

Corporate & Incentive Travel

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

High-Seas Meetings & Incentives

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Offering More 'Wow'**

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Corporate Incentive Travel

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

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Photo courtesy of QuickMobile

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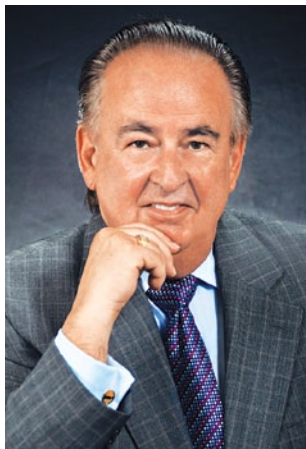
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Optimism Reigns

Every two months Meeting Professionals International (MPI) publishes its Business Barometer, which tracks actual business conditions and business outlooks year-to-year by surveying a select group of senior-level meeting professionals culled from its 22,000-member global community.



The February survey reports the highest increase in optimism since April 2009, and predictions for the future continue to improve at a faster rate than at any time since 2008. For example, 68 percent of respondents indicated a year-on-year improvement in favorable conditions, up from 66 percent in December 2010 and 62 percent in October 2010. And only 15 percent of event professionals indicate unfavorable conditions compared to a year ago, down from 16 percent in December 2010 and 17 percent in October 2010.

Which all goes to point out that this is the time to toot our horns and maintain one voice about "the power and value of the ME&I industry" as Maritz Travel's Chris Gaia so aptly argues in his guest column on page 10. Gaia presents compelling science-based research that "shows that businesses needing to capture an audience's attention, inspire a positive emotional climate, and build human networks and relationships within their business can best be achieved in a face-to-face setting."

Planners everywhere know that meetings at sea afford some of the best opportunities to stage face-to-face events and incentives. Planners featured in "High Seas Meetings & Incentives" (page 12) know they get "more bang for their buck" by holding meetings on cruise ships that combine a relaxing experience with the convenience of a one-stop-shop for one set price. Launched last year, Celebrity Cruises' Eclipse (shown on our cover this issue) is the newest ship in their Solstice class. It features special amenities such as Celebrity iLounge, an Internet café offering easy access to the Internet; and fresh green grass on the top deck's Lawn Club. One planner appreciated the size of the ship's lounge, which was large enough to fit all the participants for the company's awards ceremony.

Visit premiere mountain resorts in "Altitude Adjustment" (page 32); and stop by in Orlando (page 36) for an update on the destination planners and attendees rate No. 1.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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Optimistic Outlook for Orlando Meetings

ORLANDO, FL — Visit Orlando executives released an optimistic forecast for the city's meetings and conventions industry based on positive trending for year-end 2010 and expected business travel increases in 2011. Business travel to Orlando is forecasted to increase 2.3 percent in 2011 to 3.34 million and 4.8 percent in 2012 to 3.62 million. "Upticks across several key indicators demonstrate real strength and growth for Orlando's meetings and conventions community. Orlando is attracting an increasing variety of meetings, more international attendees, particularly from Latin America, and renewed meeting planner interest



Sain

driven by Orlando's high value and affordability," said Gary Sain, president and CEO of Visit Orlando. "Orlando was a bullish destination during the economic downturn, adding new hotels at all price points and new amenities for the meetings industry, and the meetings industry is responding to Orlando's unique energy, excitement and diversification." During the recession, Orlando invested more than \$4 billion in new infrastructure projects, from meeting hotels to the new Amway Center to the Medical City complex. www.visitorlando.com/cvb

Moody's Says The Las Vegas Strip Recovery to Continue

NEW YORK, NY — Moody's Investors Service has good news for The Las Vegas Strip. As reported in the *Las Vegas Sun*, Moody's market update predicts that the gaming industry recovery will continue this year and accelerate in 2012, despite some slowing from higher costs driven by climbing oil prices. Other factors that may affect the pace of recovery include the influx of more than 4,000 new hotel rooms, aggressive pricing and promotion strategies by new owners, and the struggles of highly leveraged operators. "The real upturn in profits will not begin until 2012," Moody's reported.

Hard Rock Hotel at Universal Orlando Celebrates 10th Anniversary



ORLANDO, FL — (Left to right) Carlton Hudson, general manager, Hard Rock Hotel at Universal Orlando; Jonathan Tisch, chairman & CEO, Loews Hotels; Tom Williams, chairman & CEO Universal Parks & Resorts; Mark McGrath of Sugar Ray; and Hamish Dodds, president & CEO, Hard Rock International, at the 10th anniversary of the Hard Rock Hotel at Universal Orlando. The highlight of the birthday bash was a special performance by Sugar Ray at Velvet Sessions, Hard Rock Hotel's special rock 'n' roll cocktail party and lobby concert held the last Thursday of every month.

Nationwide Meetings Directs 5 Percent Back to Groups

LAS VEGAS, NV — Andrew Pepper, the president and CEO of Las Vegas-based Nationwide Meetings, recently announced that the company will redirect its 5 percent commission from its preferred venues to groups booking through the company. "Not a single dollar of commissions will go to Nationwide from its preferred venues," said Pepper. "Our interest in a tough economy for so many of our hotel and meeting planner partners is to provide less obstacles and more revenue for both as we all move forward in business together."

Nationwide Meetings' preferred venues include convention hotels, resorts and boutique properties, including venues such as The Broadmoor, The American Club, The Coeur d' Alene Resort, Kiawah Island Golf Resort, The Lodge at Torrey Pines and Disney Resorts. For further information, e-mail info@nationwidemeetings.com.

Wynn Las Vegas Remodeling from Top to Bottom

LAS VEGAS, NV — As is his custom, Wynn Resorts CEO Steve Wynn calls for a complete remodel of his resorts before guests notice any wear and tear. According to the *Las Vegas Sun*, Wynn Las Vegas' 2,700 hotel rooms and suites are undergoing a complete makeover, which is scheduled to be completed by summer. To date, renovations are complete in Wynn Las Vegas' Resort Tower and are more than 50 percent complete in the hotel's AAA Five Diamond-rated Tower Suites. Wynn Design and Development Executive Vice President Roger Thomas, who has worked for Wynn for 30 years, custom-designed the rooms. www.wynnlasvegas.com

MEETING VALUES



Silverado Resort and Spa, Napa, CA.

The Legendary Napa Valley Package offers planners 10 percent off the master bill, and a complimentary 30-minute private wine and cheese reception. As part of Dolce Hotels and Resorts, Silverado offers the Complete Meetings Package, starting at \$259/person, that includes guest room, Continental breakfast and buffet lunch, continuous refreshment breaks, meeting room and AV, Wi-Fi, and more. Meetings must have minimum of 10 rooms and must be consumed by June 30, 2011. 800-532-0500, www.silveradoresort.com

■ **South Beach Marriott, Miami Beach, FL.** Planners who book a 2011 meeting with more than 75 cumulative room nights and F&B by June 1 receive the following: 35 percent attrition allowance; 2 percent rebate to master; triple Marriott reward points; 5 percent discount on 2011 F&B menus; and 10 percent discount on AV pricing. Meetings booked between June 1 and September 30, 2011 also receive comp Internet in guest rooms; and additional 5 percent off F&B and AV. 305-536-7700

■ **The Sea Pines Resort, Hilton Head Island, SC.** Planners who book a 2011 or 2012 meeting with room revenue of \$15,000 by May 31, 2011 receive: \$1,000 credit to master account; one-hour cocktail reception; 1/25 comp room; two comp foursomes for golf; comp meeting space and welcome amenities; 15 percent off catering; 20 percent off AV; comp wireless Internet; comp tennis; comp valet parking; double resort reward points; and more. 800-732-7463, www.seapines.com

■ **Portofino Hotel and Yacht Club, Redondo Beach, CA.** Meetings booked now through April 30, 2011 receive complimentary welcome reception; complimentary meeting room rental; two upgrades to Ocean Premier rooms with amenities; 1/25 comp room; overnight stay with breakfast for two; wireless Internet for all attendees; and dinner for two in BALEENLosAngeles. Meetings must be actualized by December 31, 2011. 310-798-5875, www.hotelportofino.com

Events Calendar

APRIL 13-14, 2011
HOSPITALITY SALES AND MARKETING ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL AFFORDABLE MEETINGS MID-AMERICA
 Navy Pier
 Chicago, IL
 Contact: 914-421-3270
www.affordablemeetings.com

APRIL 27-MAY 1, 2011
INCENTIVE RESEARCH FOUNDATION INCENTIVE INVITATIONAL
 Aria Resort & Casino
 Las Vegas, NV
 Contact: 314-473-5601
www.theirf.org

MAY 24-26, 2011
IMEX — THE WORLDWIDE EXHIBITION FOR INCENTIVE TRAVEL, MEETINGS AND EVENTS
 Messe Frankfurt
 Germany
 Contact: (011) 44-1273-227311
www.imex-frankfurt.com

JUNE 2, 2011
DMAI DESTINATIONS SHOWCASE CHICAGO
 Donald E. Stephens Convention Center
 Rosemont, IL
 Contact: 202-296-7888
www.destinationsshowcase.com

JULY 23-26, 2011
MEETING PROFESSIONALS INTERNATIONAL WORLD EDUCATION CONGRESS
 Orange County Convention Center
 Orlando, FL
 Contact: 972-702-3053
www.mpiweb.org

OCTOBER 11-13, 2011
IMEX AMERICA
 Sands Expo at the Venetian/Palazzo Hotel
 Las Vegas, NV
 Contact: +44 1273 227311
www.imexamerica.com

OCTOBER 13-15, 2011
SITE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
 Bellagio
 Las Vegas, NV
 Contact: 312-321-5148
www.siteglobal.com



Tom
Martin

QR Codes: The Next Best Thing

How Quick Response Codes Can Create Quick Responses to Your Next Meeting

Many major national marketers are beginning to test quick response (QR) codes in their marketing programs. In fact, a 2010 study by Burson-Marsteller showed that 22 percent of Fortune 50 companies in the U.S. are actively using QR codes in their marketing efforts. And QR codes are likely to become more commonplace in marketing during 2011 and beyond. We're already seeing major retail chains such as BestBuy and Sears making use of QR codes in their advertising, which will serve to educate

two-dimensional barcodes. Other types of two-dimensional codes include JagTags, MS Tags and Stickybits. Many mobile phones in the U.S. are now starting to be equipped with pre-installed QR code reader software. For consumers who do not have the software installed on their mobile phone, there are a number of free readers such as ScanLife or i-nigma, which consumers can download for free.

Like many of today's mobile technologies, when used properly, QR can improve how you market your meeting, attendee

QR codes are something every meeting planner should be watching.

the American public and help them become more familiar with the technology. With the technology finding its way into the hands of consumers throughout the world, QR codes are something every meeting planner should be watching. In fact, the technology could just be the best thing that ever happened to your meeting.

What is a QR Code?

QR codes are two-dimensional, black and white codes that are readable by dedicated QR barcode readers and camera phones. The code consists of black modules arranged in a square pattern on a white background. The information encoded can be text, URL or other data.

The QR code was created in Japan, by Toyota subsidiary Denso-Wave in 1994 and is one of the most popular types of

networking at your event and even save you money.

How to Use a QR Code

So how can you use these codes to better market your next meeting? Here are four examples to get you started.

- **Marketing your speakers.** The single best usage of QR codes is leveraging their ability to turn print into video. So for your next meeting, edit together a highlight reel of your speakers so prospective attendees can get a glimpse of the high quality content they'll receive. This is especially useful when you're trying to save a bit of money by booking lesser-known speakers who despite their lack of name recognition are nonetheless powerful and informative speakers. Go ahead, scan code No. 1 (right) and see what you get.

To scan the codes with your smart phone, download a free reader at www.i-nigma.com

- **Mobile-friendly registration.** Research shows that we Americans love our mobile phones. In fact, they're often within 5 feet of us at all times. Take advantage of that the next time you run an ad promoting your meeting. Include a QR code tied to a mobile friendly event registration site such as the one you'll see if you scan code No. 2. Don't rely on your attendee to remember a phone number, or a website or an e-mail address, tear out the ad or anything else. If your ad has convinced them, book them right then and there.
- **Help attendees network.** Major meetings and conventions are as much about networking as learning. But let's face it,

costs. One of the things I always hate at conferences is the schedule. I hate carrying it with me because it's just one more thing to keep up with. Luckily, when I attended the Social Medium Tourism Symposium (affectionately known as the SoMeT) this fall, organizer David Serino of Gammet Interactive used QR codes to solve my problem. My name badge came complete with QR code No. 4. Scan it. You'll see how he saved a ton of trees, a bit of money and made my life a lot easier. Why not do the same for your attendees?

Regardless of how you use QR codes, the key item to remember is context. These codes are scanned by mobile phones, so

The single best usage of QR codes is leveraging their ability to turn print into video.

typing or scanning in all those business cards to our contacts file and then syncing with our smart phone is, well kind of a pain. Why not make it easy on your attendees? Just issue each of them a QR code when they register and print it on their name tag. Now when they meet someone they'd like to follow up with, each person needs only scan the other person's tag, and presto! a vCard appears on each person's phone. They click "save to contacts" and they're now connected. Go ahead, try it by scanning my QR Business Card (code No. 3).

- **Save a tree and money on printing**

make sure whatever website or content you point the code towards is mobile friendly. That is probably the single biggest mistake marketers are making right now. They include a QR code in an ad, on a piece of collateral or a sign, and that code takes the consumer to a regular website that isn't readable on a mobile phone.

