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Corporate & Incentive Travel

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



Las Vegas

The No. 1 Hit Year After Year

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The hottest ticket on The Strip will be the Soul2Soul show starring country music's first couple Faith Hill and Tim McGraw at The Venetian starting in December.

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In perfect *harmony*
with her *timeless* charms,
New Orleans' next great improvisation
debuts January 2013.



The future site of many a command performance, the Crescent City's long revered convention center will now feature a 60,300 square foot divisible Great Hall, 25,400 sq ft multi-use pre-function space, and include hotel-like appointments throughout. This impressive 1.1 million sq ft center, which so perfectly complements the city's walkable hotel packages, will now be more attractive than ever to groups large AND small. Additional features of note include a 4,660 sq ft Junior Ballroom, complete with a 3,420 sq ft rooftop terrace, a 980 sq ft indoor balcony and a 5,700 sq ft executive club lounge.



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Photo by Las Vegas News Bureau, Glenn Pinkerton

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By Derek Reveron

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PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE

A Picture Is *Still* Worth 1,000 Words

It's true. A picture is still worth 1,000 words. People want to connect with other people — especially through the use of pictures. And today it is easier than ever because advanced technology allows us to post and share instantaneously via a smartphone or a tablet device. In this issue, we learn that using compelling images to tell a story is the way to go these days — a lesson that is not lost on meeting professionals and CVB marketers. For example, in "Show and Tell...Connecting

With Your Audience Via Social Media," Melissa Yao, chief marketing officer of VisitSavannah and a panelist at this year's Destination Marketing Association International Annual Convention, advises meeting planners using social media such as Pinterest to first determine what is unique and authentic about their destination. "You have to find what is special about your destination and tell the story through pictures. Don't just post any pictures. Find something that connects with your audience. Develop an idea of how to brand your destination with pictures," recommends Yao.



Destinations such as Las Vegas (page 54) and Florida (page 42) excel in this arena. When you see a picture of The Strip in all its electrified glory you instantly know it is Las Vegas. Photos of Mickey Mouse and Harry Potter transport you to Orlando, and images of palm trees, emerald water, lush golf courses and white sandy beaches whisper Florida.

These sophisticated destinations reach visitors and groups by means of social media, to connect with more and more people. For instance, as noted in the Las Vegas report, Pam Newman-Harris, vice president of RE/MAX Event Management, is a real fan of meeting in Las Vegas because attendance is always higher and the built-in entertainment and dining gives attendees the opportunity to "do their own things in the evenings." RE/MAX has held several conventions in Las Vegas and will be back for the next two years. "We have people in more than 80 countries and this year, people from more than 56 countries attended. That's because there is such a variety of things to do. It's also because the airlift is very convenient, and the marketing that Las Vegas does outside of North America is so powerful that it makes people want to go. Las Vegas also is more cost-effective than other destinations," says Newman-Harris.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher



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Molinet Named Senior V.P. for Greater Fort Lauderdale CVB

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL — Carlos M. Molinet, CHA, was named senior vice president of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau. In his new position, Molinet will report directly to Nicki E. Grossman, president of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention



MOLINET

& Visitors Bureau, and have oversight responsibilities for CVB operations, sales and marketing. “Carlos M. Molinet, CHA, brings 25 years of experience in hospitality, business and motivational management and leadership to the convention & visitors bureau, including senior level positions with some of the country’s leading lodging brands including Starwood, Wyndham, Hyatt and Hilton hotels,” said Grossman. Most recently, Molinet was general

manager of the Hilton Fort Lauderdale Marina. Previously, he was director of operations for LXR Resorts and Hotels Fort Lauderdale; the general manager of the Fort Lauderdale Grande and the area general manager for the Hyatt Regency Pier Sixty-Six and Bahia Mar Beach Resort.

“Carlos is a community leader in Greater Fort Lauderdale and an integral force in contributing to and helping to reshape our hospitality sector,” said Grossman. He is currently the chairman and immediate past president of the Broward Chapter of the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association (FRLA), for the second time, and he has also been inducted to the 2011–2012 Executive Committee of the FRLA, among other endeavors. www.sunny.org

JW Marriott Austin On Its Way Up



A rendering of the JW Marriott Austin, which is scheduled to open in 2015.

AUSTIN, TX — Construction on the 33-story, \$300 million downtown JW Marriott Austin convention hotel is set to start soon because the developer received final approval of the project’s building plans from the city of Austin, according to statesman.com. The 1,012-room hotel will be the largest JW Marriott in the country in room count when it opens in early 2015. The hotel will have 115,000 sf of meeting, banquet and exhibition space. More than 40,000 room reservations have already been sold, said the hotel’s developer, Indiana-based White Lodging Services Corp. Austin Mayor Lee Leffingwell said the project represents “the single largest investment in downtown Austin to date and will offer significant economic benefits to the city, including tax revenue and job creation.”

Another convention hotel is planned for downtown. The developer of the Fairmont Austin, a 50-story tower with 1,000 rooms, plans to break ground next spring and open in 2015. The two new hotels, along with a Hyatt Place that White Lodging is now building, would bring downtown Austin’s hotel room count from about 6,000 to more than 8,330. www.jwmarriottaustin.com

GSA Freezes Per Diem Rates

WASHINGTON, DC — The U.S. General Services Administration has announced that it will freeze lodging and meal per diem rates for the 2013 fiscal year. The news was welcomed by the U.S. Travel Association, American Hotel & Lodging Association and other travel industry groups that had been vigorously lobbying against proposed changes in the GSA’s method for calculating per diems. U.S. Travel noted that GSA’s policy proposal would have cut federal lodging per diem rates by roughly 30 percent, costing the travel industry \$885 million in revenue and thousands of American jobs. Roger Dow, president and CEO of U.S. Travel, said, “We should be thankful to the GSA, travel leaders in Congress and the Obama Administration for continuing to work collaboratively with our industry, and for their recognition of the importance of travel.” www.ustravel.org



Largest Sheraton in the World to Open in Macau

Sheraton Hotels & Resorts will mark a milestone this month as it celebrates its 75th anniversary with the opening of the nearly 4,000-room Sheraton Macau Hotel, becoming the largest Sheraton and the largest Starwood Hotel in the world. The Sheraton Macau located on the Cotai Strip, which is known as the “Las Vegas of Asia,” will offer three restaurants with poolside cafes, 140,000 sf of meeting space and three swimming pools. Sheraton’s services also include the largest Sheraton Club worldwide, the largest Shine Spa in Asia Pacific, a Sheraton Fitness Center, and a main ballroom that is the size of 11.5 basketball courts. www.sheratonmacao.com

First Hard Rock Hotel in Mexico Opens. Hard Rock Hotel Vallarta is Mexico’s first Hard Rock hotel and one of only three all-inclusive Hard Rock Hotels in the world. The hotel, located in Riviera Nayarit, has 348 guest rooms, 6,300 sf of meeting facilities, six restaurants, four bars and lounges, 24-hour room service, live entertainment, swimming pools, beach volleyball court, tennis court, half-court basketball, pitch and putt golf, and Body Rock fitness center. In addition to the traditional music memorabilia, the property also features the signature Rock Spa, beauty salon, Rock Shop and nightly theme parties at the outdoor amphitheater. www.hardrockhotels.com/vallarta

Waldorf Astoria Panama Now Accepting Reservations for 2013. Hilton Worldwide’s first Waldorf Astoria hotel in Latin America, Waldorf Astoria Panama, is accepting reservations for 2013. Located in the heart of Panama’s entertainment area, the 248-room hotel will offer four restaurants and bars, a 2,000-sf fitness center, a 2,000-sf spa, outdoor swimming pool and Level 5 — a multi-event venue for meetings with more than 3,500 sf of meeting space and three multipurpose meeting rooms and a ballroom. www.waldorfastoria.com, www.hiltonworldwide.com

Branson Is 79th City Added to Southwest Airlines Roster

BRANSON, MO — Beginning March 9, 2013, Branson, MO, will become the 79th city on the Southwest Airlines roster. Offering daily nonstop flights to Dallas’ Love Field, Chicago’s Midway Airport and Houston’s Hobby Airport, Southwest also will provide weekly Saturday service between Branson Airport and Orlando. Compared to

last year’s AirTran service, Southwest will provide nearly triple the amount of weekly seats to and from Branson. In addition, through the four cities, Branson will now have single-connection flights to 69 cities, including Las Vegas, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York LaGuardia, Philadelphia, Phoenix, San Diego and Seattle-Tacoma.

The Hilton Branson Convention Center Hotel, which was severely damaged in a February 29 tornado, is scheduled to re-open this month. The Branson Convention Center, which sustained less damage than the adjacent hotel, re-opened in May. www.southwest.com, www.explorebranson.com

Experience Columbus President and CEO Paul Astleford Announces Retirement



ASTLEFORD

and the numerous resulting accomplishments.” A nationwide search process to identify the next president and CEO will be led by a professional search firm. www.experiencecolumbus.com

COLUMBUS, OH — Paul Astleford, president and CEO of Experience Columbus, announced his retirement, effective December 31, 2012. During his tenure as president since 2000, Astleford has contributed to the many accomplishments of both the Experience Columbus and Greater Columbus Sports Commission boards and staff including the creation of the Greater Columbus Sports Commission, creating a new identity for the bureau as “Experience Columbus,” championing strategic hotel development efforts resulting in the new full-service Hilton Columbus Downtown and leading the collaborative efforts for Columbus’ brand image marketing. “Columbus has been one of the most fulfilling and enjoyable chapters in my 43-year career in the hospitality industry,” said Astleford. “I leave feeling a great deal of pride in having been a part of the Columbus leadership team at a time of unprecedented transformation of our community’s collaborative strategic intent

Wyndham Orlando Resort Launches Redevelopment

ORLANDO, FL — Beginning a new chapter in its nearly 40-year heritage, Wyndham Orlando Resort recently announced plans to break ground in late August on an extensive multimillion-dollar re-imagining with anticipated completion in May 2013. The project includes the addition of an estimated 25,000 sf of new, highly flexible function space, for a total of 60,000 sf of meeting space; state-of-the-art communications, master antenna television system and Internet systems throughout the resort; complete floor-to-ceiling remodel of all 613 guest rooms and suites with resort-chic décor package; an enhanced arrival experience, showcasing an expansive new-build, modern lobby; redesigned roads and walkways to improve traffic flow and enhance pedestrian connectivity; and the addition of surrounding I-Shops restaurants and retail shops to the resort grounds, creating more diverse dining and shopping experiences. www.wyndham.com/hotels/MCOWD/main.wnt



MEETING VALUES

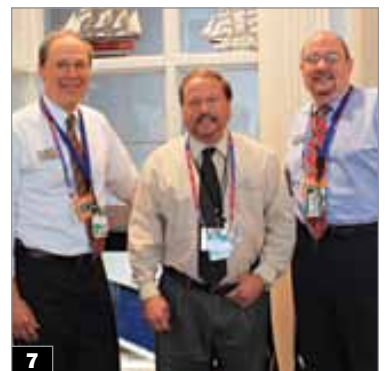
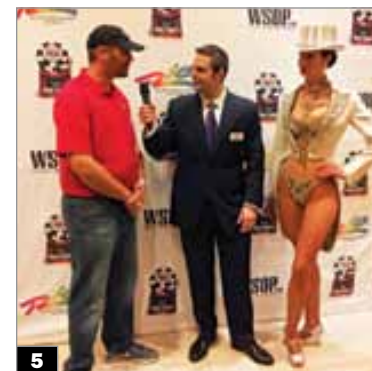


Atlantis Paradise Island, Bahamas.

