emergency contact during the registration process. "If a situation develops, we arrange for secure transportation to off-property locations or choose to keep all activities on property, depending on the circumstances," she says.

"On a personal note, I always travel with rations (food and first-aid kit) in my room in case I get stuck there due to an emergency or workload," says Elsberry. "Of course, I couldn't live without the conference committee of volunteers and our internal conference-planning team. I also could not live without the accounting firms we have hired to assist us in navigating the tax laws in each country."

## Singapore No. 1 Convention City in Asia

According to the Global Rankings of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), an industry survey that rates world-class cities by various criteria, Singapore continues to reign as the No. 1 convention city in all of Asia, as well as one of the top five convention cities, overall, alongside Vienna, Barcelona, Paris and Berlin. ([www.iccaworld.com](http://www.iccaworld.com))

Melissa Ow, assistant chief executive of Industry Development at the Singapore Tourism Board, believes the city's "constant reinvention and ever-changing skyline" are part of the reason for its success, as well as implemented incentives.

Erich J. Hermanns, event director of London-based GSM Association, which represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide and produces a large number of industry-leading events, in June held its 4th Annual Mobile Money Summit at Singapore's Marina Bay Sands.

Hermanns says when choosing an international destination, it's beneficial to choose one that has some special bearing or significance to the nature of the group. For GSM Association, Singapore is a major business and banking center of Asia, as well as is the heart of Southeast Asia, which is a strategic area for



A night view of Singapore's Helix Bridge — a pedestrian bridge linking Marina Centre with Marina South and the Marina Bay Sands Singapore.

Photo courtesy of Marina Bay Sands Singapore

mobile money and banking deployments by mobile network operators, vendors and banking institutions.

According to Hermanns, "the country offers one of the most beautiful skylines in the world," which was another factor considered during the selection process. "It also has a robust tourism bureau and team that works closely with event organizers and supports them through all aspects of the

event-planning process, from RFP through to restaurant selections. They also provide a grant opportunity to offset some of the costs for an event organizer," he adds.

Marina Bay Sands was selected as the host venue for the summit because the venue is an architectural wonder, providing new, state-of-the-art conference and exhibition facilities, as well as outstanding accommodations and a wide range of business and recreational services for the attendees.

Says Hermanns: "All elements of the Mobile Money Summit event were held in the Sands, including the conference and exhibition, press meetings, executive meetings and more. Of course, outside events were scheduled whereby attendees were able to experience all that Singapore has to offer, from outstanding restaurants and clubs to shopping and cultural activities."

While there were no emergencies during the GSM Association's four-day event, given today's climate of social and political unrest, Hermanns stresses that it is always crucial to develop a crisis plan well in advance of the event and to review that plan with internal stakeholders at regular intervals. "Our plan includes a review of potential emergency and crisis situations, the likelihood of each scenario occurring and our response and actions in each event," he says. "We also identify key onsite and home-based team members, and develop a full communications plan and evacuation plan so that we are fully prepared to manage each situation and ensure a safe environment for our attendees and staff. We do take this quite seriously and have involvement from team members across the company, including our CEO."

Susan Lausch, director of events and seminars of the Alexandria, VA-based Flight Safety Foundation (FSF), will in November hold her group's 64th annual meeting in Singapore.



Singapore's Marina Bay Sands was selected by the GSM Association as its host venue for its 4th Annual Mobile Money Summit.

Photo courtesy of GSM Association

No stranger to international meeting planning, Lausch and her team have planned annual events around the world regularly for FSF, from Beijing to Milan. Singapore is celebrating the centennial anniversary of its first flight in 1911, which ties into the theme of their gala event, which will include a "who's who of the global aviation community," she says.

The Mandarin Orchard Hotel will serve as headquarters for

meetings and accommodations, and Singapore's Aviation Academy will host one event. "Our CEO sits on the academy's board, and Singapore reached out to our group by way of a familiarization trip. When I saw the hotels and facilities, attractions and professionalism it had to offer, I immediately understood why my CEO has been so enthusiastic about Singapore for so many years."