These are just a few examples to get your mind turning. I promise you, there are lots of additional ways you can use QR codes in the planning and execution of your next meeting or convention. But you won't know if you don't try...so it's high time to get started.

C&IT

Tom Martin is the founder of Converse Digital, a digital marketing firm that helps companies understand how to leverage digital tools such as QR codes to create more effective marketing. You can follow him on Twitter @TomMartin or subscribe to his blog, <http://www.HelpMyBrand.com> to learn more.

①



②



③



④





Chris
Gaia

Strive to Maintain One Voice

About the Power and Value of the ME&I Industry

For the travel industry, 2010 proved to be a year of renewal, energy and growth. We've faced some challenging and dark days the past couple years; yet in 2010, the economy began to recover, business started to come back, and the meetings, events and incentive travel (ME&I) industry made great strides in helping policymakers, business leaders and consumers understand and embrace the value created by ME&I programs. Now that 2011 is in full swing, it's critical that those of us within the travel industry — meeting professionals, hoteliers, airline employees — maintain one voice to speak on behalf of the economic and motivational value travel brings to business and this country.

There are federal programs that have an impact on the entire travel industry, including meetings, events and incentive travel. The reality of global business travel to and within the U.S., for example, has become increasingly cumbersome due to unpleasant experiences with security screenings, U.S. visa issuance, and crowded and delayed flights.

Improving Passenger Screenings

To address the security screenings, the U.S. Travel Association convened a Blue Ribbon Panel for Aviation Security comprised of industry and security experts and former government officials to make recommendations on how to improve air travel security in a way that maintains security and minimizes the burden on travelers. On March 16, 2011, the U.S. Travel Association releases a final report that in-

cludes a broad set of recommendations to improve passenger security screening. One of the key recommendations in the report calls on the federal government to create a "trusted traveler" program that would allow passengers passing a background check to utilize a checkpoint lane with less intensive screening. Under the U.S. Travel Association proposal, the trusted traveler program would be administered by the federal government, include a risk-based approach and provide for variations in the TSA screening process.

Power of Travel Coalition

Also during the first part of the year, the U.S. Travel Association's Meetings, Incentives & Tradeshow (MIT) Council has concentrated its efforts on collaboration with exhibition industry organizations to explore opportunities to cooperate on matters of mutual interest to the industry. The U.S. Travel Association continues to encourage enrollment into the Power of Travel Coalition, the grass roots effort of individuals whose jobs depend on the travel industry and whose purpose is to champion, protect and improve travel and tourism, including the meetings industry trade associations. In addition, it has begun proactive outreach to the White House to amend the General Services Administration's policy discouraging government travel in the name of protecting the environment.

But we can't stop there. For our efforts to succeed, all meetings associations within the industry must engage with one another to educate and inform business lead-

ers and consumers on the value of ME&I programs. We must develop advocates among a larger group of business leaders as to the value ME&I programs create through energizing and engaging employees, channel partners and customers. We must focus on educating and earning the support of policymakers for meetings, incentives and trade shows through ongoing communications and data that documents the economic impact to each state and congressional district. We must develop re-

Maritz is partnering with several industry associations and our client companies to expand on this research. Specifically, we will conduct primary research on the positive emotional climate created by effectively designed and well-run meetings, events and incentives. By connecting the emotional and psychological benefits of meetings to improvements in attendee attitudes, intentions and subsequent behaviors, we can provide our industry with an expanded level of understanding of how

We must focus on educating and earning the support of policymakers.

search and communication initiatives that take a more rigorous approach into measuring and showcasing the ROI and ROO businesses achieve from meetings, events and incentive travel.

The Case for Face to Face

This effort has just begun. For example, Maritz Travel and The Maritz Institute recently partnered with the Cornell Center for Hospitality Research to develop and publish the white paper, "The Future of Meetings: The Case for Face to Face," which focuses on a science-based approach for deciding when face-to-face meetings are the most effective means to drive business results. The findings show that businesses needing to capture an audiences' attention, inspire a positive emotional climate, and build human networks and relationships within their business can best be achieved in a face-to-face setting.

As a follow-up to the white paper,

these investments create value, and how clients can design more engaging experiences for their attendees.

Economic Impact

Additionally, the U.S. Travel Association and Convention Industry Council recently released a study highlighting the industry's economic impact on the U.S. economy. The study "The Economic Significance of Meetings to the U.S. Economy" found that our industry contributes \$106 billion in GDP and can be a significant contributor to growth and reducing unemployment.

These types of research studies are just two examples of the work that the industry must undertake and promote in order to create and maintain one voice. In so doing, we as meeting professionals can better demonstrate the value meetings, events and incentive travel programs have on achieving effective results for businesses, their people and our country. **C&IT**

Chris Gaia, vice president of marketing, Maritz Travel, manages product development, events strategy, industry relations and the overall reputation of Maritz Travel. www.maritz.com

High Seas Meetings & Incentives

Cruise Lines Now Offering More 'Wow'

No one can say that the cruise industry hasn't done its share to keep the economy afloat. According to the Cruise Lines Industry Association (CLIA), the industry's total economic benefit to the U.S. economy was \$35.1 billion in 2009, the latest year for which figures are available.

In fact, cruising is the fastest growing segment of the travel industry. More than 100 new ships have been launched since 2000, offering an ever-expanding array of ports of call and shipboard amenities, including Internet cafes, luxurious spas, themed restaurants and even rock-climbing walls.

Despite the recession, cruise bookings for incentive programs have remained strong. "Our business pretty much stayed even from 2007 to 2010," states Shari Wallack, president of Buy The Sea, a Plantation, FL-based cruise brokerage firm that specializes in incentive programs. "2010 would have been an amazing year, but because of all the cancellations, it was just a great year. The best part of the story is that in 2011 we doubled our 2010 business."

Appealing Amenities

"The cruise world has totally changed in the past 10 years," she adds. "The new vessels are so innovative, and, for lack of a better word, more hotel-like in terms of facilities, that it's an easier sell." She cited Royal Caribbean International's Oasis of the Seas and its new sister ship, Allure of the Seas, which just entered service in December as examples.

Top to bottom: Royal Caribbean's newest ship Allure of the Seas showcases DreamWorks Animation character parades; Norwegian Cruise Line's new Epic ship features Cirque Dreams and Dinner in the Spiegel Tent; Celebrity Cruises' newest ship the Eclipse offers elegant dining in the Moonlight Sonata room; Allure of the Seas' AquaTheater; and Regent Seven Seas' Mariner cruises by nature's orca show.

"Some groups say, 'We've done Atlantis, we've done Las Vegas, and we've got a group of several thousand people, what do we do with them?' I can show them something that will blow everyone's mind," Wallack says.

The 5,400-passenger Allure of the Seas spans 16 decks and is divided into seven "neighborhoods" such as Central Park, Boardwalk, the Royal Promenade and the Pool and Sports Zone. One of the Allure's many entertainment choices is a show called OceanAria, which is performed in the ship's open-air AquaTheater. "It's a water acrobatic show with laser lights that's so out-of-the-box," Wallack notes. "I can't even believe what they've been able to do at sea."

No one knows the wow factor like DreamWorks Animation, which has partnered with Royal Caribbean to produce OceanAria and other onboard parades, ice shows and experiences with the film studio's characters. The Allure also features the first at-sea Broadway production of "Chicago: The Musical."

Pros and Cons of Chartering

While cruising offers a multitude of ship sizes, amenities and itineraries to choose from, the first decision planners need to make is whether to charter a private cruise or book a portion of a larger ship for their program. There are pros and cons to each side.

"With a charter, you have control, with-in reason, of where you go and when you leave," Wallack says. "It's great if you really have a grip on your numbers, because you can pick the ship with the right capacity for your group. But if you're just starting out doing incentives, you need to start with group space. It will give you the flexibility to have attrition." Wallack adds that she has chartered everything from a small, 50-person tour of the Greek Islands to a buyout of a 3,600-passenger ship.

Ashely Muntan, CMP, event marketing manager for the Atlanta, GA, technology company Symantec, worked with Wallack to charter a Crystal cruise for an incentive



Celebrity Solstice is the ship of choice for Symantec's upcoming six-night incentive program. The Solstice's two sister ships, Equinox and Eclipse, launched in 2009 and 2010, respectively.

program. "We maxed out the ship with about 1,400 people," she notes. Crystal is a luxury cruise line that prides itself on offering exceptional service, spacious staterooms and gourmet cuisine.

"Crystal is absolutely amazing. If you take over that entire ship, you can customize it for your event," she says. "When you go to a hotel, you're never the only one there. When we were on this charter, it was so cool because everywhere we would go, it would be our people."

Even though the charter was a great experience, Symantec has chosen to host its next cruise program on a larger ship. "Whenever you do an incentive, there's no way to know exactly how many people are going to qualify, so we need some scalability in our numbers," Muntan explains. "On a (chartered) cruise, if you don't fill some of your cabins, you're still paying for them, and if you have 800 winners and only 700 cabins, you're in trouble."

Wallack notes that because many cruise lines have more ships they are now more willing to do a charter for as little as four to five nights. "Seabourn is a good example of that. They just added two ships, and they're adding a third. Compagnie du

Ponant is a great company that no one knows about. It's a European company based in France. They're a nice alternative to the high-end luxury market.

"The ships are gorgeous and yacht-like and they can go into small ports of call," she continues. "They've just built two ships that hold 263 passengers that they will charter to you for any length. One of the special features is the ability to convert 40 cabins into 20 suites. The whole wall slides open between two cabins to make one 400-sf suite."

The Big Ship Experience

For its next incentive program, Symantec has booked the 2,850-passenger Celebrity Solstice for a six-night cruise in the Mediterranean. "I find it a shame that people don't look at Celebrity more," Wallack notes. "It's got gorgeous interiors, wonderful food, great service, beautiful cabins. I would go out on a limb and say they're the prettiest new ships on the water in the large-ship class."

The Solstice first set sail in 2008. Its



Symantec chartered a Crystal cruise to the Greek Islands for 1,400 attendees that allowed them to customize the entire experience for the group.

two sister ships, the Celebrity Equinox and Celebrity Eclipse, launched in 2009 and 2010, respectively. Amenities of the Solstice class ships include accommodations with verandas and spacious bathrooms, the AquaSpa and The Lawn Club, a country club-style venue offering lawn bowling and a putting green on real grass.

By Karen Brost

Two more Solstice class ships, the Celebrity Silhouette and Celebrity Reflection, will be introduced in 2011 and 2012.

"When I presented the large group experience, one of the benefits was that we can take over the show lounge and do an awards ceremony," Muntan explains, noting that smaller ships don't have a venue large enough to hold the entire group at one time. "That was one thing our management was missing (on the charter)...doing some kind of recognition in front of the spouses."

Muntan acknowledges that when they're on a larger ship, they'll lose some of the intimacy they had as a group on the charter. "We know we're going to lose some of that 'one team' feeling, but we had to just try it and see how it works."

Apparently, it worked quite well for Terry Miller, event manager for Plano, TX-based Wellness International Network Ltd., who planned a combination incentive program/company anniversary celebration on the Celebrity Solstice in October. He has been booking cruises for his company's annual sales incentive program for about eight years, and cites the savings over land-based programs as one of the key reasons. He has used a number of different cruise lines, including Silversea, Crystal and Royal Caribbean.

"It was one of the best experiences I've ever had holding an event on a ship anywhere in the world," he says. "Normally, when you have an event onboard, you're basically dealing with the onboard coordinator. That's pretty much the only person you have access to as far as making sure your event goes off without a hitch. From the moment we stepped onboard Celebrity, we had our onboard meeting set up, and everybody from the hotel director all the



"When you go to a hotel, you're never the only one there. When we were on this charter, it was so cool because everywhere we would go, it would be our people."

Ashely Muntan, CMP, Event Marketing Manager
Symantec, Atlanta, GA

way down to the event coordinator was in the room and we went through everything step by step."

Miller noted that Celebrity's staff showed up at the start of every event, including a black-tie award presentation held in the ship's main theater. "They all made sure that my events went off perfectly."

Since Miller's guest list can at times include nearly 100 children, he also plans kid-friendly events. "We'll do scavenger hunts so the kids can get to know each other and get comfortable. For a lot of them, it's their first time sailing," he notes.

Dream Cruise

One of the most highly anticipated ships to debut in 2011 is the 4,000-passenger Disney Dream. The first new Disney ship to launch in more than 10

ship, the Disney Fantasy, is scheduled to begin service in 2012.

In true Disney style, the Dream features plenty of innovative touches. Inside staterooms are equipped with "virtual portholes" that give passengers a view of the ocean in real time along with glimpses of Disney characters floating by. Another unique attraction is the Skyline bar that displays the sunset over a different city skyline every day.

"Enchanted art is another cool concept," explains David Giardino, spokesperson for Disney Worldwide Sales & Travel Operations. "It's artwork that comes to life when you walk by it. Your room card triggers it. It might be two pirate ships and all of a sudden they go into battle. As long as you have your room card with you, it knows who you are so you'll never see the same thing twice." The enchanted art is activated by RFID technology embedded in the room keys.

In another cruise-line first, the Disney Dream features a water-coaster ride called AquaDuck. From 12 decks up, the ride propels guests through an acrylic tube that goes out over the side of the ship and then drops down four decks into a lazy river.