Planners are offered added value of up to \$25,000 in the form of complimentary stays in two superior suites: the Royal Towers Bridge Suite Offer (value \$25,000/night) is available to groups with a minimum of 2,000 room nights that contract for dates in 2013 or 2014 by December 31, 2012; offer includes a private reception with customized menu for up to 20 guests; 24-hour butler service. The Coral Towers Penthouse Offer (value \$4,000–\$6,000/night) is available to groups with a minimum of 1,500 room nights that contract for dates in 2013 or 2014 by December 31, 2012; offer includes a private reception with customized menu for up to 20 guests. Contact Gus Tejeda, vice president of group sales, Gus.Tejeda@atlantis.com, 954-809-2000, www.atlantis.com.

■ **Millennium Broadway Hotel, New York, NY.** Planners can earn themselves up to 75,000 airline miles with participating frequent flyer programs by booking 200 peak rooms with a 200-person conference packages (smaller meetings also provide incentives). Full-day meeting packages start from \$235 and include IACC-certified space; staff office with high-speed Internet access; general session; breakout rooms; continental breakfast buffet; hot and cold luncheon buffet; AV package; dedicated conference planner and planner toolkit. Contact Dianne Pepe, director of group sales, dpepe@mill-usa.com, 212-789-7566. www.millenniumhotels.com/millenniumbroadwaynewyork

■ **Caesars Entertainment, Las Vegas, NV.** The “Double Down” promotion allows planners who book a 2012 meeting or event at any Caesars Entertainment U.S. property by October 31 to earn double the Total Rewards credits. Credits can be applied towards future meetings and events or redeemed for individual rewards such as experiences at Caesars Entertainment properties and merchandise from the Total Rewards Marketplace. Call 855-MEET-CET, email meet@caesars.com or contact your Caesars Entertainment salesperson directly. Reference the “Double Down” promotion.



Photos credits: 1.–2. U.S. Travel Association; 3.–4. HSMIA; 5. Caesars Entertainment; 6. MPI; 7. Tampa Convention Center

1 Attending the U.S. Travel Association's Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations (ESTO) in August at the Westin Boston Waterfront Hotel are (l to r) Pat Moscaritolo, president and CEO, Greater Boston CVB; Betsy Wall, executive director, Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism; Therese Murray, president of the Massachusetts Senate and Roger Dow, president and CEO, U.S. Travel Association. **2** Also at ESTO, Rossi Ralenkotter, National Chair, U.S. Travel Association and president and CEO, Las Vegas CVA; and Brandi Scott, the Destinations Council DMO Rising Star and corporate sales manager for the Greater Miami CVB. **3** Mike Song, CEO of Getcontrol.net, at HSMIA's MEET National in Washington, DC, September 5–6, advised planners to remove distracting apps. **4** Also at MEET, Fran Brasseux, HSMIA executive V.P.; HSMIA chair Barb Bowden; HSMIA President and CEO Bob Gilbert; and MPI Interim CEO and COO Cindy D'Aoust. **5** Eli Gorin, V.P., global client relations, ABTS Convention Services, with World Series of Poker (WSOP) Main Event director Jeff Effel. The winner of The Big Deal 2011 World Series of Poker tournament at MPI's WEC, Gorin made it to the fifth round of the WSOP in Las Vegas. **6** At MPI-WEC is new MPI Chairman Kevin Hinton (r), E.V.P., Associated Luxury Hotels International, with Vincent LaRuffa, new chair of the MPI Foundation and V.P. Resort Sales & Marketing for Universal Orlando Resort. **7** Tampa Convention Center's COO Robert Rose, Operations Director Brian Hunter and Director Rick Hamilton at the 2012 Republican National Convention in August.

NEWS&NOTES

New Conference Center to Debut at Fairmont Scottsdale Princess



A rendering of the conference center at Fairmont Scottsdale Princess.

SCOTTSDALE, AZ —The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess is adding 52,331 sf of indoor meeting space, anchored by the 23,000-sf Palomino ballroom. Debuting in October 2012, the new Conference Center at the 649-room

Fairmont Scottsdale Princess will become the largest meetings resort in the Fairmont Hotels & Resorts portfolio worldwide.

Boasting 150,000 sf of event space; two 23,000-sf ballrooms;

106,000 sf of indoor space; 47 meeting rooms; 44,000 sf of outdoor space; and 21 unique outdoor venues, the new event spaces will feature “nano” walls that open up to the outdoors for a refreshing open-air event.

All meeting rooms will offer the latest in technology capability, supporting the most advanced audio-visual and presentation needs. Existing meeting rooms will be updated to ensure seamless transitions between spaces.

www.scottsdaleprincess.com

IACC Selects SpeedRFP to Facilitate Meeting Online RFPs

ST. LOUIS, MO — The International Association of Conference Centres (IACC) integrated SpeedRFP to its website, IACCOOnline.org to facilitate the distribution of online RFPs to IACC member properties around the world. A product of Elite Meetings International, SpeedRFP provides meeting planners an efficient, time-saving tool to solicit bids for group business to multiple venues without having to rekey data. The system enables planners to enter their group's requirements one time using SpeedRFP's standardized format, submit that information directly to any IACC-member conference centre and even repurpose the information on other SpeedRFP-enabled sites. According to Peter Stewart, president of IACC, “We have wanted to increase the quantity and quality of the online RFPs that our members receive, and SpeedRFP is an ideal partner to help us achieve that goal. Their community of nearly 30,000 buyers can now easily submit new, or previously entered RFPs on the IACC website in just a few clicks without rekeying their information. Thanks to early adoption by Dolce Hotels and Resorts, Destination Hotels & Resorts, Preferred Hotel Group and others, SpeedRFP is a time-tested eRFP system.”

EVENTS CALENDAR

OCTOBER 14–16 2012 ACTE GLOBAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

Rome Cavalieri
Rome, Italy
www.acte.org

OCTOBER 9–11, 2012 IMEX AMERICA

Sands Expo at the Venetian/Palazzo Hotel
Las Vegas, NV
www.imexamerica.com

OCTOBER 20–24, 2012 ICCA CONGRESS

Puerto Rico Convention Center
San Juan, PR
www.iccaworld.com

NOVEMBER 4–6, 2012 IACC EUROPE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE

Lensbury Hotel Resort &
Conference Centre
Teddington, England
www.iacconline.org

NOVEMBER 11–14, 2012 FICP ANNUAL CONFERENCE

JW Marriott Los Angeles
Los Angeles, CA
www.ficpnet.com

NOVEMBER 27–29, 2012 EIBTM - THE GLOBAL MEETINGS & INCENTIVES EXHIBITION

Fira Gran Via
Barcelona, Spain
www.eibtm.com

DECEMBER 4–6, 2012 EXPO! EXPO! IAEE'S ANNUAL MEETING & EXHIBITION 2012

Orange County Convention Center
Orlando, Florida
www.myexpoexpo.com

MARCH 19–22, 2013 IACC-AMERICAS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Eaglewood Resort & Spa
Itasca, IL (Chicago)
www.iacconline.org

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By Katie Beddingfield

Pair Technology With Strategic Planning for Meeting Success

With the advent of mobile apps at conventions, attendees can have everything at their fingertips — on their smartphones, iPads or tablets.

Using electronic distribution of conference and meeting materials, event planners are realizing a major reduction in costs, while the change to “mobile app proficiency” is expected in all aspects of meeting planning.

Are you making the most of all the technology and expertise available in today’s fast-changing marketplace? Pairing the latest in technology with proven strategic planning is the fastest route to success before, during and after your event is held.

Use the following tips to learn how to combine foresight and technology to make your events more manageable, memorable and cost-effective.

A Strategic Meetings Management Program (SMMP) is about more than just planning and executing successful meetings and events. It’s also about consolidating data and spend across meetings and transient business travel to achieve cost savings and reduce risk.

If meetings are fragmented in your company — with different departments making decisions about travel and meeting planning — then it is possible to both economize and be more strategic in your approach.

Travel management companies (TMCs) often have separate divisions devoted to meetings and incentives, and the expertise to leverage spend across all types of travel for a client’s company by tapping airline and hotel contracts that are in force for business travel. As new requests for proposals are being sent out to travel providers, more favorable arrangements can be negotiated if all travel is taken into consideration.

A dynamic policy is the core of a well-managed SMMP. It is crucial to be in sync with your corporate culture when coordinating corporate travel efforts in the company. This is perhaps more important with SMMP, because meetings and events for large global companies tend to slide under the radar more easily than standard corporate travel.

When no one department is responsible, or when companies focus on the “low hanging fruit” of corporate travel first, visibility into meetings spend can be anything but transparent. For instance, does everyone who plans meetings in the company use the same procedures, or are some putting charges on corporate credit cards, while others use a purchase order/invoice system? These practices can distort the meeting spend snapshot and create an accounting nightmare.

Creating a dynamic policy will help with accurately and proactively tracking spend.

Don’t set it and forget it. The whole idea of “strategic meetings management” has only become commonplace in the last decade. Some companies will jump on the bandwagon to implement an SMMP, only to fall short in ongoing tracking and monitoring of program objectives.

Financial and operational objectives need to be clearly defined and attainable. Managing a successful program requires ongoing quality control. That means evaluating and making adjustments after every event is over.

Data is king. Using event registration technology can give you a return on investment of 15 to 20 percent savings. Robust reporting tools allow meeting planners to capture and track spend and budgets by individual events and across multiple events. Leveraging those results with

corporate travel data can be pivotal in negotiations with hotels, airlines and other vendors.

Embrace technology. Meeting planners use technology to not only brand their event website and engage attendees at the point of registration, but to connect and negotiate with suppliers, comply with federal regulations such as Sarbanes-Oxley and report and analyze data.

Lenos Software, for example, collects customer data from across all events — small 20-person meetings to large conferences — on a single platform and automatically tracks and provides audit reporting for regulated industries.

Whole conventions are going mobile, too, sometimes with catalogs being ditched altogether in favor of mobile apps containing everything from the schedule of events and seminars, to exhibitor lists and links to social media.

It is now possible to have a custom app created exclusively for your event, which gives it more cachet as a brand and a greater likelihood that attendees will access it for information after the event is long over.

This is a fast-moving area of technology development and deployment. Event management

company Cvent recently acquired two mobile app developers, quickly taking the lead in the mobile event app space.

Manage all types of risk proactively. What happens when storms derail flight schedules? Do you know where all your travelers are? For human resource professionals, this knowledge is called “duty of care,” and is a legal responsibility for companies.

Managing risk also involves the financial aspect of event planning — from data integrity to contractor.