Based on the level of professionalism she is already experiencing from the Singapore Tourism Bureau, Lausch expects to offer the same accolades as GSM Association's Hermanns. —SJ



Erich J. Hermanns  
Event Director  
GSM Association  
London, England

*"Of course, outside events were scheduled whereby attendees were able to experience all that Singapore has to offer, from outstanding restaurants and clubs to shopping and cultural activities."*

The Flight Safety Foundation European Aviation Safety Seminar (EASS) is held annually at various locations in Europe. EASS 2011 was held in Istanbul in March.



Photo courtesy of Flight Safety Foundation

### ASCERTAIN THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HERE AND THERE

What's true here, isn't necessarily true there. That's what M. Pamela Ballinger, CMP, underscores when discoursing about international events. Ballinger, the vice president of meetings at Mount Laurel, NJ-based Association Headquarters, reminds planners to heed time zones: "It is the responsibility on our end to make adjustments for planning calls, not theirs. 'I'll call you at 11 a.m.' means their time, not ours.

"Other differences include collecting and transmitting funds for registration and expenses, and remembering that, above all, it is the practice overseas for a third party to handle housing as compared to attendees reserving rooms directly with the hotels or online."

In addition, Ballinger urges planners to thoroughly research the costs of all items. "There are centers in Europe where they can charge you for wastebaskets, lecterns and other items we traditionally do not pay for here," she says.

Ballinger manages four associations that hold meetings overseas including the International

Liver Transplantation Society. One of its most recent meetings was held in June in Valencia, Spain. The group, which meets in Europe every third year, hosted 1,200 attendees at the convention center and a handful of area hotels.

"Whenever you hold a meeting in Europe, usually there is attendance of more than 500 people, and you need to use a convention center because, unlike in the U.S., most hotels do

not have enough meeting space to support even small exhibits, poster presentations and sessions," says Ballinger. "Also, in these cities you end up

blocking rooms at a larger number of hotels but with fewer room counts, as European hotels usually do not have the large block concentrations we see here."

For the Liver Transplantation Society, the closing event was the highlight, a spectacular evening with entertainment held at a prestigious offsite venue the City of Arts and Sciences, a modern complex of five entities that includes an opera house and performing arts center; an IMAX cinema, planetarium and laserium; a science museum; a garden; and an open-air oceanographic park. "Traditionally, events held at international meetings are designed to incorporate the culture of the city and, in Valencia, this cultural attraction was selected, complete with a fireworks program that was displayed over the water," Ballinger states.

Even though everything for Ballinger's four-day event in Spain went off as beautifully as the sun setting over its Mediterranean landscape, she cautions planners to work closely with the local organizers and make a strong effort to understand the culture of the location.

"The first thing is to reach out to your convention manager and hotel convention people to determine if there is risk of any kind," she says. "If this is determined before the meeting, consideration to delay or cancel the meeting should be discussed. However, if this happens while the meeting is taking place, a meeting with local authorities would need to be set up. The possibility of increased security and transportation of attendees between the hotels and convention center would need to be added."

### FINAL THOUGHTS

After all votes are cast, however, it's "thumbs up" for association meetings in foreign lands. KCA's Elsberry reminds fellow planners to do their research and find a contact in the country whom you can go to for assistance. She often chooses a DMO, and also seeks out a local board or committee member in that location to be her go-to person.

Association Headquarters' Ballinger adds, "Most of all, remember that the convention center manager is the most important contact you'll have, as well as the hotel convention services manager."

And ILN's Griffiths finds that local event planners normally keep things running smoothly and have often made her working life so much easier. AC&F