Suzanne Evers, manager of meetings and travel for Reliv International Inc. in Chesterfield, MO, booked the Dream sight unseen for her March 2011 incentive program for approximately 100 guests. "We're very excited about it," she says. "We were on the Disney Wonder in March of 2010 and had a wonderful time. Our distribu-



Reliv International Inc.'s program participants pose onboard the Disney Wonder during their March 2010 cruise.

years, the art deco-inspired Dream began offering three-, four- and five-night cruises from Port Canaveral, FL, to the Bahamas and Disney's private island, Castaway Cay, in late January. Its sister



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The new Norwegian Epic arrives in Miami. The innovative ship offers multifunctional public spaces to accommodate groups of any size.



Photo courtesy of Disney Cruise Lines

tors just raved about it and wanted to go back. When Disney came out with their new Dream, we were even more intrigued and wanted to do that. It's a little bit bigger and they have more things to do. Knowing Disney as we do, it was an easy decision. No one does anything better than Disney."

Evers listed some of the advantages of booking a cruise for an incentive program. "No. 1, being all-inclusive makes it easy operationally to run a program on a cruise. And there's something just really sexy about a cruise that people just love, so it's very easy to promote."

Corporate incentives "is an under-developed but potentially important market for the (cruise) industry and, given my background, one I am very excited about exploring."

Christine Duffy, President and CEO
Cruise Lines International Association, Fort Lauderdale, FL



Planners who fear that their incentive winners might be overrun with kids on a Disney cruise can put those fears to rest. Evers explains that her guests never felt they were on a kids' cruise. "You definitely have adult areas and adult things to do, yet you have the Disney service. They were lying on Disney's private beach, adults only, with a drink in their hands. They were having a ball." She also liked the variety of dining options for adults. "We went to a different restaurant with a different menu and a different atmosphere every night."

Customized Luxury Cruising

Regent Seven Seas Cruises gives plan-

ners a high-end experience to offer incentive winners. The six-star ships are intimately sized to limit capacity to 490 or 700 passengers. Accommodations are all oceanview suites, most with private balconies, restaurants are gourmet and the spa is Canyon Ranch. Planners especially like the all-inclusive pricing that includes catered meals, beverages, coffee breakout sessions, audio-visual equipment and services, meeting room rental, entertainment, wireless access throughout the ships, 24-hour room service, gratuities and more. Shore excursions also are included.

Regent Seven Seas Cruises offers charters of any number of nights for all destinations. Planners also can customize itineraries. Small groups and full-ship charters can use conference rooms, lounges, restaurants and theaters for meetings and events.

Bowled Over on the Epic

Corporate and incentive cruise event services company Landry & Kling put together a 42-person sales meeting/incentive program for the Brunswick Corporation, which is headquartered near Chicago. The Lake Forest, IL-based recreational products company is well-known for its bowling, billiards, fitness

and marine products, including Mercury Marine, so a waterborne meeting onboard Norwegian Cruise Line's new Epic was a natural fit. Surprisingly, it was the company's first sales-incentive cruise.

Explains Filip Pawelka, a marketing manager for Brunswick, "We decided to hold our annual meeting at sea because we wanted to combine a relaxed meeting atmosphere with convenience. With all necessary facilities available onboard the cruise ship, we were able to simplify our meeting/event coordination. With the one-stop-shop nature of a cruise ship we were able to conveniently plan all meetings, meals and social activities through one source as compared to land locations where several aspects of such an event need to be planned and booked separately. We wanted to offer our guests an exciting meeting location, as well as a balanced variety of social activities to ease the natural stress of business meetings.

"One of the main deciding factors was also the overall cost of such a meeting on a cruise ship," Pawelka says. "When compared to previous meetings we conducted in several locations around the world, the cost was comparable or even below. Finally, our cruise departed from Miami, which provided a convenient travel location for our international guests and staff."

Even though the Epic accommodates 2,115 passengers, the ship's luxury Villa Complex offers exclusivity for smaller groups of up to 150 attendees with a private dining room, spa and pool. The 685-seat Epic Theater features an entertainment favorite of corporate groups, Blue Man Group. Cirque Dreams and Dinner in the Spiegel Tent is another show that can be reserved for groups.

Planning Tips

Flight plan. Wallack explained that some companies are reluctant to book a cruise because their VIPs don't want to be in a position where they can't get

off the ship and fly back home if they need to. "I can fix that," she says. "In the Mediterranean, you can easily structure your charter so that every day you are in a port that has a major airport." She noted that this also makes it easy to fly a speaker in for a day or to "catch up" with any luggage that may have gotten lost.

"Site inspections" are actually really easy," Wallack notes. "Most of the big ships are here (in Florida) in the winter with a few exceptions. In the winter, if you want to do a site inspection, you just fly to Fort Lauderdale or Miami and we go on for the day."

Timing of the Celebrity Solstice's positioning between the Caribbean and the Mediterranean prevented Muntan from doing a pre-booking site inspection. "It's so not like me," she explains. "The challenge we had was that the Solstice does not go to the Mediterranean until May when it's too late to do a site inspection."

She found another solution. "We're

going to jump on the Solstice down in the Caribbean and we're going to sail on it for two days and get off at the first port of call in Puerto Rico. At least we can see the ship in motion."

Muntan still has questions about how her group will disembark at their ports of call in the Mediterranean. "Are we tendering? Are we going to be docking? I'd like to see all that, but it just didn't work out this year. I'm really going to be relying on Buy The Sea, the cruise broker, to give me direction."

Cruise brokers. Muntan has found that there are many benefits of working with a cruise broker. "They're one central place for all of the data on the cruise industry. They're there to partner with you and guide you through the process. They really know what you can do and what you can't do. They also understand the workings of a ship. In a hotel, you have a front office manager, and you have your convention services manager.

You don't have that on a cruise ship. The departments are organized differently, so you have to know who to go to for all of your different needs. (The broker) educates you and puts you in touch with the right people."

Choosing a Cruise

According to CLIA, the Caribbean is the No. 1 cruise destination in terms of sales. Other top ranking destinations include Alaska, the Mediterranean (including the Greek Islands and Turkey), Europe, Hawaii, Panama Canal, European rivers and Canada/New England.

"We're seeing quite a bit of Alaska lately. Alaska is so cyclical. The problem with Alaska is that companies only do Alaska once. They don't do it twice for the most part," Wallack notes, adding that cruises to Tahiti, the Baltic and the Greek Islands are also typically once-in-a-lifetime trips.

The Caribbean, she says, is a different story. "The Caribbean gets done over and

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Top 10 Cruise Ships for Meetings

Cruise event services specialists since 1982, Landry & Kling has selected the following top 10 ships for meetings and group events based on a combination of factors, including superior onboard meeting facilities, state-of-the-art audio-visual capabilities, as well as top-notch amenities and entertainment options. Landry & Kling is the parent company of Seaside.com, a Web portal designed specifically for the cruise meetings and incentive market.

1. Royal Caribbean International: Allure of the Seas
2. Norwegian Cruise Line: Norwegian Epic
3. Celebrity Cruises: Celebrity Millennium
4. MSC Cruises: MSC Splendida
5. Carnival Cruise Lines: Carnival Dream
6. Regent Seven Seas: Seven Seas Navigator
7. Royal Caribbean International: Liberty of the Seas
8. Sea Dream Yacht Club: Sea Dream Yacht II
9. Silversea Cruises: Silver Whisper
10. Linblad Expeditions: National Geographic Endeavor

over again. There are so many ships going there, that if you've picked another ship, you've basically picked another destination. It may be the same itinerary, with the exception of their private island versus someone else's, but it's a different ship, different environment, different food and different restaurants.

"Or," she continues, "one year they could do Royal Caribbean's Allure of the Seas on the eastern Caribbean, the next year they could do the Oasis of the Seas on the western Caribbean, and after that they can do the Adventure of the Seas in the southern Caribbean. That way, they can do totally different destinations and they're happy."

Going Green

Like the hotel industry, the cruise industry is committed to finding ways to reduce its environmental impact. Initiatives include the use of waste-water treatment

systems, energy-saving LED light bulbs, high-efficiency appliances and window tinting. Rigorous recycling programs are also in place, and environmentally safe coatings are used to make the hulls of ships smoother, therefore reducing fuel usage by as much as five percent.

Cruise News

Royal Caribbean and **Norwegian Cruise Line** recently announced that they are discontinuing their cruise service to Mexico from the Port of Los Angeles.

Carnival is also suspending its service to Mexico from the Port of San Diego. Industry experts speculate that reports of escalating drug violence in Mexico have negatively impacted demand for these cruises. Royal Caribbean's Mariner of the Seas will be rebased in Galveston, TX. NCL's Norwegian Star will be relocated to Tampa, FL. Carnival will reposition its Carnival Spirit ship to Australia in 2012.

Royal Caribbean Cruises is considering ordering a new ship that will signal a new class of ship for the brand. Richard Fain, the company's chairman, suggested that this would "probably be the start of a new series of ships which would incorporate our latest learnings about efficiency and about guest amenities."

Regent Seven Seas Cruises' Seven Seas Voyager has been named the "Best Cruise Ship in the Large Ship" category by *Condé Nast Traveler* readers.

On February 1, **Christine Duffy**, former president and chief executive officer at Maritz Travel, took the helm as president and CEO of CLIA. In her new role, she will apply her extensive travel industry experience to further the promotion and growth of the cruise industry.

"Due to the extraordinary diversity of experiences available, from the ultimate in yacht-sized luxury, world cruises and adventure voyages to the Antarctic, to fun-filled weeks in the Caribbean, Alaska, Mediterranean, Canada/New England and elsewhere, cruising represents an ideal match for corporate incentives," Duffy says. "The fact that CLIA member ships come in all sizes makes even a full ship charter an appealing option. While there are a handful of companies and agents specializing in this, including the recent CLIA Hall of Fame honorees Landry & Kling, this is an under-developed but potentially important market for the industry and, given my background, one I am very excited about exploring in the years to come."

Smooth Sailing Ahead

According to CLIA, the future looks bright for the cruise industry. Seven new ships are expected to launch this year, and the organization is projecting a 6.6 percent increase in passenger traffic in 2011.

Evers summed up some of the advantages of cruise incentives. "On the cruise, you have sun, you have the beach. There's always something going on. It's a great way to reward people and you get more bang for your buck." **C&IT**



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Smart Phones Make Planners Smarter

Amazing Apps Revolutionize the Meetings Landscape

Mobile meeting guides and applications (apps) for smart phones and tablet PCs are the hottest and fastest-growing cool tools on the meetings landscape these days. Sales of smart phones, which are out-selling PCs for the first time, are off the charts: Vendors shipped 100.9 million smart phones worldwide for 4Q10, up 87.2 percent, and 302.6 million were sold for the year up 74.4 percent, according to International Data Corporation. And Verizon's long-awaited launch of the iPhone 4 resulted in record-breaking sales. Analysts speculate that perhaps 1 million iPhones were sold. In early March, at the launch of iPad 2, Apple Chairman and CEO Steve Jobs confirmed that the record-breaking 100 millionth iPhone was just shipped, and that 15 million iPads were sold in nine months.

Thus, as sales of devices increase, so do the number of apps, including apps designed specifically for the meetings industry, prompting more and more corporate meeting planners to take their first test drive. Among these newbie enthusiasts is Catherine Mullen, president of New Providence, NJ-based Meeting Logistics

LLC, a full-service corporate meeting and event planning firm who was first introduced to mobile apps at the 2010 Meeting Professionals International (MPI) World Education Congress (WEC) in Vancouver, BC. Mullen learned firsthand that using smart phone meeting apps can enrich the experience, increase attendee engagement and add green options to meetings and events.

In this case, the specialized apps designed by QuickMobile Inc., a Vancouver, BC-based industry leader in mobile event solutions, helped attendees navigate the WEC with such features as instant access to the event schedule, attendee and speaker lists, social media channels and user-generated photo galleries among

other features. Also, attendees could interact using private messaging services.

Later, Mullen started a strategic partnership with CrowdCompass, a Portland, OR-based app maker, to offer the technology to her clients. Mullen is currently working on a mobile app for an upcoming meeting, which features schedules of meetings and sessions, attendee and speaker lists and contacts, handouts, slides and text alerts. Attendees also can access hotel information and interact with presenters via messages and Twitter.

From Engagement to Feedback

Mullen is promoting the meeting by sending the app to prospective attendees, who can easily download the tool from a

website. "We believe that mobile apps will increase attendance. One of best ways to create interest in apps is by putting information about them into attendees' hands before the event. It engages attendees before the meeting, throughout it and even afterwards because you can utilize it to get feedback," says Mullen.

More meeting planners are starting to use mobile meeting guides and other apps for sales meetings, training sessions, incentives, conferences and customer events. James Spellos, CMP, author, speaker and president of Meeting U, a New York City-based technology, education, training and consulting company for meeting professionals, says, "Certainly any app with interactivity would be great for seminars, quizzing the audience and making sure people are participating. There are huge pockets of opportunity depending on the organization. It doesn't matter whether it's an incentive trip, meeting or conference — any event can benefit from an app."

Within three to five years, most meetings will involve some kind of smart phone or tablet PC app before, during or after the event, says Spellos. "Planners who don't eventually get into this area will be at a competitive disadvantage. I don't know how marketable a planner or supplier will be without integration and understanding of this technology. They don't have to be experts, but they should become comfortable enough to learn this new technology," says Spellos.