It is also essential to know who your attendees are, so that you can help them manage their risk. For example, under the Sunshine Act for physicians attending meetings, new federal regulations require that doctors receive only a certain amount of gifts from pharmaceutical companies. This means tracking the cost of meals, goodie bags and stipends that doctors might receive when they attend meetings and conferences.

As exposure to risk escalates, meeting planners must keep abreast of their role in getting attendees on board.

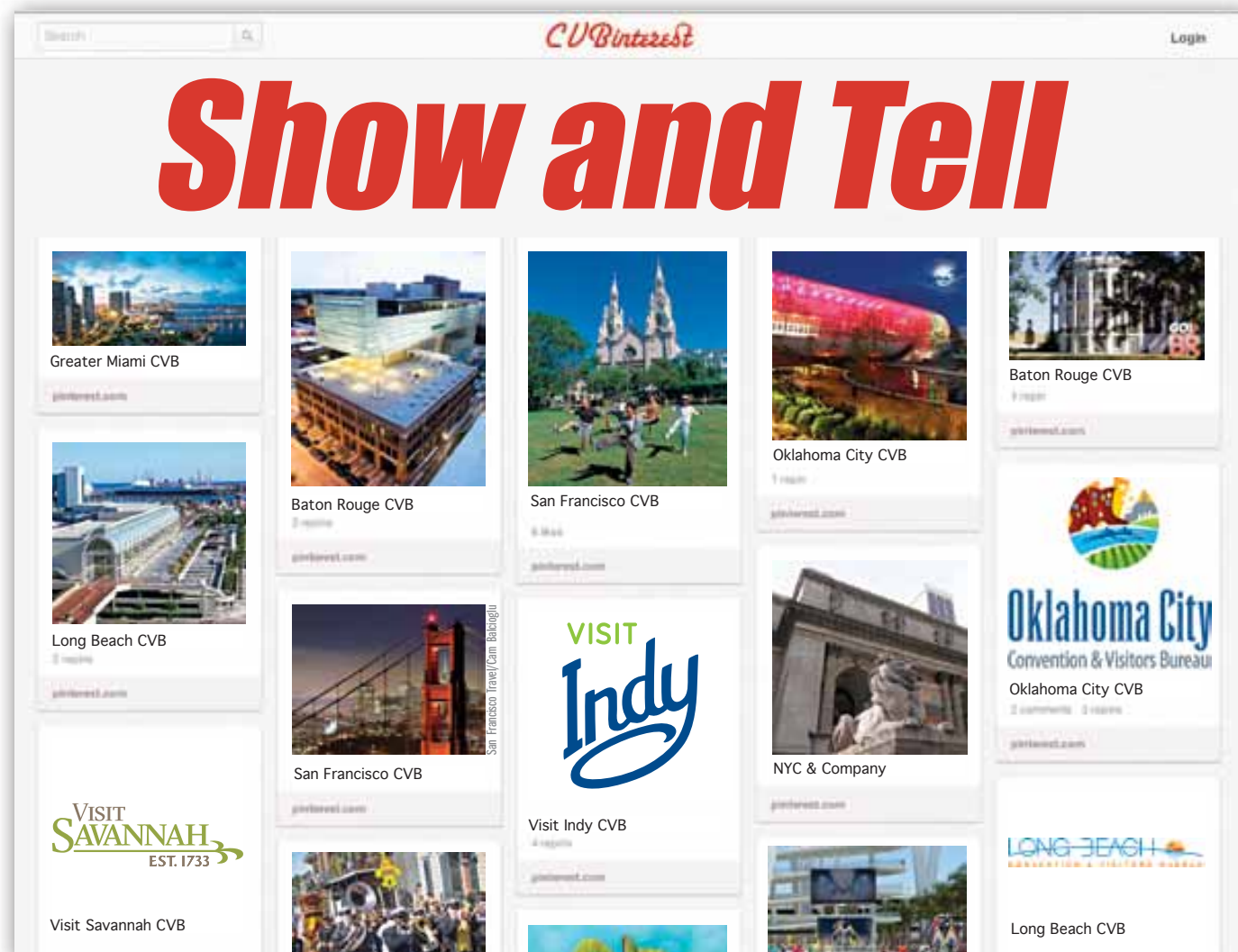
C&IT

“Are you making the most of all the technology and expertise available in today’s fast-changing marketplace?”



Katie Beddingfield

is regional sales director, West Coast, for Omega World Travel, a travel management and meetings & incentives company. Celebrating its 40th year, Omega is based in Fairfax, VA, and has 100 offices worldwide. Beddingfield has served in multiple corporate sales, business development and account management roles at Omega and other travel industry organizations for the past 13 years. Previously, she was a journalist covering the industry for such publications as *U.S. News & World Report* and *National Geographic Traveler*. www.omegaworldtravel.com



Connecting With Your Audience Via Social Media

Thirty-two boards, 3,537 pins, 1,468 likes, 15,914 followers and 147 following. What the heck is that all about? Would you believe Pinterest? You betcha. These numbers were lifted from VisitSavannah's Pinterest page. The savvy marketers at VisitSavannah jumped on the Pinterest bandwagon early on and are reaping the benefits today just as the social media site is exploding. Word is just in that red-hot Pinterest is the third most-visited social networking site in the U.S. after Facebook and Twitter in terms of total visitors, according to a report from Experian Marketing Services.

By Derek Reveron

Pinterest, which lets destinations create and share collections of visual imagery and links, is an effective marketing tool for destinations because people want to interact with other people, and nowadays, pictures, especially instant pictures, are all the rage. Moreover, pictures tend to humanize the destination/brand and tell its story at the same time.

Savannah's more than 15,000 followers delight in the 32 boards (collections) and 3,537 pins (photos) — especially the colorful, fun Pinterest board cre-

ated to celebrate Savannah's St. Patrick's Day Parade, which attracted more than 400,000 people. Chances are next year's parade will attract many more people with the help of Pinterest followers.

The founding fathers of stately Savannah may be turning over in their graves and certainly may not "get it" but social media is working and working very well for savvy marketers at destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and convention and visitor bureaus (CVBs).

VisitSavannah started using Pinterest last November and was one of the first CVBs in the nation to recognize the

potential of the site. Melissa Yao, chief marketing officer of VisitSavannah, participated in a panel on social media photo sharing at this year's Destination Marketing Association International Annual Convention. After the panel, entitled "Social Photography: A Picture is Worth More Than 140 characters," Yao fielded several questions, including "How do we make Pinterest work for us?"

Yao answered, "Make sure that you use the uniqueness and authenticity of your destination. You have to find what is special about your destination and tell the story through pictures. Don't just post any pictures. Find something that connects with your audience. Develop an idea of how to brand your destination with pictures."

Pinterest Rocks

DMOs and CVBs use Pinterest to create themed photo bulletin boards to pro-

Pinterest less than a year ago. "Pinterest is a special site for us. It's all about showing what Indy has to offer, whether it's in the Indiana Convention Center or outside of it. And it's about giving planners a fun way of using the site to showcase what attendees can do in Indy. If you are a planner you can go through and look at everything or just contact us and we can send you a link to one of our boards," says Strange.

Photos on Visit Indy's Pinterest boards depict restaurants, museums, hotels, summer fun, parks, the Indianapolis Zoo and shopping. One board features photos of items that people can buy only in Indianapolis. "Users can follow individual boards. The 'Taste of Indy' board has 500 followers and others have 300. Followers are great, but we want users to re-pin photos to their own boards. We track the number of users who re-pin photos," says Strange. The re-pins

"Make sure that you use the uniqueness and authenticity of your destination. You have to find what is special about your destination and tell the story through pictures. Don't just post any pictures. Find something that connects with your audience."

MELISSA YAO, Chief Marketing Officer
VisitSavannah, Savannah, GA



mote attractions, sights, special events, festivals, restaurants and more. Pinterest also drives users to websites. Meeting planners can use Pinterest to create bulletin boards for events, speakers, and educational and training sessions.

Evan Strange is no stranger to Pinterest. The digital marketing and communications coordinator for Visit Indy, the Indianapolis Visitors & Convention Association, started using

Visit Indy's Evan Strange says the CVB uses Pinterest to show what Indy has to offer including venues such as the Indiana Convention Center (right).

show that users, including planners and attendees, are sharing Pinterest photos with others, adds Strange.

The Galveston Island Convention & Visitors Bureau (GICVB) started using Pinterest earlier this year, accord-



Photo courtesy of Visit Indy



Beautiful antebellum homes dot the streets of Savannah's Historic District.

ing to Meg Winchester, director of the GICVB. The GICVB's Pinterest boards include historic hotels, beaches, food and attractions such as Pleasure Pier, which opened this summer featuring a variety of entertainment options. The GICVB has integrated Pinterest with its Facebook and Twitter accounts. "We haven't established Pinterest yet specifically for our meeting groups, but we believe that by promoting the destination through boards, planners and groups will keep up to date on what we are doing through the boards. We are just starting to use Pinterest and trying to figure out how it plays into everything, but it promises to be a great tool for engaging people and educating them on what's going on in a destination," says Winchester.

DMOs that use Pinterest link it to their Facebook and Twitter accounts, social media that CVBs increasingly use to engage planners and groups.

Make Social Media Work For You

One of the key aspects of a meeting planner's job is to gather and present information about a destination to enlighten attendees and create a sense of anticipation and excitement about visiting that locale. Nowadays, more meeting professionals drum up enthusiasm with

the help of social media and other online tools offered by DMOs and CVBs.

Jennifer Thomas, event coordinator, Pharmasave Central Drugs Ltd., a drug store chain based in Vancouver, British Columbia, took full advantage of online services offered by the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau (NOCVB) to inform and enlighten attendees for their three-day annual meeting next month. The NOCVB helped Pharmasave build a website tailored to the 100 pharmacy owners, executives and employees attending the retreat. “They asked me what I wanted on the site and how I wanted it to look. It not only provides great information about New Orleans but it is specialized for our group. The links to the swamp tours, plantation tours, city tours, steamboat tours and Louisiana cooking classes were put on

Overlooking the Gulf of Mexico, the Galveston Island Convention Center at The San Luis Resort offers the best of both worlds — a combination of conference facilities and relaxing resort amenities.



Photo courtesy of Galveston Island CVB

vices help her catch up on the latest developments in U.S. destinations. “Online technology opens great doors for getting information for me and for preparing attendees. I’ve been a planner for more than 10 years, but the Internet and social media sites are becoming more valuable to me in my job,” says Thomas.

Shannon Gardner, DMCP, presi-

on its Facebook and Twitter channels welcoming attendees and providing links to download free mobile apps to help them explore the city. The NOCVB also monitors the Twitter accounts of groups and conferences during their meetings to immediately answer questions about the city.

Visit Indy also uses Twitter to engage planners and attendees, says Strange. “We monitor the Twitter feeds of groups to answer their questions and address their needs. If they are talking about an upcoming convention before they come, we can join the conversation and talk about Indianapolis. For groups that are here, we follow what is going on at their meetings and conventions to answer questions and address problems in real time. We essentially use Twitter as a digital concierge. The strategy is to help. There’s no need to overthink it,” says Strange.