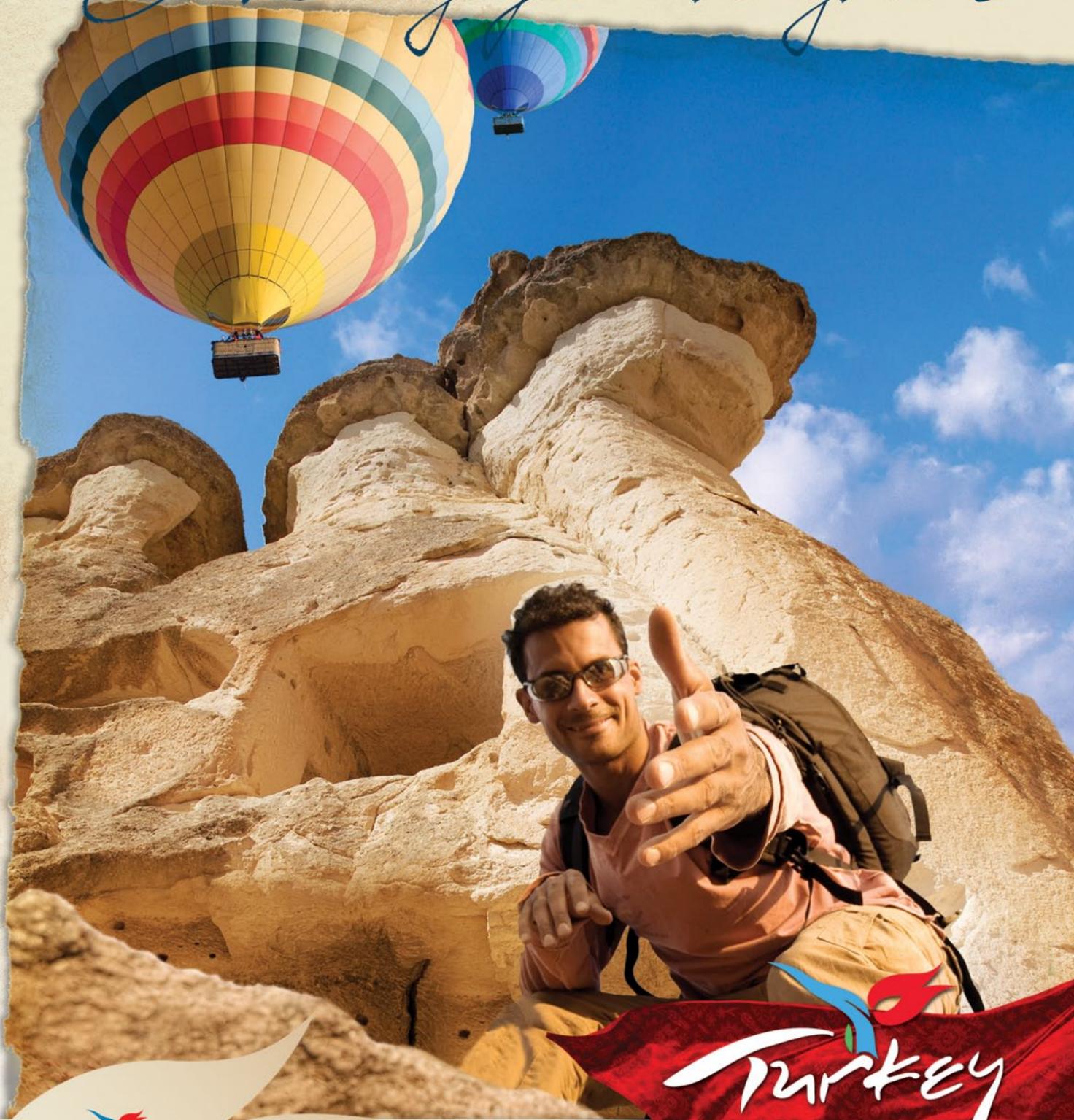


M. Pamela Ballinger, CMP  
Vice President of Meetings  
Association Headquarters  
Mount Laurel, NJ

***"Whenever you hold a meeting in Europe...you need to use a convention center because, unlike in the U.S., most hotels do not have enough meeting space to support even small exhibits, poster presentations and sessions."***

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# Las Vegas

## More Popular Than Ever

By John Buchanan

After struggling as badly as any lesser destination during the recession and meeting industry downturn of late 2008 through mid-2010, Las Vegas is back with a vengeance.

This newfound popularity is due in part to a whole new wave of association business it never saw before, simply because the city was perpetually “booked up” with A-list corporate business and brand-name city-wide association groups such as the Washington, DC-based National Association of Broadcasters (NAB).

A primary reason why Las Vegas has been all the rage with association meeting planners is that “it offers an experience and overall ambience like few other destinations in the world,” says Chris Brown, NAB’s vice president, conventions and business operations. NAB’s long-running annual show draws 90,000 attendees from all over the world. “And the

overall cost of doing business in Las Vegas is favorable to both attendees and exhibitors.”