Thousands of Apps

Apps exploded onto the scene after iTunes launched its app store in 2008. There are now hundreds of thousands of all types of apps available and at least several hundred apps designed specifically for meetings and events. The number of meeting app producers and products is growing fast. "There is a whole ecosystem of companies producing native apps for individual smart phone types or more generic Web apps for meetings information — pre-meeting, onsite and post-meeting," says Ray Thackeray, vice

president of sales for Ootoweb, a Las Vegas-based producer of mobile meeting, event and attendee apps.

Meetingapps.com, founded by Kristen Strand, BSc, CITE, CMM, is an online portal that gives planners immediate access to apps (iPhone and BlackBerry so far) that are pertinent to meetings and events, thereby saving much-needed time. Meeting planners can sign up for the "App Alert Club" to receive automatic updates on new free apps that will help the meeting community.

James Spellos, CMP
President
Meeting U
New York, NY



It doesn't matter whether it's an incentive trip, meeting or conference — any event can benefit from an app."

develop apps for several platforms, while others levy a per-platform fee. Generally, an app can range from a few hundred dollars to several thousand dollars, depending on several factors, including the number of versions required for various smart phone platforms.

Meeting apps represent a constantly evolving technology that will eventually become less expensive and provide even more functions. Meanwhile, it's crucial that planners who use the technology keep up with the latest developments, especially

those related to app platforms, says Spellos. "The question is, which platform developers are gearing the apps for. The sexy approach is to develop them for the iPhone. But that's not the platform in the greatest use in the business community right now. Development for the BlackBerry and Android is also important. You have to make sure you have an app that can

be used for several smart phone platforms, otherwise you will diminish the value of it for meetings," Spellos advises.

The Green Advantage

Planners can use mobile meeting apps to serve different purposes for different types of meetings. However, all meetings apps generally have one common impact — they replace paper meeting folders, binders and handouts with information provided via smart phones and tablet PCs.

A company that manufactures garden equipment and sprinklers uses Ootoweb's apps for training and education sessions, as well as meetings with distributors and retailers, says Thackeray. The app provides session schedules, handouts and slides; information on speakers; and messaging allowing attendees to communicate with each other as well as speakers and planners. A technology company uses Ootoweb's meeting guides for two large information and education conferences held each year for employees, and current and potential customers.



QuickMobile Inc. designed this Android app (left) for Salesforce.com and a comprehensive iPad app (above) for a recent PhoCusWright conference.

Photos courtesy of QuickMobile

By Derek Reveron

The use of mobile meeting guides and other apps will grow along with the use of smart phones. The devices account for more than one-third of the mobile phone market, according to a survey by Nielsen, an audience research and measurement firm. More than 60 million people in the U.S. use smart phones, and the number is projected to double within two years. The number of U.S. smart phone users who access mobile content through apps and browsers now exceeds the total number of non-smart phone users, according to comScore, a digital marketing research and consulting firm. The use of smart phones tends to be highest among frequent business travelers such as meeting planners.

Hybrid Meetings, Too

The fast-growing popularity of smart phones makes it possible for planners to use the devices in other innovative ways for corporate meetings. For example, Nancy Settle Murphy, president of Guided Insights, a Boston company that designs and facilitates corporate training meetings and workshops, depends partly on smart phones to implement hybrid corporate meetings that involve face-to-face and online sessions.

Murphy recently ran a hybrid strategic planning meeting for a global corporation based in New England. The meeting involved about 30 managers and executives, mostly from North America. About eight days before the face-to-face meeting, Murphy sent a series of e-mails to participants, asking them to access online conference "flipcharts," which encouraged them to brainstorm ideas leading to cost-cutting in several areas. "I set it up so that anyone who has access to the Internet can participate no matter if they access through PCs or smart phones, which more and more people do exclusively as they use their phones as computers," says Murphy. At the face-to-face meeting, attendees received 20-page

handouts outlining the cost-saving ideas submitted during the online brainstorming sessions. "Groups picked their top ideas and developed detailed action plans. It was a four-hour meeting. They achieved more and in less time because of the online portion before they got there," says Murphy. (See related story on page 28.)

Where to Start

How should planners who know little or nothing about mobile meeting guides and other apps begin the learning process? Here are some tips from the experts.

- **Research prospective attendees.**

Use surveys or questionnaires to



Catherine Mullen
President
Meeting Logistics LLC
New Providence, NJ

"One of the best ways to create interest in apps is by putting information about them into attendees' hands before the event. It engages attendees."

determine the technology-use habits of prospective attendees and the types of device functions that are important to them. "Getting a great app but not having it meet needs of clients doesn't make sense," says Spellos.

- **Research apps online.** Spellos advises planners to check out meetingapps.com to become familiar with the range of meeting guides and other apps available. Meetingapps.com applications are listed according to 26 categories, including meeting management, con-

ferences, destinations, hotel search, venues, air travel, risk management and green tools. The number of listings on meetingapps.com continues to increase. For example, the website recently added an audio-visual category that includes several applications that planners can use in corporate meetings. One app enables an iPad or iPhone to control PowerPoint presentations, and use an iPhone to create a pointer for presentations. Another application converts an iPhone or iPad into a scrolling teleprompter. "Portals like meetingapps.com tend not to be biased toward a particular product and show the types of products that are available," says Spellos.

- **Visit the websites of companies that produce meeting apps.**

"Spend time to read and understand what the technology offers, and how to apply it and be a better resource for clients. Don't try to dip into all the technology and be overwhelmed by it. Find out the type of app that can help your organization and start there," Spellos advises.

- **Talk to meeting planners who have used meeting apps.** That's what Mullen did. "Ask them about the strengths and weaknesses of using apps," she says.
- **Know how to use an app before considering it for attendees.** After selecting an app, provide staff onsite who can answer questions from meeting participants.
- **Don't expect to find a "killer app" that meets all of your needs.** "There is no such thing, no matter what anybody says. But there are apps that meet your needs better than others," says Spellos.
- **Don't feel the need to use different apps for different meetings.** "Once a planner becomes comfortable with an app and has success with it, changing all the time isn't a great idea. Providing a level of continuity isn't a bad thing for meeting attendees. It's

better to continue with the same app and have it customized more to your needs rather than make a 90-degree turn to another app," says Spellos.

- **Be patient.** There are temporary hurdles to attendee use and comfort levels with mobile meeting apps. "For any business or organization that uses apps, especially as more than a single meeting strategy, there could be a learning curve involved, especially with attendees that aren't tech savvy. But there has to be a level of patience because everyone won't adopt it immediately," says Spellos.

It's expected that, within three to five years, mobile meeting guides and other apps will be commonly used. Apps will eventually perform functions that planners don't now envision. "Planners will help define that. The technology will go as far as the feedback that developers get from planners who use it. If a planner looks at apps provided by five companies and none of them fits meeting needs, then they should tell developers what they want," says Spellos. Apps providers are willing to meet the needs of planners, partly because a growing number of businesses are competing for a small but fast-growing base of users, adds Spellos.

Tablets Gaining in Popularity

With tablet PCs such as the iPad becoming increasingly more popular, it's still unclear whether these devices will soon become the primary format for meeting apps. Dozens of companies have introduced or plan to market tablet PCs. The devices are creating more options for planners and attendees because they provide more functionality than smart phones.

Tablet PCs have larger screens for viewing meeting documents and videos, and taking notes and engaging in interactive functions. Spellos expects tablet PCs to help increase the adoption rate of apps among planners and attendees. Like smart phones, tablet PCs can be used while sitting, standing or walking.

In other new technology developments, meeting planners can soon expect to see more integration between mobile apps and Web-based software. That means attendees and planners can use mobile apps to access data entered through Web-based software.

But no matter how apps evolve, meeting planners will continue to embrace the technology because it helps attendees and planners make more effective use of their time and budgets while providing more rewarding meeting experiences. **C&IT**

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Listen and Learn

How to Draw Attendees Into the Conversation

At a time when meeting budgets continue to face unprecedented scrutiny, genuine attendee engagement should be an urgent fundamental goal for meeting planners. Instead, in an age when everyone is overwhelmed by information overload, too often the time-tested disciplines of engagement get lost in logistics and technology, experts say. As a result, too many meetings miss their mark despite the best of intentions.

"The concept of engagement is more important than ever," says Jim Cavanaugh, executive vice president of sales at marketing communications agency and meeting planning firm TBA Global in New York City. "It's more important than ever today that you have a targeted, succinct, relevant message at the outset — before the engagement even begins."

And the entire process should begin with a single, simple question — addressed from the attendee's perspective: Why? "Why the meeting?" says Cavanaugh. "Why me as an attendee?" Sometimes, however, planners and companies lose sight of that. The question that needs to be answered," Cavanaugh says,

"is, what is the reason for these people to be excited, interested and motivated to be involved in this meeting? That's 50 percent of the battle. And that's the 'why.' The 'how' can't precede the why. And the how becomes much more clear once you know the why. But often, planners just go right to the how."

Meanwhile, notes Eric Olson, general manager of Boulder, CO-based meeting technology leader Active Network/Events, "The standard today for attendee engagement is much higher than it was just a couple of years ago. And it has been raised because of the demands of the people who attend meetings. For a long time, meetings were sort of an isolated world that was different from the everyday social experience that people have. And meeting attendees will not tolerate that anymore. So, the onus is really on planners now to provide the tools that will promote real engagement among their attendees."

What percentage of planners are doing it right in early 2011? "A vast minority," says Olson. But on the other hand, he adds, a new and higher standard is being set by innovators and best practitioners,

such as Cisco. "But for most planners, the focus is still on logistics rather than attendee engagement," Olson says. "There has been a lot of discussion about engagement in the digital age. But there has not been a lot of adoption yet."

A core principle of engagement in the era of Facebook, Twitter and other revolutionary social media platforms is that "planners can no longer talk *at* attendees," says Lynn Randall, a strategic events consultant at Fenton, MO-based Maritz Travel Co. "You have to learn to talk with them and engage them in the conversation around the meeting. And that process has to begin before you ever step foot onsite for the meeting."

For example, Randall says, long before the meeting, a savvy planner will engineer collaborative communication among a keynote speaker, attendees and other key stakeholders, so that the keynoter can adapt his or her canned talk to specific issues and concerns raised by a specific audience within the context of the general topic. "That's a good example of a forward-looking way to look at your sessions," says Randall. "And if you really want to engage

people and have them feel like they're really part of the meeting, what better way could there be to do that?"

Content Is King

Despite the transformational effect that technology has had on the process of planning a meeting, the undeniable fact is that content is the primary driver of engagement, both for attendees and the organization.

Despite the meetings slump of 2009–10, when many companies saw attendance at voluntary but important meetings plummet, St. Louis, MO-based national health care group purchasing organization Amerinet Inc. enjoyed enthusiastic voluntary attendance at its many meetings, says senior director Kerry Price, CMP. Why?

"A lot of our programs focus on continuing education for health care professionals, whether it's a supply chain or pharmaceutical or dietary issue," says Price, who plans more than 250 meetings a year with a three-person staff. "And we have attendees up to the C-suite level. For example, we do a forum every year for CEOs from member hospitals. And we find that it's really just a matter of the content. For me, attendee engagement is about making it worthwhile for people to be there. You have to be clear on how they can justify their attendance. So, our primary focus is on content that really addresses what's important to attendees on any given topic."

For example, she adds, a hot draw now is meetings that address the complexities and practical impact of health care reform. At some Amerinet meetings, Price adds, attendees actually pay a fee to be there. Many others are free, but still attract capacity crowds. "And if they have to pay a fee to be there," she says, "you have to work even harder to make sure you give them a good reason to want to be there."

Nevertheless, says Michael Lyons,

DMCP, Newtown, PA-based executive vice president of AMR Meetings & Incentives, too many planners lose sight of the underlying purpose and practical benefit of their meetings. "You have to get back to basics about the purpose of the meeting and why attendees should want to be there," says Lyons, who has planned meetings for 40 years. "It's about exchanging information. Therefore, it's really about the content and the takeaway from the meeting. It's not about technology."

Avoid Confusion

Yet, experts unanimously agree, in the Internet Age the essential message about the meeting is routinely confused with the technology platform that delivers the message. Planners enamored of Facebook and Twitter create a lot of noise that adds up to not much. The initiative lacks a clear, compelling reason why the meeting matters



Kerry Price, CMP, Senior Director
Amerinet Inc., St. Louis, MO

"For me, attendee engagement is about making it worthwhile for people to be there. You have to be clear on how they can justify their attendance. So, our primary focus is on content that really addresses what's important."

to the company — and should matter to each and every attendee.

A good way to build such a foundation from the start is a custom Web page created to support the meeting, says Lyons. And it should be vetted and fully functional at the moment the meeting is announced. Well-organized content should include the purpose of the meeting, the agenda, and presenters and speakers. In addition, it should feature all relevant logistical details, such as information on the hotel and destination. "And all of that should be laid out in a way that is easy to deal with and understand," Lyons says. "Companies that hold a lot

of meetings should have a general meetings portal, then a microsite for every individual meeting."

The planner's focus should be on "managing information effectively," Lyons explains. "Going forward, that's what meeting planners are going to have to learn to do, both effectively and efficiently. And that will lead to things like more use of mobile platforms such as iPhones and BlackBerrys, because attendees are mobile and you have to engage them and give them easy access to information 24/7 now."

Most important, adds Lyons, "it's no longer going to be just about keeping pace. It's going to be about staying ahead of the curve."