NYC & Company, New York City’s CVB, tweets welcome messages and information about events to the Twitter accounts of groups. Additionally, the CVB uses a special media Twitter account to inform local media about groups holding meetings and conventions. The CVB also has international press twitter feeds in several countries, including Brazil, France, Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Canada, The Netherlands and Italy.

Kelly Curtin, NYC & Company’s senior vice president of membership and destination services, uses a host of social media tools. “Social media is becoming an increasingly popular tool to use with meeting planners. They are learning how to use it better to reach their attendees. We have been engaging social media with

some of our larger groups. We will do it more frequently with more groups and expand it. In the future, it will be more robust and frequent,” says Curtin. Also, NYC & Company plans to offer more services via its website, which won the 2012 Webby Award for Best Tourism Website.

The staff at the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau posts photos, maps, links and information about events and entertainment on Facebook such as Aquarium of the Pacific, Rainbow Harbor and the Great Sand Sculpture Contest. The CVB’s Twitter account promotes Long Beach as “a dynamic waterfront destination” and tweets welcome messages to visiting groups. There are also posts and links on the destination, including events, music and restaurants.

The Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau uses its Twitter and Facebook accounts to welcome meeting planners and their groups. The site also touts what’s new in Oklahoma City, including the Outlet Shoppes and the two millionth visitor to the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum. In addition, the CVB’s Flickr pages feature pictures of popular venues and sites while a narrated YouTube video provides an introduction to Oklahoma City.

Meeting planners find that DMO websites are increasingly indispensable tools for obtaining the latest informa-



“Social media is becoming an increasingly popular tool to use with meeting planners. They are learning how to use it better to reach their attendees. We have been engaging social media with some of our larger groups. We will do it more frequently with more groups and expand it.”

KELLY CURTIN, Senior V.P, Membership and Destination Services, NYC & Company, NY, NY

based provider of wholesale distribution and retail services for the home improvement industry, depends on information from Orlando, Florida’s Orange County Convention Center and Visit Orlando websites to help plan its annual Spring Dealer Market held every year in Orlando. The three-day event draws 25,000 attendees from around the world including Orgill employees, executives with corporate customers and retail store owners.

Before the meetings, Smith tracks the latest information on Orlando’s websites. She emails links to the information to attendees or posts it on the meeting’s website. She also researches the Orlando sites to answer questions from attend-

We tell them the distance things are from the hotels. We tell them every restaurant within a 10-mile radius of hotels. We tell them about the latest goings-on at amusement parks. I even send them information about parking,” says Smith, who plans about 25 meetings a year.

Smith’s use of social media is not unique these days. More and more corporate meeting planners are following in Smith’s steps. However, meeting professionals have not been the speediest adopters of social media and other online tools. Some experts suggest that as the use of online technology grows among meeting planners, they may one day find it to be indispensable.

Convention Center Expansion Updates

San Antonio officials plan to expand the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center. The \$325 million project will add more than 500,000 sf of exhibit space and a 50,000-sf ballroom. The center now offers 440,000 sf of exhibit space and 192,000 sf of meeting space. The expansion is scheduled to begin in late 2013 and be completed during the summer of 2016.

A 25-year master plan for the expansion of San Francisco’s Moscone Convention Center was announced in June. The first phase of the expansion is set for completion in 2018. Moscone Center recently completed a two-year, \$56 million renovation of the North and South buildings, which offer a combined 1.2 million sf of function space.

“Pinterest is a special site for us. It’s all about showing what Indy has to offer, whether it’s in the Indiana Convention Center or outside of it. And it’s about giving planners a fun way of using the site to showcase what attendees can do in Indy.”

EVAN STRANGE, Digital Marketing and Communications Coordinator, Visit Indy



the site because they were all things we offered our group,” says Thomas.

In addition, the customized Pharmasave website includes a welcome video that Thomas selected from an online library. The site provides several sections such as “What’s New in New Orleans,” “Where to Eat,” “What to Do,” and “Photo and Video Gallery.” There is also a link to the group’s hotel, the 346-room Omni Royal Orleans in the French Quarter of New Orleans. The website also is linked to the NOCVB’s YouTube, Facebook and Twitter channels.

Pharmasave Central Drugs holds its annual meeting in the U.S. every other year. Thus, Thomas finds CVB online ser-

vice of Indianapolis-based Accent on Indianapolis, a DMC Network Company, agrees. She takes advantage of much of what Visit Indy offers online. “We use anything that might resonate with our clients. They have good resources such as maps that we use. When we do our proposals and sales calls in places such as Washington, DC, and Dallas, we may want to take some materials along as collateral, or send people to it through links or electronically,” says Gardner.

Using Twitter as a Digital Concierge

CVBs use Twitter in several ways. For example, the NOCVB posts messages



“We are just starting to use Pinterest and trying to figure out how it plays into everything, but it promises to be a great tool for engaging people and educating them on what’s going on in a destination.”

MEG WINCHESTER, Director Galveston Island CVB, Galveston, TX

tion about destinations and communicating it online to attendees.

Judy Smith, CEM, director, dealer market, for Orgill Inc., a Memphis, TN-

ees and update them on the destination.

“I keep them posted on anything that changes. We let them know about openings of new hotels and improvements.

The renovation included new carpet, lighting, paint, restrooms and ceilings, as well as new graphics of the Bay Area's natural settings. An upgraded high-speed wireless Internet system allows access for 60,000 devices simultaneously.

In another development, the Golden State Warriors National Basketball Association team announced plans to build a new sports and entertainment arena on the San Francisco waterfront for completion in 2017.

The Albuquerque Convention Center will undergo a \$20 million renovation starting next year. Improvements include a remodeled ballroom that will feature a new entertainment deck; large windows that offer a scenic view; and a new exterior façade. The project also includes a remodeled atrium that features a food court/café and a fireplace. The project is set for completion by the end of 2014.

Oklahoma City plans to build a new convention center scheduled to open in 2018. The city's current facility, the Cox Convention Center, offers 100,000 sf of exhibit space, a 25,000-sf ballroom and



The skyline of New York City with a glimpse of Central Park in the background as seen from the iconic Empire State Building.

Photo courtesy of NYC & Company

The new facility provides more than 85,000 sf of meeting space, including a 16,894-sf ballroom. Groups can also use 19,620 sf of exhibit space.

In Cleveland, the Medical Mart and Convention Center is set to open next year. The Convention Center alone is scheduled to open two months ahead of schedule in July 2013. Most of the Convention Center will be located underground with walkways on the street level. The Medical Mart is scheduled to open in late August 2013.

Some destinations are building new convention center hotels. Austin, TX, is scheduled to debut two new properties:

of meeting space. Both hotels are scheduled to open in 2015.

In Columbus, OH, the 532-room Hilton Columbus Downtown opens this fall. The hotel will have 22,800 sf of meeting space, including a 12,000-sf ballroom. An enclosed walkway will connect the hotel to the Greater Columbus Convention Center, which offers 65 meeting rooms, three ballrooms and 410,000 sf of exhibit space.

In Dallas, the Omni Dallas Hotel opened last November.

The 1,001-room hotel offers 110,000 sf of meeting space, including a 32,000-sf ballroom. More than 7,000 pieces of art by local artists decorate the hotel, which is connected to the Dallas Convention Center.

In Other News

Connecticut recently launched the Connecticut Convention & Sports Bureau (CCSB) to market the Nutmeg State as a destination for meetings, conventions and sporting events. The CCSB is a partnership between the Greater Hartford Convention & Visitors Bureau and the state Department of Economic and Community Development. The CCSB will also promote meeting venues in the state.

The San Diego Convention Center Corp. moved its marketing and sales programs to the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau (SDCVB) as of July 1. As a result of the move, the SDCVB becomes the destination's primary marketing organization. The move will provide planners with one point of contact for meetings. The SDCVB believes the move will help San Diego attract more national group meetings.

The Pennsylvania Convention Center (PCC) recently became one of a handful of convention centers nationwide to install a NanoLumens NanoFlex LED Display. The signage allows groups to display digital messages throughout the PCC using videos, informational slides and advertisements. NanoFlex displays are more effective and attention-grabbing than the static banner signs used previously. **C&IT**



"We let them know about openings of new hotels and improvements. We tell them the distance things are from the hotels. We tell them every restaurant within a 10-mile radius of hotels. I even send them information about parking."

JUDY SMITH, CEM, Director, Dealer Market Orgill Inc., Memphis, TN

21 meeting rooms. Oklahoma City officials believe a new convention center will enable the city to better compete with other destinations of a similar size for groups and visitors.

In Utah, the Utah Valley Convention Center opened in Provo earlier this year.

Fairmont Hotels & Resorts will operate a new 1,000-room convention hotel scheduled to break ground next spring. The 50-story hotel will feature 1,000 rooms. JW Marriott recently started construction on a 33-story, 1,012 JW Marriott hotel that will offer 115,000 sf

Visit Baton Rouge

Baton Rouge is a city where the weather is always warm, the food is always spicy and the people are always ready to have fun! We've got the high-end amenities and unique meetings venues your group is looking for, plus a hard-working staff that will be there every step of the way. Come enjoy the Capital City's eclectic mix of restaurants, museums, upscale shopping, antebellum homes, festivals, live music and more.

Experience the magic of a theatrical performance at the Shaw Center for the Arts or dive into the colorful history of Louisiana politics at Louisiana's Old Governor's Mansion and Old State Capitol. Spend a day at one of Baton Rouge's many upscale shopping centers, including the

Mall of Louisiana, Towne Center and Perkins Rowe. Explore a picturesque antebellum home along River Road or one of the many beautiful plantations.

Located on the banks of the Mississippi River, the Baton Rouge River Center complex includes the Arena, Auditorium and Exhibition Halls with 17 breakout meeting rooms, featuring more than 200,000 sf of new and renovated space. The Baton Rouge River Center is within walking distance to downtown hotels, nightlife, restaurants and attractions.

The perfect mixture of work and play comes with the territory when you're one of the fastest-growing cities in America. Go BR! And get it right from the word "Go."

C&IT

CVB AND CONVENTION CENTER UPDATE

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Director of Destination Sales
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www.visitbatonrouge.com

Citywide Facts & Features:

Guest Rooms: 13,400

Hotels/Resorts: 127 properties and two resorts – Nottoway and L'Auberge.

Meeting Space: Approx. 400,000 sf

Convention Center FYI: River Center boasts 225,000 sf, 17 breakouts and a 70,000-sf exhibition hall.



GET CONNECTED. What they do during the meeting is important. But what they do after it's over can be just as important. That's why you need a destination that has the best of both worlds. We've got that – and a hard-working staff that will be there every step of the way.

VisitBatonRouge.com
800 LA ROUGE 

CVB AND CONVENTION CENTER UPDATE

Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau

Imagine planning your next event at the place on everyone's lips. That's what will happen when you schedule

your next meeting in Miami. Our inspiration comes from a convergence of cultures, and we've got every amenity your audiences are looking forward to enjoying.

Miami's the international city where you'll hear languages and dialects from around the world. Meet people from every corner of the earth. What you won't find in Miami is the same old, same old. We're brighter, hipper, hotter, cooler, friendlier, sunnier, steamier and more sensuous than anywhere you've ever been before.