Another often-cited benefit of Las Vegas as a destination is that it typically bumps attendance up by as much as 20–30 percent. “Historically, if you look at our attendance over the last 20 years, Las Vegas is one of the destinations that generates the highest attendance,” says James Goodman, managing vice president, conference and meeting services at the American Dental Association in Chicago. Its Las Vegas annual meeting in October drew 29,000 attendees.

“But,” Goodman says, “we also look first for facilities, because we have a very large trade show as well as over 260 continuing education courses. And we also have a large number of delegates. Then we look at what there is to do in the destination, especially in the evening. And Las Vegas offers something for everybody.”

Goodman also likes the airlift into Las Vegas, which makes it convenient from virtually anywhere on earth. “We only have about 10 percent international attendance,” Goodman says, “but because of the airlift people from all over the world can usually get there with one connection.”

The convenience of getting to Las Vegas is also a key benefit cited by Ed Myers, chairman of the Tri-State Home Furnishings Association in Ambler, PA. For the last seven years, Myers has held major meetings twice a year at the 2,992-room Monte Carlo Resort & Casino.

“The No. 1 reason why Las Vegas is such a successful and popular destination for us is the ability it gives attendees and hosts to entertain clients and pursue new business,” says Myers, whose membership is primarily manufacturer’s representatives who want more exposure to furniture retailers. Those two groups get together twice a year under the auspices of a major furniture show at the World Market Center Las Vegas.

“It’s really just the whole atmosphere of the town,” says Myers. “It lends itself to an upbeat mood that’s good for doing business. And doing business is a very important part of our meetings.”

Phelps Hope, vice president, meetings and exhibitions at Kellen Meetings, a branded service division of Kellen Company in Atlanta, has been planning Las Vegas meetings for 30 years. Therefore, it’s no surprise to him that the destination is more popular than ever among his association peers. “Everybody has always wanted to go to Las Vegas,” Hope says. “It’s an exciting city. It’s not like any other downtown that you will find in an American city. It’s an amusement park for adults.”

More important, however, he notes, is the well-established fact that Las Vegas usually increases attendance — and often establishes new records. Stephanie Arone, DMCP, president and general manager of local destination management company Activity Planners, cites the same historic reality. “Statistics don’t lie,” Arone says. “Las Vegas is going to drive your attendance by up to 15 percent. It’s going to increase your international attendance by up to 30 percent. So if you’re really looking to grow your meetings, Las Vegas is a winning destination.”

### NEW FANS

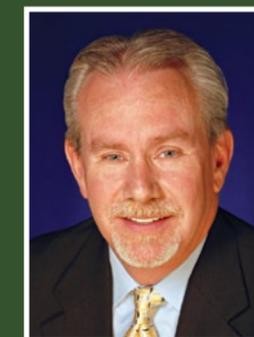
As a result of the recession — which caused an unprecedented slump in Las Vegas meetings of all sorts — many new associations, most of them smaller and less well-known than their marquee-name counterparts such as NAB, tried Las Vegas and loved it. That simple fact has not only helped the city begin to recover from the meltdown. It has also opened up an ever-growing list of new customers.

“The benefit for the association meetings market of the slump was that Las Vegas opened its doors a little more to some lower room rates and reduced the room to meeting space ratios, which meant they were more amenable to negotiating with midrange associations that traditionally had a tough time getting into Las Vegas,” says Hope. “Those include meetings that might only have 300 or 400 rooms on peak, but still need a lot of meeting space because they do a lot of breakouts.”

In turn, Hope says, those planners learned that Las Vegas does indeed significantly increase attendance for a meeting, which brings them into the fold of repeat customers.

And at the same time, Las Vegas suppliers fi-

**“(Las Vegas) offers an experience and overall ambience like few other destinations in the world. And the overall cost of doing business in Las Vegas is favorable to both attendees and exhibitors.”**



Chris Brown  
Vice President, Conventions and  
Business Operations  
National Association of Broadcasters  
Washington, DC

nally recognized the value of their business. “That business is no longer just perceived as low-priced or filler business,” Hope says. “It’s now seen as good, viable dollar-and-cent business.”