Taking Control

As peer-to-peer networking tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter continue to redefine the execution of meetings, a

crucial consideration for planners should be taking control of social media rather than letting social media take control of them, says Olson. "Planners need to not just take control of it," he says. "They need to track it and measure it. And one of the most important things planners can do is listen to the conversations going on in social media. But that is something that meeting planners have been afraid of, because they think people are going to say bad things. To those planners, I say, they were already saying those things anyway. Now you just know about them, and you can react to them. You just have to be open about it. And if you are, you'll have

By John Buchanan

better meetings that are more relevant and more useful to your attendees.”

Planners who truly master technology as a facilitator of attendee engagement will enjoy remarkable rewards, says Bob Etheridge, event director at West Chester, PA-based Social Media Plus, which drew 750 highly engaged attendees to a social media conference in Philadelphia last year. “And LinkedIn was responsible for 80 percent of the engagement that we got through social media,” Etheridge says. “And that’s because my target market was sales and marketing people within 100 miles of Philadelphia. And with their en-

“Smart companies that want real results from their meetings make such feedback mandatory and pursue it aggressively and relentlessly.”



Chris Reilly Ph.D., Researcher
Sperduto & Associates, Atlanta, GA

hanced search capability, LinkedIn gives you the ability to really target who you want to get your message in front of, as opposed to Facebook and Twitter, which just go out there, and you hope you’re reaching your market. With LinkedIn, you can really get granular about who you want to target.”

Price also uses LinkedIn as a key technology platform. She uses it to foster peer-to-peer communication among attendee constituencies such as Amerinet member hospitals or a category of suppliers.

Defining Best Practices

Ironically, while the explosion of technology has empowered faster, broader communication with attendees, one core element of meetings has faced sometimes severe neglect, says Cavanaugh — underlying objectives that represent the reason behind the meeting.

“And a planner should get those objectives from a variety of stakeholders,” Cavanaugh says. “And then everything should be driven by those objectives.”

Only then, he says, should a planner begin to address tactical considerations.

Once the purpose of the meeting has been blessed by strong consensus, planners who want to improve attendee engagement should focus on a trio of essential principles, says Randall.

The first is to understand the meeting’s targeted audience. “Before you can create attendee engagement, you need to truly understand your attendees,” Randall says. “And in order to do that, you have to get their voices into the process. And you can’t just use backward-

In addition, advises Olson, effective engagement strategies must have practical implications for and engagement from attendees before the meeting. For example, forward-looking planners executing a traditional annual sales meeting now introduce a series of brief, topic-specific webinars along the way to focus the attention of attendees and get important feedback. “The more interaction you have before the event, the more you can anticipate and react to situa-

tions related to the event,” Olson says. “And then you can tweak your agenda and content beforehand to address those situations.”

Post-Meeting Feedback

By the same token, says Chris Reilly, Ph.D., a researcher at Atlanta-based consultancy Sperduto & Associates, a genuine and thorough assessment of the meeting — from the point of view of attendees — should be conducted immediately at its conclusion. Smart companies that want real results from their meetings make such feedback mandatory and pursue it aggressively and relentlessly, says Reilly, a pioneer in the scientific study of employee engagement.

“For example,” he says, “for every single meeting held by Baptist Healthcare, a hospital operator in Florida, every attendee has to rate every part of the meeting. It’s a hard-scale rating, and those ratings then go back to the presenters. And unless the presenter scores in the 90th percentile or above, chances are that presentation will be changed or deleted for the next year. That means that if attendees want something changed, it is changed. In fact, sometimes, if there are multiple sessions of it at the same meeting, it’s changed or deleted before the next session.”

Another example cited by Reilly is Geneva, IL-based health care conglomerate Delnor. “They spend the last 10 minutes of every session at every meeting

getting attendee feedback,” he says. “And they actually ask, ‘What can we do differently or better?’ And that is a very valuable process. I know that because I have sat in for some of them.”

In the future, Reilly predicts, such serious assessment will become a foundational best practice for meeting planners and their companies.

Amerinet already practices what Reilly preaches, says Price. “When our attendees attend a session, we scan their badges and then they immediately get an e-mail from us that includes a survey. And in order to get their continuing education credits from the session, they have to complete the survey. So, we’re constantly engaging them and listening to ways we can improve our meetings from their perspective.”

And for Price, successful meetings have always been — and will always be — about the delivery of meaningful content. For example, she says, when Amerinet hosts a meeting in Orlando, she partners with The Disney Institute, which is well known and highly respected in health care circles, to create innovative, high-quality presentations. “And those sessions are always jam-packed,” she says. “Our attendance in Orlando is off the charts.”

That said, Price notes that her pre-meeting engagement tactics are decidedly old school. In fact, she sees little real value in Facebook or Twitter, which she says have not been widely adopted in the health care industry.

Instead, Price uses a simple one-sheet that is disseminated both by e-mail and snail mail as her standard announcement tool. “We also have sales reps who call on hospitals to promote the key meetings face-to-face as part of their normal sales activities,” Price says. “That is another key way we create buzz. A lot of our registrations come from those face-to-face contacts with our reps in the field.”

Facing the Facts

Despite the allure of technology and the promotion of the best hotels in the

most desirable destinations, meetings are not about logistics, experts concur. Instead, a planner’s focus should be on simple issues of motivation. “Think about the things that make people really want to attend a meeting,” Cavanaugh says. “What is really important about the meeting and why should your attendees be drawn to it? What are the benefits to them of being there?”

When a planner poses those questions, success ensues, says Price. For example, despite the downturn in meetings over the last two years — including attendance at voluntary events — Price has maintained record attendance at her annual conferences, which attract 1,500 attendees. “And we’re in an industry where a lot of people didn’t go to meetings over the last couple of years,” she says. “But I pick up my room block for every meeting and actually exceed it. And the reason is

that we really listen to the voices of our customers, members and suppliers. They told us they wanted more education tracks and more powerful keynote speakers. And we gave them what they told us they wanted. So, they come.”

Meanwhile, says Lyons, too many planners are focused entirely on how to set up a Facebook page or open a Twitter account, as if technology can mask basic shortcomings in their engagement agendas. “You can use all the technology in the world to promote your meeting and engage attendees,” Lyons says. “But at the end of the day, it’s about the business purpose of the meeting and the content. The objective is for attendees to be smarter at the end of the meeting when it comes to doing their jobs. That’s the fundamental value that planners need to focus on, because that’s what their attendees are focused on.”

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Cisco Technologies' Global Sales Experience hybrid event



ON24 produced a virtual trade show's cocktail party.



CA Technologies' virtual networking lounge.



Unisfair's virtual convention center.

Going Hybrid

>> How to Find a Happy Medium With Virtual and Physical Events

After an economic nadir in 2009 when companies often staged virtual versions of their events for the travel and lodging cost-avoidance, many have now settled into a “happy medium” with hybrid events. They combine the quality of a face-to-face experience with the convenience of a virtual one. Unsurprisingly, major providers of virtual events such as San Francisco, CA-based ON24 and Menlo Park, CA-based Unisfair have seen a surge in business over the last couple years.

So even when economic recovery allows face-to-face meetings to return, many companies seek to retain the virtues of virtual that they discovered, including the promise of reaching a broader audience. “There’s really no reason why any event in the future would not have a virtual component,” says Joerg Rathenberg, vice president of marketing for Unisfair. “If you just run physical events, you’re leaving out about 50 percent of your potential audience.”

The virtual option offers a good Plan B for those who, for one reason or another, can’t make it to the physical event. “We find that we’re increasingly being told by our customers that they’ve been getting more travel restrictions, and it’s much more difficult to get the approval to come to our physical event,” says Steven A. Menges, vice president, marketing for the Mainframe Business Unit of Islandia, NY-based CA Technologies. “That’s how we came up with the idea to have a virtual event for our mainframe customers.”

That month-long event, May Mainframe Madness (MMM), was held for the first time last year, overlapping with CA World, a week-long user conference that has been held for several years in Las Vegas.

From the point of view of the exhibitor, the virtual medium also means increased exposure in the marketplace, thus boosting ROI. And virtual technologies even can reduce their investment on the logistics side. “One of the interesting approaches we’ve seen is the ability for exhibitors to have additional people available virtually in their booth,” says Neal Thompson, director of strategic technologies with Maritz Travel. “So I may not bring 20 experts to the booth, I may only have three or four, but I have another 10 available on camera for attendees to speak with at the booth.”

Hybrid Sales Meetings

Sales meetings also derive logistical advantages by going hybrid, while retaining the more personal connection with reps through a physical presence. San Jose, CA-based Cisco Technologies’ Global Sales Experience (GSX), for example, went from being face-to-face for 19 years to fully virtual to a hybrid style last August. “Definitely the first year completely virtual there was a lot missing,” says Angie Smith, senior manager of the GSX. “And part of it is perception: People are used to it a certain way and you take that away from them and there’s no in between.”

Now there is an “in between” with a

virtual medium that reaches attendees in nearly 400 cities worldwide, complementing physical events in San Jose (the “hub”) and 162 other cities at Cisco offices (the “spokes”). “We also had four locations around the world that we call ‘super spokes,’ where we had a high concentration of people,” Smith explains. “And we had Cisco TV facilities and locations where we could work on the bandwidth across the network and distribute content from the super spokes as well.”

For Cisco’s second go-round at the hybrid model, it plans to lean more heavily on the virtual medium and “not produce events in so many cities,” Smith says. “We tried to make it super convenient to where people were geographically located. But quite frankly, to produce even small events you’ve still got to make sure everything is working: the conference room, the Ethernet the IP addresses.” And sometimes employees who were not ideally qualified had to help out. “If there’s an office of 600 people we needed a real travel director on the ground,” she says. With fewer spokes, “maybe more will have to travel but we can make that experience more impactful.”

Hybrid sales meetings also afford the flexibility of presenting content to agents after the live event. “We’re seeing many sales kickoffs adding a virtual component, oftentimes as an add-on after the event for anyone who couldn’t participate or joins the company after the kickoff,” notes Denise Persson, CMO, and vice president of marketing with

ON24. “Especially with sales organizations, you’re constantly hiring, and after the sales kickoff you’ve developed all of this valuable training content you don’t want to lose. It’s worth so much more than the cost of building a virtual component afterward.” But there are other options, such as delivering the general sessions virtually followed by regional face-to-face events as “breakouts.”

Pros and Cons

Perhaps the classic way to structure a hybrid meeting is to simply transmit the content (e.g., presentations) to the remote audience live. But it’s not necessarily the best approach, argues Rathenberg. “The advantage is it’s exciting. Virtual attendees feel they’re taking part in the event while it’s going on. The disadvantage is that you don’t have control over the content, and accidents may happen, like somebody stepping over the camera cable and everything goes dark.”

Rathenberg warns of “trying to match the virtual event too closely to the physical event,” for example by transmitting live sessions in parallel and forcing the virtual audience to choose. “The whole benefit of the virtual environment is that you can make the sessions available on demand and you stagger them,” he notes. Along with online discussion among participants and presenters, on-demand content is a way to “extend the life” of the event beyond the face-to-face gathering. Revenue-generating events have the potential to accrue more profit in this

way. “You might capture all the content in your live and then extend that event in the following month to a new audience to generate yet another revenue stream from it,” Mark Szelenyi, senior director, webcasting for ON24, points out. “Most of your revenue is coming from sponsors, and you can extend your sponsor packages to include your virtual side as well.”

Equally valuable is the pre-event virtual presence. Participants can begin to discuss the topics that will be presented face-to-face, host companies can use the medium as a marketing tool and presenters can get “warmed up.”

For example, software developer Ariba, a Unisfair client, stages a virtual user conference and product launch as a forerunner to physical events at cities such as New York, Paris and London. “Decentralization is a trend,” says Rathenberg. “Instead of having this one gigantic worldwide event that everybody’s going to fly to, you go where the people are and have a virtual event upfront. The benefit is that you’ve developed all your content, and the speakers deliver the same material live that they’ve already fine-tuned in front of the camera. So it’s kind of a dry run for the physical event. The interesting thing is that you’re not having a cannibalization effect: You actually attract more people by giving them an incentive to go to the physical event.”

Attendance Robber?

“Cannibalization” occurs when many attendees choose to attend virtually in

lieu of face to face, which is usually the ideal way for them to participate (especially for revenue-generating events). Thus, by offering the virtual option, the host company effectively undercuts its own attendance at the physical event. Overall, it’s not happening, Rathenberg observes, showing that attendees still appreciate the value of meeting in person.

But companies are understandably concerned. Menges admitted to being “pretty worried about cannibalization” of CA World by the virtual event May Mainframe Madness. “Getting people physically out to Las Vegas with us for a week is still the best way for them to interact, and we thought that such a robust virtual event might have some people choose that over the physical event,” Menges says. “But we very carefully marketed each event for what it was. We called it May Mainframe Madness, not CA World Live or CA World Interactive. We very purposely gave it its own identity, its own branding, to make it very clear that it was something different and something to augment the CA World experience. And because CA World kind of fell in the middle of the virtual event, we heavily promoted it during MMM. We told people that ideally they want to attend both, and here is why.”

“Throughout our planning process, we kept in mind whether the marketing or content of the virtual event would in any way potentially cannibalize or hurt the physical event,” Menges says. The result of all these measures and precautions

By George Seli

was strong face-to-face and virtual attendance. “The attendance by mainframers at CA World this past year was actually higher than at the previous CA World (which lacked the virtual component). We were absolutely thrilled about that.”