Miami is chock-full of new hotels — almost 50,000 guest rooms. Our grand dames have been facelifted with billions of dollars of renovations and joined by scores of brand new hotels flying famous flags from around the world. In the last year, newly arrived standout restaurants have opened next door to our international superstars and Miami's own world-renowned homegrown classics, increasing our total to more than 5,000.

Miami International Airport boasts new terminals and a new high-speed train to whisk travelers to MIA's new intermodal center where your group will find rental cars, taxis and limos, and public transportation waiting for them in one convenient place. It's so Miami! *C&IT*

701 Brickell Avenue
Miami, FL 33131
800-933-8448 ext. 3071
www.MiamiMeetings.com

Citywide Facts & Features:
Guest Rooms/Suites: 50,000
Convention Center FYI: 502,000 sf of exhibit space; 70 flexible meeting rooms and 100,000 sf of prefunction space.

Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau

Downtown Oklahoma City provides seven hotels within walking distance of the Cox Convention Center for meetings. The Renaissance Oklahoma City Convention Center Hotel is connected to the convention center via a sky bridge. The historic Skirvin Hilton — a grand hotel opened in 1911 — features original woodwork, flooring and other original architectural details.

In the heart of downtown Oklahoma City, the Cox Convention Center boasts more than 150,000 sf of meeting space including a 25,000-sf ballroom, eight exhibit halls totaling 100,000 sf and meeting rooms totaling 27,500 sf.

And the best is yet to come. Oklahoma City voters approved funding to build (starting in 2016) a new \$252 million downtown convention center with 200,000 sf of exhibit space.

Unique event spaces with stunning views can be found in Oklahoma City's Boathouse District located along the Oklahoma River. And the Bricktown Entertainment District, located just steps from the Cox Convention Center, is a great place for attendees to please their palates. Downtown Oklahoma City offers plenty to see and do just a few blocks

from the hotels. With 20 nonstop flights to 18 destinations in the U.S., getting to Oklahoma City is a breeze, too. *C&IT*

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Robin O'Connor
Director of Sales & Services
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Guest Rooms: Approximately 16,000
Hotels/Resorts: Approximately 150
Meeting Space: Cox Convention Center: 100,000 sf of exhibit space; 25,000-sf ballroom; and 27,500 sf of additional meeting space throughout 21 meeting rooms.

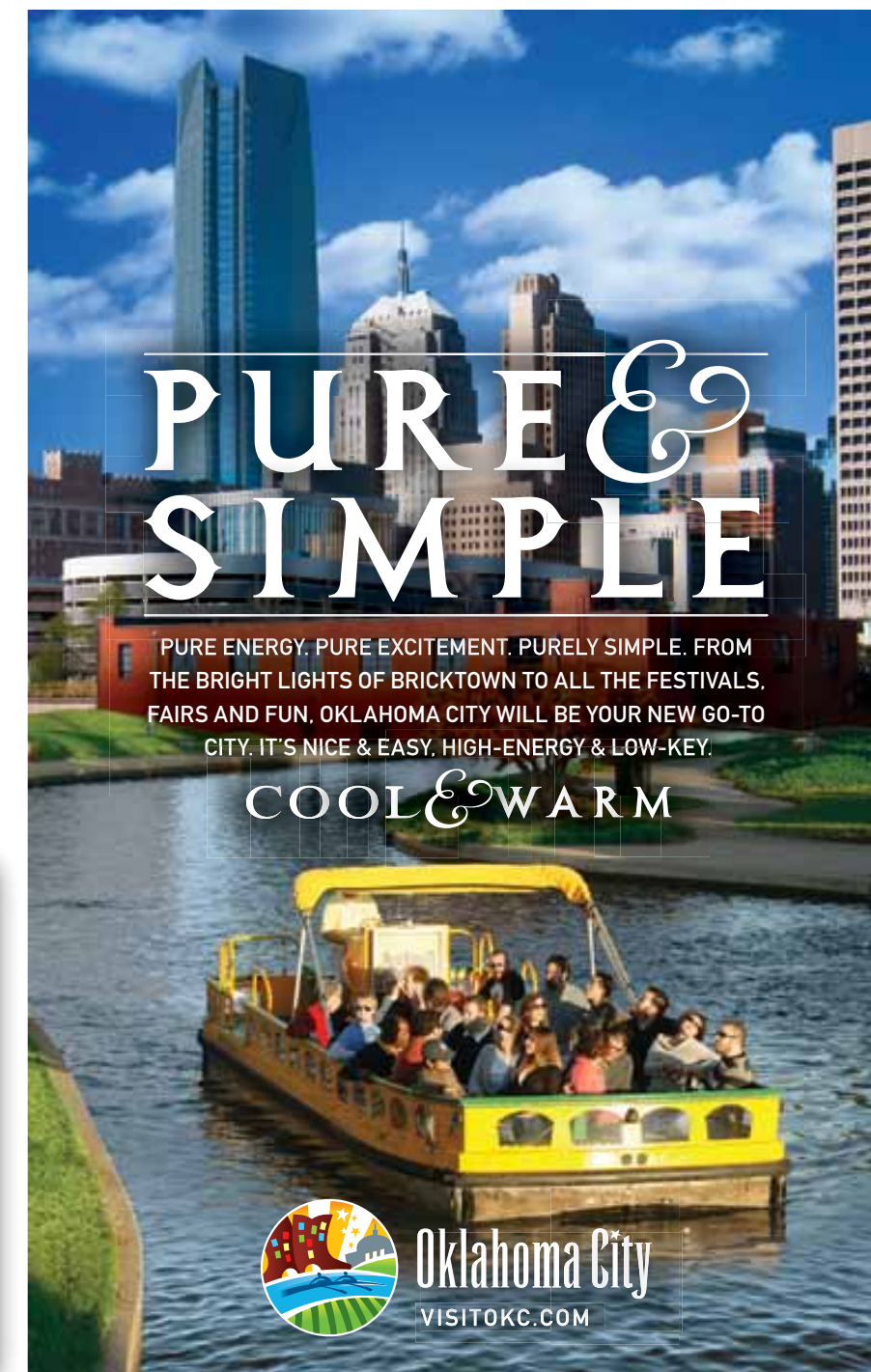
CVB AND CONVENTION CENTER UPDATE



IT'S SO MIAMI

So someone tried to tell you why meeting in Miami's so inspiring, so exciting and so productive. Know this. No tweet, snapshot or posting will ever be enough. You so have to meet here to get it. MiamiMeetings.com


©Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau - The Official Destination Marketing Organization for Greater Miami and the Beaches.



PURE & SIMPLE

PURE ENERGY. PURE EXCITEMENT. PURELY SIMPLE. FROM THE BRIGHT LIGHTS OF BRICKTOWN TO ALL THE FESTIVALS, FAIRS AND FUN, OKLAHOMA CITY WILL BE YOUR NEW GO-TO CITY. IT'S NICE & EASY. HIGH-ENERGY & LOW-KEY.

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CVB AND CONVENTION CENTER UPDATE

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Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau

The Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center, with more than 300,000 sf of modern, flexible exhibit and meeting space, is located in the center of the downtown waterfront with sweeping harbor views.

The center recently underwent a major modernization, and more than \$35 million in major upgrades and renovations have been invested to create a new model for contemporary convention centers. This dynamic repositioning is designed to give guests a warm, stylish and welcoming social experience.

With the needs of today's convention and meeting attendees in mind, the center's lobbies and hallway areas have been enhanced with new furniture, carpets, plants and artwork to create mini meeting spots and networking pods where people can sit, talk and socialize. All of these enhancements have continued to hit higher benchmarks in surpassing customer expectations in terms of service and experience. This is already being

noted in the convention planning community and is one of our main competitive advantages.

The Long Beach Arena

Set to be complete in February 2013, the Long Beach Arena will have the capability of being transformed into a "loft-style" ballroom and will produce 45,000 sf of event space. The loft-style ballroom will be formed using the floor space of the arena and dropping electronically operated curtains from the ceiling, covering the views of the upper deck seating. Over the ballroom area will be a grid of truss systems (complete with LED, stage lighting and sound systems). This will provide an intimate environment for dinners and

concerts for up to 5,500 people, doubling current capacity.

New Campus

A campus has been created around downtown Long Beach that encourages the development and sharing of ideas. This campus includes newly renovated hotels, which are just steps from the convention center and the surrounding downtown waterfront entertainment district. Attendees will find shopping venues, entertainment, nightlife and more than 100 quality restaurants, many with spectacular oceanfront views.

Also, 10 hotels include Long Beach meeting facilities, several with more than 20,000 sf. Long Beach is the recipient of several major meeting trade awards.

Long Beach is the center of Southern California, with all the attractions of Los Angeles and Orange County just minutes from our downtown waterfront. But Long Beach features its own world-class attractions: The Queen Mary and the Aquarium of the Pacific, The Pike At Rainbow Harbor, Shoreline Village, plus four distinctive museums and two historic ranchos.

Downtown Long Beach sets the standard for "walk-ability." Recognized by *Walkscore.com* as one of the most "Walkable Cities in America," visitors are within steps of the convention center, first-class accommodations, shopping, dining, attractions, sightseeing along picturesque bays and 5½ miles of sandy beach.

Getting to Long Beach has never been easier with service from three major airports. Los Angeles International Airport and Orange County Airports are less than 30 minutes away, and Long Beach Airport is just seven minutes from downtown. Set to be complete in 2013, Long Beach Airport is undergoing a \$140 million modernization set to include a new parking structure, ramp improvements, gates and a concourse with a central garden. **C&IT**



Citywide Facts & Features:

Guest Rooms: 4,527

Hotels/Resorts: 21

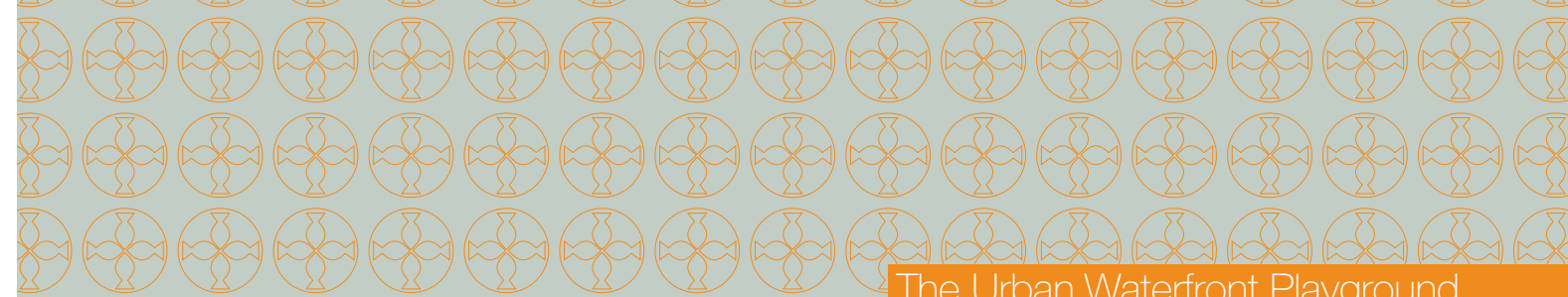
Meeting Space:

Hotel: 219,000+ sf

Offsite: 500,000+ sf

Convention Center FYI:

With the recent addition of free Wi-Fi throughout the convention center, guests are able to go online to work and connect with their offices.