Michael Gasta, chief operating officer at Las Vegas-based AWG Destination Management Company, has been a local hotelier, independent meeting planner and DMC executive for 36 years. He agrees that incremental business, during the worst of the downturn and since, has been a major factor in the city’s return to relative health and well-being. But that new business was built on a reputation Las Vegas already enjoyed for delivering exceptional bottom-line value.

“With this three-year dip we’re just coming out of, association planners have been able to take advantage of value through the recovery period,” Gasta says. And as a result of getting good rates and creative value-added packages, those planners have now become bona fide fans of the destination.

In turn, that new popularity has generated many association meetings on short booking windows that would have been almost unheard of before the recession. “For some association meetings that require as many as 3,000 rooms, the booking window can now be as short as a year and a half,” Gasta says. For small meetings, the booking windows are now often measured in months or even weeks.

And going forward, Gasta says, such short-term meetings will continue to enjoy real value if planners can be a little flexible. “As long as they can be a little flexible in their dates and possibly even their booking pattern (for the week), they’re going to get what they want much more easily than they did before the recession three years ago,” he says.

At the 2011 NAB Show, held in April at the Las Vegas Convention Center, the second annual “War on the Floor” featured exuberant teams from Drake University and Frostburg State University who shot, produced and edited their own video packages.



Photo courtesy of NAB



Michael Gasta  
Chief Operating Officer  
AWG Destination Management  
Las Vegas, NV

**“As long as they can be a little flexible in their dates and possibly even their booking pattern (for the week), they’re going to get what they want much more easily than they did before the recession three years ago.”**

Even better, perhaps, is the fact that hoteliers and other major suppliers are not being as aggressive in their pricing as they are with corporate groups in an attempt to finally generate maximum cash flow from every meeting. Because smaller association meetings now represent a legitimate new niche, planners have surprisingly strong leverage. And sellers finally comprehend that the typical association planner is on a much tighter and more strained budget than a typical corporate planner.

All of that said, then, 2011 has been the year that less well known and smaller associations discovered one of the country’s premier destinations.

And in doing so, they discovered an almost unequaled array of buying options.

#### **A HUGE SHOPPING LIST**

Planners using Las Vegas for the first time are often surprised by the extraordinary range of hotel product in its 150,000-room inventory.

Among its newest and most acclaimed properties is the 4,004-room Aria Resort & Casino, located within the CityCenter complex that redefined the famous Strip upon its late 2009 debut with its breathtaking architecture and almost endless list of amenities, including a world-class art collection. Aria features a full-service luxury spa and 300,000 sf of top-notch meeting space. It’s also home to Cirque du Soleil’s hot new show, a tribute to Elvis. The hotel has also achieved coveted LEED Gold certification and 5 Green Key status from the Green Key

Eco-Rating program, the largest international evaluator of sustainable hotel operations.

Another modern meeting landmark is the huge complex that includes the 4,027-room The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino and 3,066-room The Palazzo Las Vegas — which share the state-of-the-art 2.25-million-sf Sands Expo and Convention Center. For after-hours entertainment, The Palazzo offers Tao, one of the city’s most wildly popular nightclubs (and offsite venues), and the smash Broadway show “Jersey Boys.”

In October, the Sands Expo and Convention Center hosted the first-ever IMEX America show — taking its already stellar reputation in the industry up a notch.

Another relatively new property is the intimate, 390-room M Resort Spa and Casino, which bills itself as a “four-star boutique resort,” with 60,000 sf of meeting space. It combines striking contemporary architecture with highly personalized service. M Resort features the 100,000-sf Villagio Del Sole events piazza, which includes a built-in stage and a capacity of 4,000.

At the same time that new properties bring new choice, major legacy properties hold their own based on their well-defined niches in a broad market.

One of the most time-honored is the 3,044-room The Mirage, which delivers its first blast of wow factor upon arrival with its impressive volcano. Its 90,000-sf Mirage Events Center features ballrooms of 10,000 sf, 20,000 sf and 60,000 sf. The hotel’s unique venues include Jet Nightclub and Revolution Lounge. Special attractions include Dolphin Habitat.