Engagement Challenges

In contrast to cannibalization is the possibility that the virtual event will not be compelling enough, resulting in weak ROI. There are many ways to encourage a remote audience’s participation, but No. 1 is the quality of the content. “That’s really the main reason people participate,” said Rathenberg, “so make sure you don’t have anything that’s redundant, lengthy

by having the speaker available to answer questions virtually.

Easily digestible content was part of the reason for the success of MMM. “We condensed almost all of the sessions that were going to be the same or on the same topic down to that 20- to 25-minute ideal length for the virtual event,” Menges says. “And we were very happy with the fact that we really maintained our audience through the sessions and through the Q&As.”

The same goal applies to face-to-face sessions that are simultaneously broadcast virtually: Remote participants shouldn’t be left hanging while the onsite group takes a break. A virtual chat, for ex-

well. You don’t want them bogged down with managing the technology when they are trying to present.” Thus, the comfort level of the presenter with that medium should be taken into account: Is a moderator needed to track the stream and bring questions to the presenter’s attention? Should the input be held over for a Q&A session, or brought up during the presentation?

“If my CEO is giving a live presentation, I’m not going to be directing questions up to him,” Szelenyi says. “On the other hand, if I as a product manager am training sales-



“Throughout our planning process, we kept in mind whether the marketing or content of the virtual event would in any way potentially cannibalize or hurt the physical event.”

Steven A. Menges, Vice President, Marketing, CA Technologies, Islandia, NY

or boring.” After all, the virtual event doesn’t have the energy of a live audience to compensate for these drawbacks. Even a high-quality presentation will tend to lose its luster for the remote audience after too long of a time, so Rathenberg recommends offering approximately 20-minute online sessions.

“Typically conference sessions are about 45 minutes or maybe an hour, but if you just stream that into the website it’s going to be a failure, people are going to hate you for that,” he quipped. “Because when you’re sitting in a big audience, the threshold is high to get up and leave, but when you’re at your computer the threshold is extremely low: You just click one button, and then you’ve got that spreadsheet that you were working on.”

With this in mind, a planner might design the face-to-face sessions so as to be easily chunked for virtual consumption, for example by dividing presentations into three sections. Afterward, the recorded sessions will be available on-demand and a live component can be added

ample, can be arranged at those intervals. It’s critical that participation not become a passive experience of sitting in front of the computer screen. “Integrate applications that will keep them interacting with the content, such as Twitter, group chat, polls and Q&A sessions to make sure they are awake and you have their attention,” says Persson.

Streaming Q&As

If a Twitter stream will be integrated with a live webcast, consider whether to broadcast it in the meeting room, and if so, whether on a main screen behind the presenter or on monitors off to the side. “Once the session is over and the content is finished being presented you come to that Q&A slide, and we’ve seen a lot of sessions presenting on the screen a Twitter feed showing the tweets coming in in real time, and then they can pick questions from it,” Thompson describes.

“And having a moderator to manage the technology so that it appears seamless to the speakers is very important as

people, then I’m probably driving the whole thing by myself and then I would be multitasking and dealing with the Q&A at the same time.”

Smith notes that segregating the Q&A with the virtual audience into its own session works best. The virtual medium is “a new dynamic for many of our traditional speakers, and not all of them are good at it. So we were pretty cautious in recommending (live interactivity), and didn’t offer it in every single session. When we did the chat we made a session all about that. We didn’t mix it up with delivering strategy and fiscal year initiatives and motivating them to still want to work for a great company.”

MMM was facilitated by ON24, which offers a virtual event platform (VEP) with a variety of options for presenters and moderators. “You can log into the system in different roles: Q&A screener, moderator, speaker, giving you different permissions and views of the event,” Szelenyi explains. For example, a presenter can log in to do an unmoderated group chat, or sev-

eral moderators can log in to handle input from hundreds of virtual participants.

MMM had Q&A sessions following each of its two or three weekly keynote presentations. “We decided to allow the audience to essentially type in their questions during the presentation itself or at the conclusion of it, they had the choice,” Menges relates. “The speaker as well as a member of my staff could see the questions come in, sift through them and basically combine duplicates and put them in kind of a priority order to have those ready for the speaker.”

Integrating Social Media

ON24’s VEP also can integrate social media tools such as Twitter, as does Unisfair. “We would be crazy to try to take people away from their Twitter, so we integrate with it, as well as with Skype, which is wildly popular in Europe,” notes Rathenberg. “We also provide our own proprietary chat in parallel. But we try to do everything inside our virtual environment, so when you click on a window it appears in our environment. It’s very easy to loosely integrate by popping up new windows, but

“With our most senior executive, we would have 2,500 people let’s say in a chatroom and on average get about 500–600 questions, so that’s a pretty good percentage.”

Angie Smith, Senior Manager of the Global Sales Experience, Cisco, San Jose, CA

then you don’t have the experience that you’re in that location.”

Social media tools and proprietary chat functions certainly expand each attendee’s networking “reach,” and that’s another plus to adding a virtual component. “One of the big advantages for the attendee is that they can connect with everybody who’s at the event; at a physical event you might miss people,” Rathenberg points out. “In our environment we even have a MatchMe button that will match you up with others with similar interests.”

Emboldening Attendees

The virtual medium also seems to enhance attendees’ willingness to interact. “Our market research shows that attendees are actually more likely to ask questions and network in a virtual event than a face-to-face,” says Tricia Heinrich, senior director, strategic communications, ON24. “There’s something to be said for the enhanced self confidence that people feel when interacting with others virtually. I recently got that feedback from a customer about an internal event, a town hall-type meeting, where the featured speaker was the new CEO. What they found is that at the in-person meeting, employees asked no questions at all, but at the virtual meetings there were so many questions, they had to cut them off and answer them.”

Smith confirms that inclination among Cisco’s virtual participants: “With our most senior executive, we would have 2,500 people let’s say in a chatroom and on average get about 500–600 questions, so that’s a pretty good percentage.” Attendees also were quite busy on the “Togetherizer,” Cisco’s private micro blogging tool (fitting the theme of the

program: “Together We Can”). “So people would go in there and talk about what can we accomplish as a human network at Cisco,” Smith adds.

Measuring Engagement and ROI

Virtual participants’ interactions, both among themselves and with presenters, all can be monitored in order to measure ROI. “One of the advantages of the virtual environment is that every single click is trackable,” notes Thompson. “You can somewhat measure

engagement based on the interactivity of the user, how long they are in, did they watch content, did they participate, did they chat, did they network? We are starting to see more dashboard-type approaches where all that data is aggregated and summarized in kind of an executive level dashboard.”

One example of this increased sophistication is Unisfair’s Engagement Index (EI), which allows the host company to quantify the degree of a virtual attendee’s engagement with the content. Essentially, the company can define what specific actions it would ideally like the attendees to take during the event, and award points for each. Suppose it wants to target marketing managers from the UK for lead generation. “You can say: I want them to attend the webcast session about my new product, download the data sheet, and to have chatted at least for 10 minutes with the booth rep,” says Rathenberg by way of example. “You then give points for those actions that count toward the person’s EI.” The attendee may then be qualified to be referred to the company’s CRM system only if he or she exceeds a certain EI threshold.

“Engagement” is indeed how today’s planners often conceive the objective of their events: to strengthen the psychological ties that attendees, whether employees or customers, have with the host company. Adding a virtual component to face-to-face meetings is another route to engagement, and measuring engagement. The route is becoming less optional going forward. “The hybrid approach is something corporations will have to embrace and develop a strategy for how to best take advantage of this new opportunity,” Persson concludes. **C&IT**

Do Your Meetings Need an Altitude Adjustment?

MOUNTAIN RESORTS INSPIRE PEAK PERFORMANCE

Mountain resorts have a rarified air about them. They afford corporate groups not only the opportunity to escape the maddening crowd but the environs to inspire the kind of creative thinking that's often disrupted by the demands of the high-tech work world. Following are some stellar destinations for planners who aspire to meetings on a higher plane.

The Spirit of the Southwest

The recently renovated **Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino** sits on the Mescalero Apache Reservation in southern New Mexico, near the town of Ruidoso. The AAA Four Diamond resort is surrounded by a collage of colors, textures, mesas and the Sacramento Mountains.

There are 273 guest rooms, many facing Lake Mescalero, and 40,000 sf of space for meetings. Outdoor recreational opportunities are unlimited, including golf, horseback riding, boating, fishing, skeet shooting, hiking and biking. Indoor entertainment centers on the 38,000-sf casino, and fine dining can be had in Wendell's Restaurant. Other onsite amenities include an indoor pool, fitness center, pro shop and gift shop.

What many attendees love most, however, is the Southwestern setting: Mountains that change colors as the day progresses; bald eagles overhead, and wild turkey, deer and elk roaming the reservation; and the nearby Old West town of Ruidoso. And planners love the affordability.



The new year-round resort Montage Deer Valley opened in December in Park City, UT. There are 220 guest rooms and 55,000 sf of indoor and outdoor venues featuring breathtaking vistas.

Photo courtesy of Montage Deer Valley

Bruce Tevis, field manager for a major petroleum service company, has been bringing some 125 attendees to a customer appreciation golf tournament and dinner event at Inn of the Mountain Gods for 27 years.

"We like it here because there's so much to do," he says. "Between the amenities and the natural beauty, there's never a reason to leave."

Tevis says the staff at the inn is not only professional, but proactive.

"Our attendees love it," Tevis says. "As soon as one event ends, they're already asking when the following year's will be."



A major petroleum service company hosted a successful customer appreciation golf tournament at Inn of the Mountain Gods.

Rocky Mountain High

The **Broadmoor** is one of America's grandest hotels, designed in Italian Renaissance style and opened in 1918, situated in one of the great towns of the West, Colorado Springs. Just outside your door is 14,110-foot Pikes Peak. And with 744 rooms and cottages, and 185,000 sf of meeting space, it's a planner's dream.

Only 70 miles from Denver International Airport, The Broadmoor has Colorado's only five-star spa, its only five-star, five-diamond restaurant, and 25 retail shops. Outside? Three championship golf courses, hiking, biking, horseback riding, tennis, paddleboats on the lake, rafting, fishing, two pools (and another one indoors) and rock climbing. And Colorado Springs is surrounded by attractions such as the United States Air Force Academy, Cave of the Winds, Garden of the Gods, Royal Gorge, the U.S. Olympic Training Center and the Cog Railway to the top of Pikes Peak.

"We define ourselves as 'Where European elegance meets Western hospitality,'" says Allison Scott, spokesperson at The Broadmoor. "And we've put close to a billion dollars into the resort in the past decade."



Photo courtesy of The Broadmoor

Tracy Guzman is owner of Corporate Events, a Los Altos, CA-based firm that plans conferences and incentives for companies. She's held two annual conferences at The Broadmoor for an international information services company.

"We average about 450 attendees," Guzman says, "and The Broadmoor is perfect for us. The breakout spaces are great, as is the technology. And the Conference Center is state of the art."

Guzman calls it a "complete experience" for attendees.

"You walk outside in the morning, and Pikes Peak is right there — the energy level is incredible. And in the evening you can sit outside in front of a firepit."

The nearby **Cheyenne Mountain Resort & Conference Center** has 316 guest rooms and 40,000 sf of IACC-certified meeting space. The resort is currently undergoing a \$20 mil-



"Between the amenities and the natural beauty, there's never a reason to leave."

Bruce Tevis, Field Manager for a major petroleum service company

lion renovation slated for completion in spring 2011 that will encompass guest rooms, meeting spaces, common areas, landscaping and more. There's also a championship golf course designed by Pete Dye.

Downstate, near Aspen, is the year-round resort town of **Snowmass Village**. There are some 30 lodging properties here, 95 percent of which are slope-side, many of them ski-in, ski-out. The Snowmass Conference Center accommodates up to 2,000 attendees and features the 4,100-sf Roof Garden event venue with sweeping views of the valley.

Down Home in the Quaker State

The **Inn at Pocono Manor** was built in 1902 as a "Retreat House" by Quakers from Philadelphia and is on the National Registry of Historic Places. The all-season resort, known as "The Grand Lady of the Mountains," is perched on the top of Little Pocono Mountain, and surrounded by glorious 1930s-era coun-

The Broadmoor's Cheyenne Lodge is 6,300 sf of unique mountain-view event space for both indoor and outdoor gatherings.

By Steve Winston



The Mohonk Mountain House is an elegant Victorian-era hideaway in New York's Hudson Valley.

This was the company's first meeting in a mountain resort. But it won't be the last. "We accomplished all our goals," Kolodziejczyk says. "And our attendees thought it was a wonderful change of pace from the usual meeting venue."

The Heart of Utah

Located in Park City, UT, 35 miles from Salt Lake City, **Montage Deer Valley** sits amidst the stunning natural beauty of Deer Valley, considered by many to be the top ski area in America.

With 220 guest rooms and 55,000 sf of indoor/outdoor space for meetings and events, this resort offers 75-mile views, all the way into Wyoming. It just opened in December with three fine restaurants, the Spa Montage, every conceivable kind of summer and winter recreation, and an ambience reminiscent of the great mountain lodges. "Meeting planners seem to like the small-town flavor of

try homes. It's a world away for corporate meetings, but within two hours of New York City, New Jersey and Philadelphia.