The Urban Waterfront Playground

Experience Unconventional

Meet the City that doesn't do Ordinary. Chic. Casual. Modern. Retro. Hot, sunny days. Bright, electric nights. It's the unmistakable contrasts and sweet contradictions that make Long Beach a city apart from the rest. So when hosting your next event, go where a world of possibilities await just a few sandy steps from your beach towel – because in Long Beach, whatever you do, you're in for the unconventional. visitlongbeach.com



LONG BEACH
CALIFORNIA

CVB AND CONVENTION CENTER UPDATE

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Citywide Facts & Features:
Guest Rooms: 32,976
Hotels/Resorts: 215
Meeting Space: Moscone Center: 992,123 sf; major convention hotels in excess of 300,000 sf.
Convention Center FYI: A \$56 million renovation has just been completed of Moscone Center; the buildings are on three adjacent blocks in the heart of San Francisco within walking distance of 20,000 hotel rooms.

San Francisco Travel Association

The year 2012 has been a golden year for San Francisco for many reasons, chief among them the 75th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge in May.

And if 2012 was golden, 2013 should be AU-some (anyone who ever studied their periodic tables in high school should get that play on words). Among the milestones and new attractions coming up next year are:

- The opening of the new SFJAZZ Center on the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., January 21, 2013.
- The completion of the first phase of the new cruise terminal, which will be used for the America's Cup Village, spring 2013.
- The opening of the Exploratorium, San Francisco's internationally acclaimed museum of art, science and human perception, spring 2013.
- Host city for the semi-final and finals of the World Baseball Classic at AT&T Park, spring 2013.
- Basing of Princess Cruises' 2,600-passenger *Grand Princess* year-round for the first time in San Francisco, May 2013.
- The Louis Vuitton Cup, the America's Cup Challenger Series, and America's Cup Finals, July 4–September 22, 2013.
- The completion of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge \$6.281 billion seismic retrofit; the new east span will feature the world's largest self-anchored suspension bridge, 2013.

Moscone Center Improvements

San Francisco is also taking care of the customer on every front. Through a public/private joint partnership with the San Francisco Travel Association, the City and County of San Francisco, and

the San Francisco Tourism Improvement District (TID), a \$56 million renovation of Moscone North and South was completed in May 2012. Moscone is now replete with design elements that link the interior of the building with its site in the heart of one of the world's most iconic cities. The buildings have also been transformed with new carpet, paint, lighting and ceilings; restroom renovations; upgraded lobbies and kitchens; and infrastructure projects including major upgrades to HVAC systems, elevators and escalators. And what isn't visible may be the biggest hit of all: a \$4.5 million wireless system that can provide high-speed service to as many as 60,000 devices at one time. The 25-year master plan for the expansion of Moscone Center calls for the completion of the first phase by early 2018.

Memorable Meetings

San Francisco Travel works with a variety of planners to produce memorable San Francisco meetings. Experienced sales professionals can research availability and help meeting planners with sourcing unique venues and only-in-San Francisco experiences. Meeting planners recently picked San Francisco as the "Best Place for Small Meetings" in the first "Best of the Industry" awards by *Convene*, the magazine of the Professional Convention Management Association.

San Francisco Travel's website (www.sanfrancisco.travel) allows planners to search for hotels and event space, review the San Francisco Meeting and Event Planner's Guide, utilize e-marketing tools and download the new video "A Day in the Life: San Francisco."

The San Francisco Travel Association also has a dedicated channel for meeting planners at: www.facebook.com/sfmeetings and "MeetinSF" on Twitter at www.twitter.com/meetinsf.

C&IT

Today's meeting report: Mostly amazing with a chance of anything.

A LOT CAN HAPPEN IN 49 HOURS

For those who believe that given the right environment, anything is possible—we welcome you to San Francisco. The City, home to some of the world's finest hotels, restaurants and legendary Moscone Center, is that environment. When you hold a meeting in San Francisco, more people want to attend, which gives everyone a chance to work better together. When that happens, great meetings happen. And when great meetings happen, everyone is happy. When you book your next meeting or event in San Francisco, here's one tip: suggest that anyone attending stay an extra 49 hours. They'll go from a great meeting to a great life experience.

www.sanfrancisco.travel/meeting-planners

San Francisco Travel™

AT&T PARK
SAN FRANCISCO

49
HOURS
OF SF



Like being there: A videoconferencing program on the big screen. Photo courtesy of ConferenceGlobal

Pleasanton, CA-based Virtual Edge Institute, dedicated to the advancement of virtual meetings, was launched in 2008 just before “we hit that rocky road with the economy,” notes its executive director, Michael Doyle. “But once that started, our phones were ringing.” The reason, of course, was that much meetings-related travel was cancelled, yet companies still needed the critical information exchange, the presentations and the net-

ence, actually attended that conference physically the following year.

That is perhaps the standard trend analysis of virtual meeting adoption over the last few years. It suggests that much of corporate America is by this time well versed in the virtual approach. Yet there remains room for improvement. “Business has been very good actually,” reports Pamela Kozikowski, president of Williston, VT-based ConferenceGlobal, a firm that special-

that some planners may wish to add to their CMPs and CMMs: the DES (digital event strategist) certification. The first classes took place last summer, in partnership with the Professional Convention Management Association. The curriculum covers areas such as creating a digital engagement strategy, monetizing digital events and drawing an audience. Sixteen different modules comprise the online program, and participants must complete 25 hours worth

technology firms, and thus the DESC includes “selecting vendors” among its topics. “When you are looking at the technology companies, you want to figure out how much service you would

are doing virtual meetings in ways that are good enough, as opposed to as good as you can make them.”

Unlike videoconferencing, satellite broadcast is one-way, “unless you

broadcast, an all-day kind of thing, it can become tedious to sit at your computer.”

Whichever broadcast medium is utilized, it is advisable to include some “live” elements in a virtual meeting.

One approach is to ensure presenters have live audiences, even small ones. “Presenters are more alive when they have people in the room,” Kozikowski observes, and that comes across in the broadcast to the remote audience. Another is to broadcast at least some sessions live, as opposed to prerecorded offerings. While this approach requires participants to be in front of a screen at a certain time, they get some of the energy of being part of an event as it unfolds. “What we’ve seen is that live is more popular, there is more initial participation in the live event,” Doyle says. “You get the spike of attendance during the live event, but then people keep coming back and looking at content over and over again over a course of time.”



Michael Doyle, Executive Director
Virtual Edge Institute, Pleasanton, CA

“You get the spike of attendance during the live event, but then people keep coming back and looking at content over and over again over a course of time.”

need from them,” Doyle advises. “Will you be able to have staff devoted to the virtual event, such as digital specialists in the IT department, or are you going to need a company that is going to be able to do the whole thing turnkey?”

Two-Way Interaction

A planner must also consider what the best broadcast medium would be given the event goals. If two-way interaction is desired, then generally speaking, videoconferencing is the solution, but it requires specialized equipment (Polycom and Tandberg are among the major manufacturers) at both ends of the broadcast. “More and more compa-

have an uplink and a downlink at each location,” Kozikowski explains. “So satellite can be two-way, but it gets to be very expensive, so in our experience it’s not done. Satellite is good, however, if you need a very high-quality broadcast and you have a lot of endpoints. If you have 100–300 endpoints, normally you would do satellite. With videoconferencing, we do maybe up to 50 endpoints.” While satellite is generally held to be higher quality, videoconferencing can approximate that quality, Kozikowski points out, depending on bandwidth. “We can do a very high-quality videoconference at 768 kbps (kilobits per second), or even at a bandwidth lower than that, 384. It also depends whether that bandwidth is dedicated or shared. So a lot of our clients don’t require us to go to 768, but we can and do sometimes if everybody is set up to be able to do that.” The media also can be mixed, for example by using a high-quality satellite broadcast for a keynote speech and videoconferencing for other sessions.

One-Way Broadcasting

Internet broadcasting, although one way, has the advantages of being less expensive and not requiring specialized equipment. “The quality is getting much better and will depend on how good the quality is from your host site and the amount of bandwidth, and also how much bandwidth you have on your receiving end,” says Kozikowski. “But you are depending on your audience’s being somewhat tech savvy. And if it’s a long

Live Sessions

One strategy is to broadcast all the sessions live: remote participants then chose which live stream to view, and then access the archives for other sessions they’re interested in. “It’s like when I go to a physical meeting and there are five sessions going on and I’m only in one. The same thing goes on with the hybrid: I am attending one track and then I get access to the other four,” explains James Parker, president of Jamestown, NY-based Digitell. Alternatively, in order to save costs, the meeting host can pay for the Internet feed for just one room for the live broadcast, “and then ‘pop’ as many sessions as you can through that room,” says Parker. “In many cases, it will be that general session room. We help clients understand that after you have a general session in the morning, use that room for one of your breakouts in the afternoon so you can capitalize on what you spent already on the Internet. I would say that for the average three-day conference, we probably stream 12 to 15 sessions.”

Extend the Life of Your Meeting

Enhance Engagement Through Hybrid Options

By George Seli

working. For it all to happen virtually seemed like the cost-effective answer. Now that face-to-face meetings are back up to speed, companies are more aware of the advantages of virtual meetings — such as the much larger audience potential — and often seek to retain that medium in a “hybrid” kind of event. And, according to multimedia company Digitell, statistics have shown that as much as 30 percent of people watching a live-streaming video from a confer-

izes in virtual meeting management, with an emphasis on videoconferencing. “But as the years go on, we find there are still people who still don’t know what videoconferencing is, so we’re still educating people about that.”

Digital Event Strategist Certification

Some of those people are meeting planners, and the Virtual Edge Institute has recently introduced a certification

of credit. There is little overlap between the DES and other prominent certifications in meeting planning, Doyle affirms. “Most of the planner certifications don’t really cover virtual event strategy. There might be a small segment that focuses on event technology, but nothing in depth, so there really isn’t anything like this out there,” he says.

However knowledgeable a planner becomes in virtual events, he or she will often need to ally with third-party

Avatar Attendees

If you ask a stressed and overworked executive whether he'd rather attend another business meeting or play a video game, you might well find him going for the latter option. Fortunately, today's virtual meetings industry offers an option that's something in between: the 3-D immersive environment. James Parker, president of Jamestown, NY-based Digitell Inc., considers it an "exploding" area of the industry, and his company in part specializes in building these customized environments for corporate clients such as Thrivent, Heinz and Siemens (pictured right).

Their attendees create "avatars" of themselves and explore virtual convention halls, meet up with other attendees, and even interact with objects in that environment — much like, well, a video game. Except that the "game" is really a productive corporate meeting, filled with learning and networking. "This is where the future of virtual technology is going," Parker says. "We build an exact replica of a client's physical meeting, including the facility; for example, an exact reproduction of McCormick Place. Each participant designs their avatar to look like him or her. They can chat with each other via text and also verbally, when their avatars are in proximity. You can actually click on a person's name (appearing above their avatar) and teleport right next to them. And you can speak to them privately or publicly. So you can walk into a room and say 'Good morning' to everyone in that room."