Not far away is sister MGM Resorts International property MGM Grand Las Vegas — one of the city’s most famous landmarks. With 5,034 rooms and 602,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space, MGM Grand served as co-headquarters hotel, along with sister property Mandalay Bay, for ADA annual meetings in 2006 and again this year. “The two properties did a wonderful job for us five years ago, so we went back,” says Goodman. “Our attendees and exhibitors were very happy with the service they received. MGM Resorts has been absolutely phenomenal to work with.”

Yet another time-tested landmark property is the 2,992-room, AAA Four Diamond Monte Carlo Las Vegas Resort & Casino, with 30,000 sf of meeting space. The Monte Carlo also boasts HOTEL32,

an exclusive boutique hotel within the hotel, delivering rare privacy via a VIP celebrity-style entrance. Monte Carlo, too, offers a full-service spa, which has become an almost universal amenity at Las Vegas hotels.

Tri-State Home Furnishings Association’s Myers has been a loyal Monte Carlo customer for 14 meetings over the last seven years. “The staff is second to none,” he says. “They have gone above and beyond for me and just made it so easy that I don’t even think about trying any other hotels. The service at Monte Carlo is that good. And it’s all thanks to the group sales department and the consistent delivery of excellent meeting services.”

Planners looking for something different often opt for the 2,163-room South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa, which features 150,000 sf of meeting space housed in a South Point Conference Center and exhibit/banquet complex. As unique, fun amenities, the hotel offers a 16-screen Cineplex showing the latest movies; a modern, 64-lane bowling center; and a state-of-the-art arena/equestrian center facility. Its spa is the stylish Spa Costa Del Sur.

Another option for something truly singular is the 2,024-room New York-New York Hotel & Casino, with 21,500 sf of meeting space. The hotel lovingly and accurately re-creates the world-famous Manhattan skyline with a dozen mini-skyscrapers. Appropriately, guest rooms offer breathtaking views of the fabled Strip. Its flagship entertainment offering is Cirque du Soleil’s long-running and very popular Zumanity.

Located just a block off The Strip, The Westin Casuarina Las Vegas Hotel, Casino & Spa positions itself as “a calm sanctuary amidst the bustle of Las Vegas.” Although its 826 rooms would make it a fairly large hotel in any other city, in Las Vegas that qualifies as relative intimacy for small and medium-sized groups. The Westin Casuarina is also known for pampering its meeting hosts and attendees, whether than means exemplary, personalized service or Westin’s signature 10-layer Heavenly Bed.

The hotel offers 20,000 sf of meeting

and function space, including a 7,000-sf ballroom that can be configured into four individual meeting rooms, plus 10 multifunction meeting rooms. The facilities feature high-speed Internet access, video conferencing capabilities and onsite audiovisual services.

Despite such an illustrious list of standout

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**“Historically, if you look at our attendance over the last 20 years, Las Vegas is one of the destinations that generates the highest attendance.”**

James Goodman  
Managing Vice President, Conference and Meeting Services  
American Dental Association, Chicago, IL



Phelps Hope  
Vice President, Meetings and Expositions  
Kellen Company  
Atlanta, GA

**“The benefit for the association meetings market of the slump was that Las Vegas opened its doors a little more to some lower room rates and reduced the room to meeting space ratios, which meant they were more amenable to negotiating with midrange associations that traditionally had a tough time getting into Las Vegas.”**

properties, each with its own unique merits for the right group, there are two adjacent sister properties that virtually define the best Las Vegas has to offer — the 2,716-room Wynn Las Vegas and the 2,034-room Encore at Wynn Las Vegas. Together, the properties combine sophisticated comfort, the latest in technology and a list of blue-chip amenities that would impress any meeting planner.

When it comes to top entertainment, Wynn and Encore again vie consistently for the title of greatest show in town. Le Reve, Wynn’s flagship presentation, rivals Cirque du Soleil as the most spectacular “spectacular” in town. And recently, Wynn has added a new long-running show from Garth Brooks. For after-dinner socializing, night-clubs XS and Surrender are as good as it gets.

And always working to improve upon its already stellar reputation among meeting planners and attendees, Wynn will complete a \$499 million renovation this year.

#### NEW AND RENOVATED

As the meeting industry began to recover last year, a number of Las Vegas properties launched aggressive renovations in order to be fully competitive, in a very competitive market, once business got back to normal.