The inn has 237 guest rooms and 25,000 sf for meetings, along with a spa, stables, two golf courses, indoor and outdoor pools, and plenty of fishing, hiking, biking and skeet shooting. And the view from the 600-capacity Mountain View Dining Room is spectacular. A major \$4 million renovation of the main lodge to be completed this spring will involve the entrance, public lobbies, event and meeting rooms, restaurants and guest rooms.

Bob Kolodziejczyk, northeast industrial regional manager for Robert Bosch Tool Corporation, held the company's Northeast Regional Meeting here last August, with 20 attendees.

"It's a three- to four-day, hands-on training meeting for our salespeople," Kolodziejczyk says. "And we need a place with both indoor and outdoor facilities, so we can demonstrate the new equipment. The Inn at Pocono Manor was perfect, with plenty of classroom space and plenty of covered space outdoors."



"You walk outside in the morning, and Pikes Peak is right there — the energy level is incredible. And in the evening you can sit outside in front of a firepit."

Tracy Guzeman, Owner
Corporate Events, Los Altos, CA

Park City," says Kurt Diekhoff, director of sales, "and the outdoor recreation here. We think this leaves attendees refreshed and relaxed. And we think it makes meetings more productive."

Allegheny Mountain Meetings

Located in White Sulphur Springs, WV, **The Greenbrier** has been welcoming folks to this part of the Allegheny Mountains since 1778. And, if anything, its Early American elegance has grown over the years. There are 710 guest rooms, more than 100,000 sf for meetings, and outdoor patios and lawns for large gatherings.

There's hiking, biking, trout fishing, skeet shooting, a falconry academy, an off-road driving school, horseback riding, four golf courses, tennis, a spa, 11 restaurants, 25 shops and a movie theater. And there's even a new 103,000-sf gaming and entertainment venue, in which — in true Greenbrier

The historic Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, WV, boasts four championship golf courses and The Greenbrier Golf Academy.



Photo courtesy of The Greenbrier

style — gentlemen are required to wear jackets after seven.

The special ambience here is perhaps best symbolized by the afternoon custom of High Tea.

The Homestead, now 245 years old, is a National Historic Landmark in Hot Springs, VA, founded by George Washington. And it's still a place where people come to "take the waters" of the naturally heated springs. For meeting planners, though, the lure is 483 guest rooms, 72,000 sf of newly renovated and technologically advanced meeting space, all integrated into the resort's unique Old World ambience.

Nestled in the Allegheny Mountains, the resort's environs offer a quiet, colorful alternative to urban meeting places with activities such as falconry, three golf courses, a spa, and hiking, biking, canoeing, kayaking and skiing.

"Mountain resorts offer attendees a true private getaway that allows them to focus on the business at hand," says Mike Aylmer, director of sales at The Homestead. "You won't find any bulletin boards in our lobby with lists of meetings."

Northeastern Nuggets

The Mohonk Mountain House is 80 miles north of New York City in the Hudson Valley in New Paltz, NY, overlooking spectacular Lake Mohonk. Built in 1869, the turreted, turn-of-the-century Victorian castle sits on 2,200 acres. There's 13,000 sf of meeting space, 260 guest rooms and a full-service spa. It's a snowy-white wonderland in winter with an 18,000-sf ice skating pavilion, and a colorful recreational retreat in summer that features a 110-year-old historic Scottish golf course.

Stowe Mountain Resort in Stowe, VT, boasts some of the East Coast's best skiing on Mount Mansfield, the state's highest mountain. In December, Stowe Mountain Lodge opened its South Wing, doubling the property's guest room capacity to 312. The lodge is the centerpiece of Spruce Peak at Stowe, a new \$400 million alpine neighborhood. Stowe Mountain

Resort offers a combined total of 56,000 sf of meeting space including group options at the newly opened Spruce Peak Performing Arts Center.

From Rocky Mountain jewels to Allegheny landmarks, mountain resorts lend a breath of fresh air — and hopefully some fresh thinking — to even the most staid corporate meeting.

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Orlando

Golf programs are back in favor and what better place to play than Orlando. Here a foursome celebrates at Reunion Resort, home to courses by Palmer, Watson and Nicklaus.

Over the past decade, Orlando has evolved from the world-famous home of Mickey Mouse to a mature center of business and one of the country's premier meeting and convention destinations — whether a theme park foray is on the agenda or not. The evolution has come from a relentless, concerted effort by Visit Orlando (the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau), city and county officials, hoteliers and other industry suppliers to build a brand that is synonymous with successful meetings.

What's Not To Love?

Planners and Attendees Rate it No. 1

That campaign hit its high-water mark last year, when a Metropoll market survey found that Orlando ranked as the top overall convention site, placing No. 1 among corporate planners.

By John Buchanan

"Orlando is an easy destination to get to and an easy destination to work with," says Lisa Zebrowski, CMP, manager of major events at Boston-based global information management technology provider Iron Mountain. Last March, Zebrowski hosted 35 attendees for a five-day meeting at the Hard Rock Hotel at Universal Orlando Resort. "We have people coming in from all over the world to attend our meetings," adds Zebrowski, who plans about 90 meetings a year, "so it's important to us that it's easy to get into and out of. But because of the time of year when we hold some of our most important meetings, the climate is a big factor, too."

Other key factors that make Orlando so attractive as a destination include "a ton of hotels and a variety of things to do," she says. "It's also one of the relatively few destinations where



The long-awaited Hilton Orlando opened in 2009 with fanfare. The 1,400-room hotel is connected to the Orange County Convention Center

you can bring a large group and stay in a single hotel, such as The Peabody Orlando."

Leslie Tait, events manager at call center software provider Aspect Software in Chelmsford, MA, is another enthusiastic repeat user of Orlando as a destination. In January 2010, Tait hosted 850 attendees for a five-day meeting at the 584-room Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes.

"I'm tasked with controlling the cost of programs" says Tait, who plans 15-20 meetings a year. "And what I've found is that Orlando is very cost-effective for us, in terms of airlift and flights, including for our international attendees. You just can't beat Orlando for value. For example, on the typical meeting we do in Orlando, we save \$50,000 in airfare for an internal program, compared to what we'd pay for the same meeting in a directly competing destination."

When selecting destinations, Tait also uses a ranking system for airports, based on data from the Bureau of Transportation and Statistics. By that measure, she says, Orlando International Airport is one of the top two or three in the U.S.

Terry Cosentino, director for special events at New York City-based software manufacturer Information Builders, also



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holds Orlando dear on his roster of regularly used destinations. For him, however, the holy grail is exceptional service. “When I’m planning a meeting, I always say that ‘no’ should not be part of the vocabulary,” says Cosentino, who has been with Information Builders for 20 years and plans more than 100 meetings each year, including destinations across the U.S. and around the world. “And I’ve found that in Orlando, because the destination deals with a lot of children and their parents, there’s a different mindset as far as making sure that everything goes fine. And that if there are any mishaps, that they’re taken care of, and you never, ever see a problem. And I appreciate that level of service, because what a meeting planner always fears is a problem that needs to be corrected immediately. And I’ve found that any resort in Orlando deals with it so creatively and does such a great job, that ‘no’ or the idea of a ‘problem’ is never an issue.”

New and Renovated

A key catalyst for Orlando’s accelerating dominance as a top-draw meeting destination has been the dramatic evolution of its hotel inventory as well as major new projects such as the \$1.3 billion “medical city” complex in Lake Nona, one of only two medical city communities in the world; the \$383 million Dr. Phillips Performing Arts Center, scheduled for completion in 2013; and the \$380 million Amway Center arena, home to the NBA’s Orlando Magic basketball team.

On the hotel scene, the long-anticipated Hilton Orlando made its debut in 2009. The 1,400-room property is connected via skywalk to the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC). Just down the street on International Drive, The Peabody



Connected to the OCCC, The Peabody Orlando boasts 1,641 rooms since its \$450 million expansion and renovation.

Photo courtesy of The Peabody Orlando

room Holiday Inn & Suites at Universal Orlando completed an extensive renovation last October.

The 1,334-room Rosen Centre Hotel, located adjacent to the convention center and one of four major convention properties owned and operated by legendary local hotelier Harris Rosen, has finished work on a pedestrian bridge that connects the property to the OCCC. Rosen Centre is the third hotel property to connect to the OCCC, along with The Peabody Orlando and the Hilton Orlando.



Photo courtesy of Rosen Hotels & Resorts

The 1,334-room Rosen Centre Hotel connects to the OCCC by a pedestrian bridge.

With the recent addition of the 1,020-room newly renovated and rebranded Rosen Inn at Pointe Orlando to the brand’s collection of convention hotels, Rosen Hotels & Resorts now offers four convention properties totaling 4,500 guest rooms and 605,000 sf of meeting and event space.

In addition to Rosen Inn at Pointe Orlando, the independent brand’s collection of convention hotels includes the two award-winning properties that bookend the OCCC — the 800-room Rosen Plaza with 60,000 sf of meeting space and the 1,334-room Rosen Centre with 106,000 sf of meeting space. In addition, the 1,500-room Rosen Shingle Creek with 445,000 sf of meeting space is within a mile of the OCCC. All four hotels are within 10–15 minutes of Orlando International Airport.



The newly named DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at Seaworld is the ideal destination for serious corporate meetings followed or preceded by a fun and exciting vacation for the whole family.

Photo courtesy of DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando

Orlando, also connected to the convention center, completed a \$450 million expansion and renovation last September and brought its room count to 1,641. Meeting space totals 300,000 sf on three levels and features five pillar-free ballrooms.

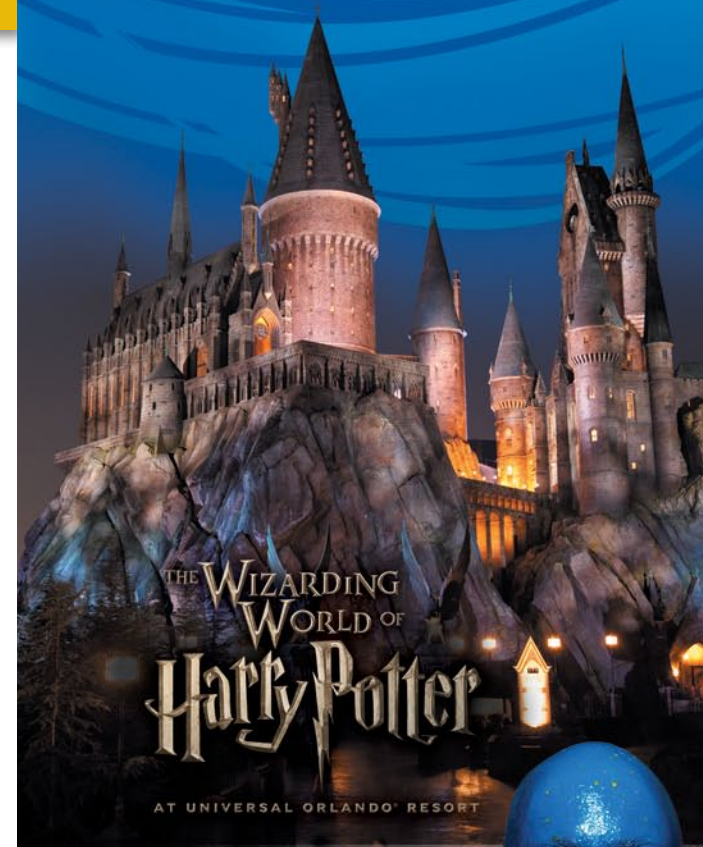
The 1,001-room Doubletree Orlando Resort–International Drive has been rebranded as the DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld. The newly revitalized resort is in a prime location situated on 28 acres of native palm trees and tropical fountains and only 10 minutes from the Orlando International Airport. The property has 60,000 sf of meeting facilities for indoor or outdoor events, including two grand ballrooms.

The 750-room Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress completed a \$45 million renovation in January of last year. The property features a popular Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course. The 390-

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“And believe it or not, shopping is a very popular recreational activity for meeting attendees. We have fantastic outlet stores. ...There’s just so much to do in and around Orlando. There really is a recreational activity for every taste.”

Dana Cross, Executive Sales and Event Manager
ME Productions
Orlando, FL

Golf and Recreation

Orlando features nearly 200 golf courses, which include some of the most prestigious in the country, such as the famous links at Arnold Palmer’s Bay Hill Club and Lodge, site of the annual Arnold Palmer Invitational tournament on the PGA Tour.

Orlando golf is such a draw for some attendees that last year, five foursomes got together and came in a couple of days before Cosentino’s meeting commenced to get in a couple of rounds.

Golf also plays a role in a number of the meetings Tait plans. “We actually use golf as more of a perk for our speakers and presenters,” she says. “But for meetings involving executives or clients, golf plays a part in the event. In fact, we usually place our Orlando meetings at resort properties that have a golf course and spa. And I love the range of golf and spa properties that Orlando offers now. Our meetings are very intense from a

signed by the revered trinity of Arnold Palmer, Tom Watson and Jack Nicklaus.

The 720-room Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate features two highly regarded courses designed by Greg Norman. The 36 holes of world-class golf offer golfers a blend of traditional and modern elements: The International Course offers an authentic links-style golf experience, such as one would find on the golf courses of the British Isles; and the National Course provides a challenging round of American-style golf.

Other top courses include Grand Cypress Golf Club, featuring 45 holes designed by Jack Nicklaus; Shingle Creek Golf Club; The Ritz-Carlton Golf Club, Orlando, Grande Lakes; Marriott’s Grande Pines Golf Club and the fabled courses at Walt Disney World Golf.