Parker notes that the user interface is quite simple, and he has found that even older attendees have exhibited a surprising degree of comfort in manipulating their avatars through the environments using a series of icons on the screen. He encourages clients to open



Photos courtesy of Digitell Inc.

the environments a few weeks prior to the event to allow participants to log on at their convenience for training by Digitell. In addition, there is no need to compel all remote attendees to use the 3-D environment; some may prefer a non-immersive experience. "That's why we can run what is considered a 3-D/2-D integrated platform; we stream the event into both platforms at once. Therefore, the user can get the experience they want, not what the meeting planner has selected for them." And that, in turn, optimizes engagement.

— GS

Choosing a Format

Whether a remote participant is viewing a live or prerecorded session, it has become almost an adage that shorter sessions are key to retaining her attention, especially if she is seated at a computer. But this format choice should really be guided by a careful consideration of the audience and the nature of the content. "Let's say you're attending a medical convention virtually and you need to spend X amount of time in certain areas to get your credentials; broadcasting shorter snippets just isn't an option," Doyle points out.

Another example comes from Dannette Veale, digital engagement and technology strategist, Cisco Sales and Partner Engagements and Recognition

Programs. Veale works on the Global Sales Experience (GSX), an award-winning hybrid event that reaches 22,000 individuals across 98 locations over a four-day period, including five main stages with live audiences of 100–400. Veale finds that short formats are much more successful for the sales force, "which is extremely busy. They have a lot of things pulling their attention." On the other hand, the customer-facing Cisco Live, a hybrid training event for IT, networking and communications professionals, is more suited to longer formats for the virtual audience. "The individuals in the core of that audience would be very averse to short format, because their expectation is 'You're going to give me 90 minutes or two hours

of a deep dive on a very technical subject,'" Veale explains. "So I think the appropriateness of length depends on your audience."

Engagement Strategies

Engagement and attention are driven by much more than just session length, of course. Offering the remote audience opportunities for interactivity is a major part of Cisco's engagement strategy for its GSX. Attendees can comment on presenters and sessions, participate in polls, and engage in peer-to-peer chat throughout. "What happens at every live event when we're sitting with 8,000 people at a keynote? We're turning and talking to people at some point in time. This reintroduces the ability to do that

casual conversation and commentary" in the virtual space, Veale says. As far as Q&A for the remote audience, Cisco has found it most effective for questions to be directed to designated company experts, as opposed to the presenter. "A back-end group of subject matter experts respond via text," she says. "That is the most effective way to have that audience clearly understand, 'I hear you, I'm responding, I'm making the most out of the valuable time you're giving to me.'"

So instead of the speaker being able to take only the five questions over the 15 minutes they've allotted for Q&A, you can (answer many more questions), and that's critical."

Polling and Speakers

Polling also can heighten the interactivity, especially when remote attendees are asked for their content preferences. A particular session can be left with the topic TBD, and participants are polled on what subject would be most helpful to them. This puts the remote attendees "in the driver's seat," Veale says. These attendees also can feel somewhat like "second rate" partici-

But again, audience demographics should be considered when developing engagement strategies based on interactivity. "Perhaps an executive audience does not want a lot of interactivity; they don't want Twitter feeds,



"I would say that for the average three-day conference, we probably stream 12 to 15 sessions."

James Parker, President
Digitell Inc., Jamestown, NY

online games and so on. They want a smart television-like experience with good-quality audio-video, and that is all they want," Doyle adds.

Playing Games

In fact, one of Cisco's most recent tweaks to its GSX was to eschew games for its virtual audience, more specifically games that are "entertainment for entertainment's sake," Veale says. "We made a very strategic move last year to move away from alternate reality games and focus our digital engagement on content-related issues. What we were hearing from attendees is, 'I don't want to go online and play a game just for

"As the years go on, we find there are still people who still don't know what videoconferencing is, so we're still educating people about that."

Pamela Kozikowski, President
ConferenceGlobal, Williston, VT



pants in a hybrid event, and so a growing trend is to have content devoted strictly to them. "What is very engaging for the virtual audience is to have special hosts talking specifically on camera live to them, and this is being done more and more," Doyle observes. "The meeting host might have a speaker that spoke on some topic spend another 10 minutes doing a deeper presentation on addressing specific questions from the virtual audience; things of that nature that really help to keep people engaged."

fun, but if you gave me a tool to help me delve into cloud computing strategy and compensation, I would engage in that.' And that was the majority of our audience. So last year we moved to a role-playing game that was focused on our top five priorities that put the sales individuals in the role of an account team that had just gone out to try and do a client bid and had lost it, and now have the ability via Cisco-enabled tools to travel back in time to relearn or learn new information to try and win the bid.

So the game components were very relevant to content."

A game-like activity that fostered engagement for the virtual audience of last year's GSX enabled the recognition of sales overachievers through "virtual

congratulations," which could be extended by any virtual participant. Veale says, "You could virtually give someone a hug, handshake, high five. Before we (launched this program), the sales recognition areas (of the GSX) were restricted to the sales recognition folks, and that's because we were replicating what we would do onsite. We would give those folks these exclusive lounges and areas, which is not an effective tactic online if what you're really trying to do is get more awareness of these winners and get them to be congratulated. So we opened it up last year, and then we layered in this achievement program: Participants could get a badge by doing five unique congratulations, and then another level for 10, and when you got to that 15 level you were entered in a prize drawing. We went from 1,600 of those virtual congratulations being exchanged to 62,000. So we had an exponential increase in the activity in that area."

That's a great quantitative measure of engagement, and of course there are others. How attentive is that participant sitting at her computer? We might find out, suggests Doyle, with attention-tracking devices such as questions that pop up on the session being presented, after which the viewer's response time is recorded. Such metrics all go toward an ROI assessment of the virtual experience, which not only guides the future development of the program, but also culls the positive metrics that justify investing in the program at all. **C&IT**



Photo courtesy of Royal Caribbean International

Meeting at Sea

Cruising today is as easy as 1-2-3: (Top) Attendees easily find their way around the ship using award-winning digital wayfinders available on many Royal Caribbean ships; (center) checking email is a cinch in the library aboard the Carnival Spirit; and when it's time to reward the company's top producers, an incentive program sailing out of Manhattan (bottom) or a hop around the islands of Hawaii on RCL's Pride of America can't be beat.



Photo courtesy of Carnival Cruise Lines

It's as Easy as 1-2-3

By John Buchanan

When G. Monica Wightman, CAP, executive assistant to the chairman and CEO of Irving, TX-based oil and gas company Pioneer Natural Resources, had to come up with a good idea for the company's 15th anniversary celebration, she faced a formidable challenge.

"For years, we had done great ski trips or golf trips," she says, "but those events were typically for smaller groups that either liked to ski or play golf. For our 15th anniversary, we were doing a company-wide event that included everyone from top executives to truck mechanics. So we thought we should find something for all the people who don't typically get to participate in our meetings on an annual basis."

By consulting with coworkers, Wightman settled on the idea of a cruise. "And the more people I talked to," she says,



Photo courtesy of Norwegian Cruise Line

"the more I realized that they really liked the idea."

As a result, in June, Pioneer Natural Resources hosted two back-to-back groups of 700 attendees each on the Carnival Destiny for a multi-destination Caribbean cruise that included a private island.

The results were spectacular.

"We don't do any formal surveys after our meetings," Wightman says. "But our executives and managers have an open-door policy for feedback. And we have received a tremendous amount of positive feedback from doing a cruise. It gave us such flexibility and so many different options that all of our attendees could choose something they wanted to do, and we weren't set in one place with just one agenda in terms of activities. Different people got to try different things. It was a great experience, and we definitely plan to do a cruise again."

Unique Benefits

Like many professional meeting planners before her, Wightman discovered the singular benefits of meetings at sea.

First and foremost among them — and the primary reason why cruises grow in popularity every year as an option — are the affordability and value they deliver.

"The cost-effectiveness of cruises is what continues to be the No. 1 driving factor in their selection," says Jo Kling, president of Miami-based Landry & Kling Cruise Event Services, one of the world's top cruise consultation and booking firms. "And that value is still new to a lot of planners who have not looked at cruises as an option and come to that realization. Those planners still think of cruising from the old days, when trans-Atlantic cruises were an expensive way to travel. But those days are gone, and cruising is very affordable now."

Even more important, Kling says, in a recovering but still sluggish post-recession market where budgets are tighter and under more scrutiny than ever before, the value proposition of cruise meetings has become a critical catalyst



The Norwegian Epic's Spice H2O is a sun deck by day. Then, when the sun goes down, it morphs into an elegant stage and dance floor for adults only.

for their use by companies that want to get maximum bang for the buck.

"I've heard planners say they can spend way less on a cruise, but their attendees still think they're gotten more," Kling says. "And the attendees also see that they're not having to pay for their own lunch or cocktails or room service or entertainment in the evening if those are not part of the formal agenda. So there are benefits for attendees as well as planners when it comes to cost."

offer something different," he says. "I wouldn't suggest that somebody do it every year, but as part of their rotation it allows you the opportunity to do something that is just different from a land-based meeting."

And as a practical matter, Mattia says, for international programs, cruising offers a hedge against future currency fluctuations because a large chunk of the expenditure is accounted for in the U.S.



"It gave us such flexibility and so many different options...people got to try different things. It was a great experience and we definitely plan to do a cruise again."

G. Monica Wightman, CAP, Executive Assistant, Pioneer Natural Resources
Irving, TX

Barney Mattia, president of Clark, NJ-based independent meeting and event planning company Westfield Group, has been booking cruises for corporate clients for a decade. At a time when "been there, done that syndrome" has infected a lot of organizations, he cites what he considers another key benefit of cruises. "Cruise programs

"In recent years, European programs have become quite expensive because of the weak dollar," he says. "But cruise programs allow us to send groups there, but at a lower cost."

Earlier this year, Mattia and his colleague, MaryAnne Kanacki, CMP, Westfield Group's executive vice president, chartered a luxury vessel for a

private cruise that took 160 couples from Barcelona to Rome, with stops in between exotic ports such as Marseilles and Monte Carlo, as part of a repeat client's high-end incentive program.

"For some groups, the ability to cruise and visit multiple ports is very appealing," Kanacki says. "And for those groups, a charter makes a lot of sense in many cases. It gives them exclusivity and a feeling that they're on their own yacht. And that has a sense of perceived value on the part of attendees that lasts for quite a long time. The other end of the spectrum is where budget is a concern, but the client still wants to reward people with something different. And in those instances, we look for shorter itineraries in the Caribbean during shoulder or off season, to get the value but still give people a great experience."

Meanwhile, as cruise meetings become more mainstream, the ability of cruise lines to enhance a meeting experience and the enthusiasm attendees have for going to sea are evolving with the growth, says veteran speaker Barry Maher, who has been making presentations and delivering keynotes on the high seas for more than 10 years. "Cruise meetings are getting better," says Corona, CA-based Maher. "Attendees are becoming more familiar with them, and the cruise lines are more used to handling the needs of a meeting."

In response, planners are becoming more interested in cruises each and ev-



"Cruise meetings are getting better. Attendees are becoming more familiar with them, and the cruise lines are more used to handling the needs of a meeting."