Last February, Dolce Hotels unveiled the 349-room Ravella at Lake Las Vegas, located 17 miles from The Strip on the site of the former Ritz-Carlton, Lake Las Vegas. Meanwhile, Aston Hotels & Resorts has taken over the 347-room, all-suite Montelago Village Resort at Lake Las Vegas, with 10,000 sf of meeting space.

New owner K Hotels has completed a multi-

million-dollar renovation of 2,885-room Treasure Island, with 18,000 sf of meeting space.

After halting construction during the recession, Caesars Palace will open its much-anticipated new Octavius Tower in January 2012, featuring 665 rooms and 17 suites. Nobu, the super-upscale sushi restaurant brand created by Nobu Matsuhisa and Robert De Niro, is developing the world’s first Nobu boutique hotel in a tower at Caesars, just as Four Seasons pioneered the hotel-within-a-hotel concept with four floors of Mandalay Bay. The new Nobu Hotel, Restaurant and Lounge will make its highly anticipated debut next summer.

The 2,444-room Stratosphere Las Vegas has completed a \$20 million renovation. The 2,526-room Harrah’s Las Vegas has completed a renovation of its 25,000 sf of meeting space. The 2,814-room Bally’s Las Vegas has remodeled its Grand Ballroom and Event Center.

One of the more talked-about renovations has been the creative redevelopment of the historic Tropicana, one of the few remaining architectural icons of Las Vegas. The hotel’s new owners have completed a \$125 million facelift that has restored the property to its past glory.

Now, the landmark, 2,072-room Riviera Hotel & Casino — another of the remaining symbols of the city — is undergoing a major renovation.

The 3,933-room Bellagio — another crown jewel property — is currently in the final stages of a \$70 million renovation of its 2,568 resort rooms in the main tower, which will be completed in December.

Caesars Entertainment, which operates Caesars Palace and other highly regarded major meeting hotels including Paris Las Vegas and Rio, is now developing a project that city officials say will redefine the Las Vegas Strip yet again — the \$550 million, 200,000-sf Linq retail, dining and entertainment complex, which will take shape across the street from Caesars Palace and open in 2013.

Meanwhile, often overlooked downtown Las Vegas is also undergoing a rejuvenation. The 40-year-old, 1,037-room Plaza Hotel & Casino, with 25,000 sf of meeting space, recently reopened to much fanfare after a \$35 million renovation. Also, the longest continuously running downtown hotel-casino in Las Vegas, the 297-room El Cortez Hotel & Casino, has completed its own \$30 million renovation. AC&F

# SOUTH POINT

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Churchill

**Michael Snapkoski** was named director of sales and marketing for Lansdowne Resort Leesburg, VA. He was vice president of sales and marketing for Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, National Harbor, MD.

**Bryan Churchill** was named vice president of hotel sales at LA INC. The Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau. He was previously with Marriott International where he was area sales leader.



O'Connor

**Joan Esneault** was named director of sales and marketing for the New Orleans Marriott, New Orleans, LA. She was vice president of resort sales at Foxwoods Resort Casino and MGM Grand Foxwoods in Mashantucket, CT.

**Wade Thompson** was named director of sales and marketing for the new Embassy Suites St. Louis Downtown, St. Louis, MO. He was director of sales and marketing for The Westin St. Louis.



Callahan

**David Townshend** was promoted to senior vice president, global sales for Marriott International. He most recently served as senior vice president, corporate and international sales, where he was responsible for Marriott's top global corporate and national association accounts, as well as the international sales offices.

The Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau has named **Robin O'Connor** as assistant director of sales. She was manager of global accounts with HelmsBriscoe.

**Gene T. Hare** was named director of sales, event sales center for the Hiltons of Chicago Complex. His most recent assignment was as director of sales and marketing of Oak Brook Hotels & Resorts, St. Charles, IL.

**Brittany Callahan** has joined the Tampa Bay & Company convention sales team as national sales manager. She is responsible for federal government, social, hobby, educational and fraternal groups. She was sales manager for The Westin Tampa Harbour Island.

**Paul Pelican** was named director of sales for The Westin Westminster, Westminster, CO. He was director of sales at the Sheraton Denver Downtown.