Orlando also claims some of the best golf clinics or academies in the country. Reunion Resort features the Annika Academy, which offers customized Callaway golf-club fitting. The David Leadbetter Golf Academy at the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate is one of the most highly regarded facilities of its kind, regularly coaching top PGA players. The Grand Cypress Academy of Golf is another place where attendees can master the game, if only for a day. The Faldo Golf Institute by Marriott is another local golf landmark for aspirants to the perfect swing. The Brad Brewer Golf Academy at Shingle Creek Golf Club offers customized programs for individuals and groups as well as teambuilding programs and a new player session that teaches fundamentals of the game in just four to six hours.

Non-golfers also can enjoy a wide range of choices in the Orlando area. Kennedy Space Center, about 45 minutes from downtown Orlando, is a consistent draw for attendees, says Dana Cross, executive sales and event manager at Orlando destination management company ME Productions. “And believe it or not, shopping is a very popular recreational activity for meeting attendees,” she says. “We have fantastic outlet stores. We also recommend things like a wine tasting tour of Lake Ridge Winery or airboat rides into the Everglades.”

Another popular group activity is hot-air ballooning. “There’s just so much to do in and around Orlando,” Cross says. “There really is a recreational activity for every taste.”



Photo courtesy of Rosen Shingle Creek

The Shingle Creek Golf Club, which serves all four Rosen Hotels & Resorts convention properties, is a championship public golf course that is also home to the Brad Brewer Golf Academy.

business perspective, so it’s nice to have a great resort that offers those options for attendees to relax and enjoy themselves.”

Orlando also scores well with Zebrowski’s attendees. “We haven’t actually booked a meeting at a golf resort,” she says. “We just make arrangements to get people to the golf courses.”

Although honest debate can ensue about which Orlando courses offer the best experience, depending on skill level and aesthetics, no one can challenge the fact that the 500-room Reunion Resort is the only property with a trio of courses de-

Meeting planner meets investment planner.



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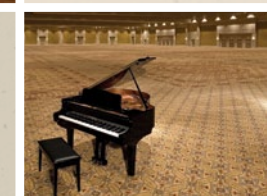
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"I've found that in Orlando...if there are any mishaps, that they're taken care of, and you never, ever see a problem. I appreciate that level of service. ...Any resort in Orlando deals with it creatively and does such a great job, that 'no' or the idea of a 'problem' is never an issue."

Terry Cosentino, Director for Special Events
Information Builders
New York, NY

Theme Parks

Although recreation can take many forms in Orlando, the city's major theme parks — operated by Disney, Universal and



Breaktaking views of the pools and two championship Greg Norman-designed golf courses await attendees at Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate.

Sea World — are its international calling cards. And each offers a broad range of meeting facilities and services, including spectacular entertainment options. But regardless of whether it's a buyout for the event, or a casual visit for a small group of attendees after hours, Orlando's famous theme parks deliver a memorable experience.

"For our meeting last June, the highlight was a chance to go to Universal Studios," says Cosentino. "We did an offsite event there, where we virtually took over Universal Studios. And we were free for four hours to go wherever we wanted. Every attraction was open. We had food and an open bar. It was a great night."

Cosentino has been an enthusiastic user of Universal for years. "We've also done buyouts of the other Universal theme park, Islands of Adventure," he says. "We were actually one of the first groups to use it when it had first opened up." Such excursions always score well in post-meeting surveys. "Attendees absolutely love it," Cosentino says. "They always say they want to go back."

For Tait, a group outing to a theme park on the final night of her Orlando meetings is a special treat, because until then attendees have been engaged in intense, all-day business meetings for up to five days.

"I typically will do a buyout at either a restaurant or a venue," Tait says. "And I've done a lot at Universal, especially at CityWalk. I've also used Disney venues when we used a Disney hotel. For example, we used Typhoon Lagoon for one meeting. Those facilities are a big plus for planners, a real no-brainer, because it makes things so easy. It's a turnkey option for groups. And it's something that attendees really like because it's just fun."

Zebrowski also has used Disney venues successfully. "We've used Pleasure Island at Downtown Disney, and we've also used Epcot," she says. "We did a fantastic awards ceremony at Epcot that went over really well. Last March, we took the group to Universal and to Disney World. We had a smaller group for that meeting, so we could just mingle with the public and reserve sections of the restaurants for our group."

Like Cosentino, Zebrowski finds that Orlando theme park experiences always generate high scores in post-meeting research. "They're popular with all of our attendees," she says. "But especially with our international attendees."

Orlando got a great shot in the arm when Harry Potter came to town. The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, which opened in mid-June in the Universal's Islands of Adventure theme park, drew 11.2 million visitors in 2010, an increase



Construction has begun on Hyperion Wharf at Downtown Disney. To be completed by 2013, the area will include new boutiques, restaurants, a lakeside park and a nighttime electric wonderland.

Photo courtesy of Walt Disney World Resort

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“Orlando is an easy destination to get to and an easy destination to work with. We have people coming in from all over the world to attend our meetings so it’s important to us that it’s easy to get into and out of. The climate is a big factor, too.”

Lisa Zebrowski, CMP, Manager of Major Events
Iron Mountain
Boston, MA



of nearly 2 million from 2009. Fresh, new experiences are what corporate meeting attendees expect when they come to Orlando, and Harry Potter and his friends continue to deliver.

Offsite Venues

As a natural extension of its broad and sophisticated theme-park capabilities, the greater Orlando area also offers a wide range of choices in offsite venues and related activities.

For example, planners can choose from a dozen museums. The more traditional options include Orlando Museum of Art, Cornell Fine Arts Museum or the Museum of Arts and Sciences. But there are also notably interesting or eclectic options, such as Fantasy of Flight, which chronicles the history and evolution of aviation, or The Wells’ Built Museum of African American History & Culture.

One of the area’s top offsite venues for groups is the Kennedy Space Center, says Cross. “It’s an amazing place. It’s a great venue for a reception or banquet. That’s especially true



The Hard Rock Hotel at Universal Orlando Resort, billed as “the coolest hotel on earth,” recently celebrated its 10th anniversary.

of the Saturn V rocket room — that’s the huge rocket that got men to the moon. You can stage a dinner or other major event there and have an astronaut as keynote speaker. Or you can arrange for the group to have lunch or dinner with astronauts. Not a lot of planners realize that.”

Other options include Blue Martini, a highly popular local nightclub, and Corona Cigar Company and Diamond Crown

Cigar Lounge. The Velvet Bar at the Hard Rock Hotel, located onsite at Universal Orlando Resort, is a popular option for smaller groups.

Planners with sports-minded attendees also can select a venue from a diverse list. Universal Orlando Resort features a NASCAR Sports Grille and NBA City. Other exciting options include Daytona 500 Experience, Richard Petty Driving Experience and Orlando Harley-Davidson. Brand-name live entertainment venues include House of Blues and Hard Rock Cafe, located in Universal’s CityWalk complex.

“The options and talent pool in Orlando for doing offsite events are phenomenal,” says Tait. “We look for something turnkey, that doesn’t have a lot of moving parts to it. For example, we’ve done events at the Hard Rock Cafe that were very successful. In Orlando, you have a lot of options. You don’t ever feel like the same old jazz trio is the only game in town.”

Zebrowski also praises the range of venue options in Orlando. She tries to mix things up and keep things fresh from meeting to meeting, year to year. “We work hard so that attendees will never think we’re just doing the same old thing all over again,” she says. “Another advantage of Orlando is that there are just so many things you can do.”

Dining and Entertainment

Just as Orlando has meticulously upgraded its general meeting capabilities over the past decade, so too have its dining and entertainment scenes risen to world-class standards.

For meeting planners, the city now offers a vast range of reliable dining options, from established national brands to lesser-known local landmarks. For example, the relatively little-known Victoria and Albert’s at Disney’s Grand Floridian Resort & Spa is one of the most critically acclaimed restaurants in the U.S. and also highly rated by Zagat. It’s expensive, but it’s also intimate, and it offers a period-themed experience based on classical American cuisine prepared as culinary art.

Excellent big-name steak-house options include Capital Grille, Morton’s of Chicago, The Palm and Ruth’s Chris Steak House, as well as beloved, family-owned local competitor Del Frisco’s Prime Steak & Lobster.

Top seafood options include Landry’s Seafood House,

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“Our folks just love Orlando. Some people, especially our international attendees, will add a day or two before or after the meeting so they can really enjoy Orlando. And sometimes they even bring their families and enjoy a little personal vacation.”

Leslie Tait, Events Manager
Aspect Software
Chelmsford, MA



Photo courtesy of Walt Disney World Resort
The conference center at Disney's BoardWalk Inn offers 20,000 sf of meeting space, featuring high-speed Internet, state-of-the-art sound systems, satellite up/down link capabilities and more.

McCormick & Schmick's and Todd English's Blue Zoo. Unique, locally themed seafood restaurants include Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. at Universal's CityWalk, as well as the Flying Fish Café at Disney's BoardWalk Resort. Other popular seafood choices include The Crab House and Boston Lobster Feast, each with two Orlando locations, and Coral Reef Restaurant at Epcot.

The most critically acclaimed Italian restaurants in town include Bice Ristorante and Primo by Melissa Kelly, which are complemented by longtime local favorites Christini's Ristorante Italiano and Antonio's at Sand Lake.

Particularly popular with attendees are the small neighborhood eateries located in the Vietnamese district of the city, along East Colonial Drive. It's the best Vietnamese food this side of Vietnam. And it's inexpensive.

By its very nature, Orlando offers an extraordinary roster of after-dinner entertainment possibilities, whether organized for a group or as an individual activity. Two hot-ticket shows are Blue Man Group at Universal and "La Nouba" from Cirque du Soleil at Walt Disney World Resort.

Groups geared toward the performing arts can enjoy an evening of classical music with the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra, or a night at the opera with Orlando Opera Company. For competition-oriented groups, Casino Party Planners can arrange an onsite or offsite private casino experience.

Getting Help

Given the staggering list of available options in Orlando, many planners turn to Visit Orlando, the Orlando/Orange County Convention & Visitors Bureau, for everything from recommendations on dining or entertainment to meeting services such as onsite registration staffing. Also, attendees can purchase discounted attraction tickets for SeaWorld Orlando, Universal Orlando Resort and Walt Disney World Resort.

"The CVB is another reason I love Orlando," says Tait. "They have a great CVB. I work with them on site visits, and I also use their registration services at the meeting." Cosentino also gives high marks to the CVB. "They are wonderful," he says. "They reach out to you. They are always accessible. You feel like you have a long-distance cousin helping you out. They offer all kinds of services, and they're always there for you."

Add it all up, and you understand Orlando's phenomenal rise of recent years. "The city is evolving into a really robust meeting destination," says Tait. "You have the new hotels and the major renovations such as The Peabody. You have upgraded



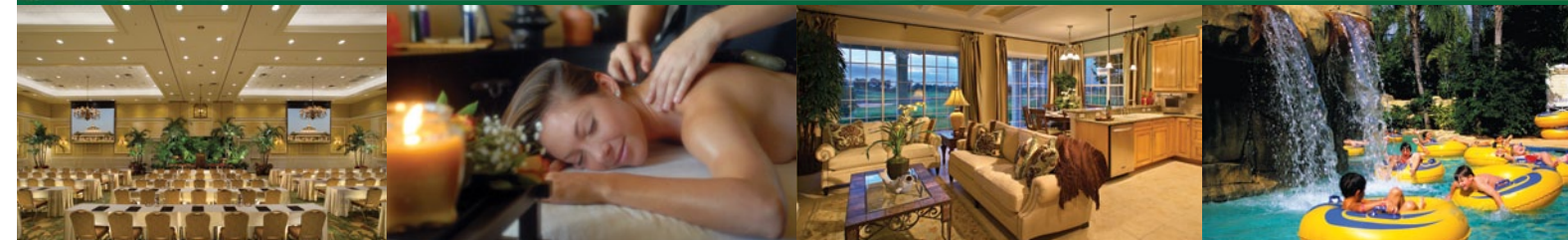
Photo courtesy of Reunion Resort
The spectacular hole 7 at the Palmer Course, one of three championship golf courses at Reunion Resort, Orlando.

meeting technology. Then you have the list of major meeting properties. It's just a beautiful destination for a meeting."

And attendees love it, too. "Our folks just love Orlando," says Tait. "Some people, especially our international attendees, will add a day or two before or after the meeting so they can really enjoy Orlando. And sometimes they even bring their families and enjoy a little personal vacation." **C&IT**



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*Terms and Conditions: Number of persons for refreshment breaks or reception may not exceed number of total room nights, dinner for four includes two appetizers, entrées, desserts & two (2) bottles of house selected wine. Meeting must be booked by May 31, 2011 with meeting arrival by December 31, 2011.

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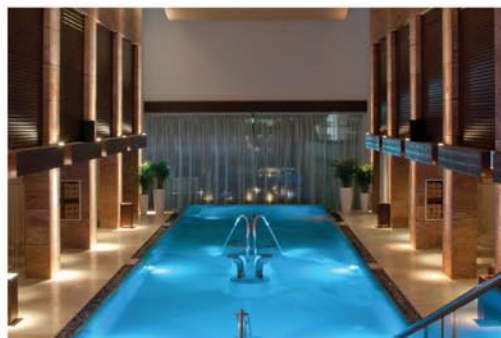
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