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ARIA Resort & Casino	866-718-2489	<a href="http://www.ariasvegas.com">www.ariasvegas.com</a>	Tony Yousfi	<a href="mailto:meetings@ariasvegas.com">meetings@ariasvegas.com</a>
Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa	609-317-7729	<a href="http://www.theborgata.com">www.theborgata.com</a>	Group Sales	<a href="mailto:meetings@theborgata.com">meetings@theborgata.com</a>
The Broadmoor	719-577-5777	<a href="http://www.broadmoor.com">www.broadmoor.com</a>	John Rovie	<a href="mailto:jrovie@broadmoor.com">jrovie@broadmoor.com</a>
Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau	800-933-8448	<a href="http://www.miamimeetings.com">www.miamimeetings.com</a>	Ileana Castillo	<a href="mailto:ileana@miamimeetings.com">ileana@miamimeetings.com</a>
Greensboro Area Convention & Visitors Bureau	800-344-2282	<a href="http://www.visitgreensboronc.com">www.visitgreensboronc.com</a>	Ava Pope	<a href="mailto:apope@visitgreensboronc.com">apope@visitgreensboronc.com</a>
Hilton Orlando	407-313-4300	<a href="http://www.thehiltonorlando.com">www.thehiltonorlando.com</a>	William McKay	<a href="mailto:orloc-salesadm@hilton.com">orloc-salesadm@hilton.com</a>
Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino	800-545-6040	<a href="http://www.innofthemountaingods.com">www.innofthemountaingods.com</a>	Jo Kazhe	<a href="mailto:jokazhe@innofthemountaingods.com">jokazhe@innofthemountaingods.com</a>
Jack Fiala's Corporate Sidekicks	877-856-1160	<a href="http://www.corporatesidekicks.com">www.corporatesidekicks.com</a>	Jack Fiala	<a href="mailto:jack@corporatesidekicks.com">jack@corporatesidekicks.com</a>
Loews Hotels at Universal Orlando	888-322-5531	<a href="http://www.uomeetingsandevents.com">www.uomeetingsandevents.com</a>	Group Sales	<a href="mailto:meetings@universalorlando.com">meetings@universalorlando.com</a>
Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau	800-452-7829	<a href="http://www.visitlongbeach.com">www.visitlongbeach.com</a>	Iris Himert	<a href="mailto:irish@longbeachcvb.org">irish@longbeachcvb.org</a>
MGM Grand Las Vegas	800-929-1112	<a href="http://www.mgmgrand.com">www.mgmgrand.com</a>	Ruth Leis	<a href="mailto:hotelsalesleads@lv.mgmgrand.com">hotelsalesleads@lv.mgmgrand.com</a>
The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club	800-866-1946	<a href="http://www.naplesbeachhotel.com">www.naplesbeachhotel.com</a>	Group Sales	<a href="mailto:groupsales@naplesbeachhotel.com">groupsales@naplesbeachhotel.com</a>
New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center	504-582-3023	<a href="http://www.mccno.com">www.mccno.com</a>	Keith Levey	<a href="mailto:m-s@mccno.com">m-s@mccno.com</a>
Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau	405-297-8912	<a href="http://www.visitokc.com">www.visitokc.com</a>	Elizabeth Richardson	<a href="mailto:erichardson@okccvb.org">erichardson@okccvb.org</a>
Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate	407-238-6526	<a href="http://www.omnihotels.com/findahotel/orlando-championsgate/meetingfacilities.aspx">www.omnihotels.com/findahotel/orlando-championsgate/meetingfacilities.aspx</a>	Group Sales	<a href="mailto:mcocha.leads@omnihotels.com">mcocha.leads@omnihotels.com</a>
Palm Beach County Convention & Visitors Bureau	561-329-3753	<a href="http://www.palmbeachfl.com">www.palmbeachfl.com</a>	Donna Del Gallo	<a href="mailto:ddelgallo@palmbeachfl.com">ddelgallo@palmbeachfl.com</a>
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Rosen Centre Hotel	407-996-9939	<a href="http://www.rosencentre.com">www.rosencentre.com</a>	Todd Frappier	<a href="mailto:sales@rosenhoteles.com">sales@rosenhoteles.com</a>
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