Barry Maher, Principal
Barry Maher & Associates
Corona, CA

ery year, which is helping to drive the growth of the industry.

The Case for Cruising

Although the bottom-line value and all-inclusive pricing of cruises have always been perceived by corporate users and planners as their most important benefits, they also offer a sense of exclusivity and a captive audience.

But at a time when budgets are strained, it is cost-effectiveness more than anything else that is attracting new corporate clients from many different industries, cruise experts say.

Nowadays, many meeting planners are aware that meeting at sea compares favorably to a meeting on land when it comes to such items as entertainment, which is most often included in the total package price per person. The same goes for unlimited food and beverage — another area where cruises prove to be more cost-effective. Room service is complimentary on a cruise ship but not on land. All recreation also is included, meaning attendees save money on after-hours expenditures. And, unlike many hotels, cruise lines do not charge resort fees.

Buyer Beware

Despite their obvious appeal and constantly growing popularity, cruise meetings do offer some unique challenges and cautions, advises Maher.

"For example," he says, "a planner has to be careful to make sure that a particular meeting is right for a cruise ship. If it's a technical meeting, with a lot of detail in the content, a cruise might offer too many distractions, even if that just means staring out the window as Alaska or a Caribbean island goes by. If that's a concern, you might not want to do a cruise. Or if you do, you'll want to make sure the blinds are closed in the meeting room."

In addition, Maher stresses that planners new to cruises must pay careful attention to the meeting space on a ship, because it rarely offers an apples-to-apples comparison with a hotel. "Make sure to ask specific questions about the ship's available meeting space and facilities and get specific answers," he says. "Take nothing for granted. And make sure to formally confirm your space so cruise directors cannot move you at the last minute, because that tends to happen a lot on cruise ships as cruise directors juggle various facilities once the cruise is underway. The only way to prevent that is to make sure your meeting facilities are locked in before

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Royal Caribbean's Splendour of the Seas.

Photo courtesy of Royal Caribbean International

South Florida Ports Debut New Ships

South Florida's Port Everglades, Fort Lauderdale, FL, and PortMiami will welcome new and established cruise ships for the first time this 2012–2013 season.

Celebrity Reflection, Oceania Riviera and Carnival Breeze are three of the new ships to debut at PortMiami later this year. The Celebrity Silhouette will debut at Port Everglades and the Disney Wonder will ship out of PortMiami for the first time. In late 2013, Princess Cruises' new Royal Princess is planning Caribbean sailings from Port Everglades.

Also, for the first time, Celebrity Eclipse will be based at Port Everglades in Broward County, and Columbus 2, a Hapag Lloyd Cruise Ship, will make a port call there.

Four terminals at Port Everglades were recently renovated and updated to improve the passenger experience for South Florida cruisers. Guests will have new

experiences on board as well. For example, the open-air Lawn Club Grill on the Celebrity Silhouette is an original dining experience that is the talk of the town. Guests

are invited to grill their own food (or have a chef do it for them) while pretending they are in their own backyard.

The Carnival Breeze, which just launched from Venice in June, is now Carnival Cruise Line's largest South Florida-based ship.

The Breeze is the first to feature the Thrill Theater, an immersive multi-dimensional special effects experience that makes viewers

feel like they are part of the movie. New dining options include Bonsai Sushi and Fat Jimmy's C-Side BBQ, an open-air barbecue venue. Also, Guy's Burger Joint, is a cool poolside spot for hot burgers and hand-cut fries. The Carnival Breeze offers year-round six- and eight-day Caribbean cruises out of PortMiami.



A rendering of the glitzy Piano Bar on the newly launched Carnival Breeze.

Photo courtesy of Carnival Cruise Lines

the ship ever leaves the port. If you don't do that, you could find yourself, on short notice, in a much less advantageous space than you expected."

And finally, Maher says, be aware that the cruise director on a ship is not the same thing as a meeting services person in a hotel. "Cruise directors have much broader responsibilities that include all passengers on the ship, not just your attendees," he says. "Therefore, all details of your meeting must be clearly worked out and agreed to with your sales representative before

the ship sails. A cruise director on a big ship has several thousand people to deal with. So unless you've done a buy-out of the ship, your several hundred attendees are not going to be a priority. And you have to understand and plan for that going in."

More Advice

Like other forms of specialized meeting options such as adventure travel or community service events, cruise meetings require careful attention to specific details.



"Something we often do is arrange private shore excursions for a client group with our own local vendors in the destination. That is a way to make the trip truly special and tailor it to the interests of the group."

MaryAnne Kanacki, CMP
Executive Vice President
Westfield Group, Clark, NJ

For example, says Kanacki, although exclusivity is touted as one of the key benefits of cruising, it is hard to attain if you have a group of just a few hundred attendees on a huge ship that accommodates several thousand passengers.

"In that kind of situation," she says, "something we often do is arrange private shore excursions for a client group with our own local vendors in the destination, apart from what the line offers other passengers," she says. "That is a way to make the trip truly special and tailor it to the interests of the group, while also delivering a genuine sense of exclusivity."

On a more practical level in terms of execution, Kanacki says, each cruise line has its own rules and regulations that must be carefully adhered to. "For example, the timing of documents has to be handled in a certain way," she says. "Registration needs to be done properly, because if it doesn't include things the cruise line needs, such as passports, that can delay things or cause problems. For example, in one cruise company's case, the attendees'

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The Celebrity Millennium features the 900-seat Celebrity Theater.

passports have to be valid for at least six months after the sailing. So you have to pay very careful attention to those kinds of details."

By the same token, dealing with meeting-related materials is often more challenging for a cruise than what



"The cost-effectiveness of cruises is what continues to be the No. 1 driving factor in their selection. And that value is still new to a lot of planners who have not looked at cruises as an option."

Jo Kling, President
Landry & Kling Cruise Event Services
Miami, FL

planners are accustomed to with land-based programs. "That's true whether you're talking about name badges or gifts for the group," she says. "You have to allow ample time for shipping. And if anything is going outside the U.S., you need to work with a customs broker. And all of those things require more time than a domestic land-based program. So you have to plan those things far enough in advance to make sure they get handled properly."

But the most critical consideration, Kanacki says, is understanding that there are significant differences in key aspects of a cruise meeting versus a land-based event — and the only way to account for them is to do your homework. "That's precisely why you have to conduct a site inspection before you book a cruise," she says. For one of her recent programs, she visited three different ships to ensure they booked the right one for their group, based on factors such as cabin size and available meeting facilities.

Gets Easier All the Time

Given such a range of considerations and potential challenges, Kling says, planners who are not experienced at booking cruises should use the services of a specialized vendor such as Landry & Kling.

Based on her experience, Wightman agrees wholeheartedly. "It was because

of Landry & Kling that I was able to get some great information and make a cruise meeting happen," she says. Without their assistance, she says, the task would have been a daunting one, and she likely would not have been able to get the job done alone for two large groups that would sail back-to-back. "We knew it was going to be a large undertaking and require specialized connections that we did not have in our corporate events department," Wightman says. "So, everyone was especially happy that all of the planning and logistics were handled so well by working with Landry & Kling. They just made everything so easy."

With or without the services of an advisor most meeting planners who opt for the first time for a cruise are pleasantly surprised by how relatively easy it is from a logistical point of view.

For example, most of the decisions



Attendees soak up the sun onboard the Carnival Spirit.

are made well in advance and don't require additional input by the planner. One doesn't have to sift through pages and pages of banquet menus to find just the right fit or decide on the entertainment — it's built-in and ready to go. Basically, everything is done for the planner and all they have to do is show up, get their attendees onboard and have a terrific event with spectacular results. It's as easy as 1-2-3. **C&IT**



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A Planner's Personal To-Do List

Reflect, Reprioritize, Be Renewed

By Karen Brost

Achieving the ideal balance between our work lives and our personal lives is something many of us aspire to. We know that it would be much better for our health (both mental and physical) and our happiness. But the great irony is that we're often just too darn busy to add "work on work-life balance" to our already packed "to do" lists.

Are You Techno-Tethered?

Speaker, author, humorist Kathleen Passanisi, PT, CSP, CPAE, of Kathleen Passanisi New Perspectives, frequently speaks on the topic of life balance and wellness, and her work has earned her admission to the National Speakers

"They send each other emails at 2 o'clock in the morning on a Sunday which says, 'I'm working, are you?'"



Kathleen Passanisi, PT, CSP, CAE
New Perspectives, St. Louis, MO

Association's Speaker Hall of Fame. She says that corporate America is "horrible" at achieving balance and that a major culprit is our obsession with being connected 24/7. "I call it being techno-tethered," she says. "People are so afraid of being out of the loop. They feel like

pace up.' They know this. They send each other emails at 2 o'clock in the morning on a Sunday which says, 'I'm working, are you?'" She added that bosses that encourage this kind of behavior are simply burning their employees out.

"Most people are living in a state of

they're going to lose their edge or somebody is going to get a leg up on them or they'll lose their job."

She cited a recent *Newsweek* cover story titled "iCrazy" as proof. "They said in there that a third of people check their email before they get out of bed. That means you've got to have your phone or your iPad or your BlackBerry right there. Technology is supposed to be a tool at your disposal. If you're a carpenter, you don't sleep with your hammer.

"I did a big meeting for a big company the other day," she continues, "and I taught this class on balance. I said to them, 'You can't keep this

overwhelm," she adds. "The No. 1 cause of stress is uncertainty. We feel like 'if I work fast enough to stay ahead of it, I'll increase my job security, and I'll feel more certain because I have more data, more information.' That's a total myth."

She described an experiment she likes to conduct with her groups. "I say, 'Yell amen' if you're guilty of any of these.' Then she reads off a list of statements such as: You put your self-care last. Your schedule revolves around your work. Your family demands wear you down.

You feel overwhelmed or rushed. You have an uneasy feeling about your life's direction. You have a sense that time is flying by, and you have a strong desire to slow down, but you're afraid to. She says that she receives so many amens that it sounds like some kind of revival. "Sometimes, they'll stand up and point at someone across the room like they're saying 'She's talking about you, Stella!'"

What Does Balance Feel Like?

This chorus of "amens" is symbolic of lives that are out of balance, but that begs the question: What would a balanced life feel like? Passanisi says, "Balance feels like making choices that allow me to live



happily in sync with my values. If I say I value my health, but I don't exercise, I don't eat right and I don't see the doctor, I feel terribly guilty about that. What I say is important to me and what I do are not in sync, and therefore I'm out of balance because I'm increasing my own stress level by not following through on those things. If I say I value my friendship with this person, but I never make time to talk to my friend, I will feel out of balance because that's something I value, but I'm not honoring that value. So I feel like a bad friend."

Passanisi offered several suggestions for improving balance:

Work-Life Balance To-Do List

✓ **Avoid Multitasking.** Although this may sound counterintuitive, here's her reasoning: "You have to realize the damage that it does to you. There's a phrase called partial continuous attention. We are constantly attending to multiple things. We use the phrase multitasking like it's a good thing, but multitasking really means I'm not paying attention to anything. And so what's happening is that we have no time to reflect. We don't

think anything through deeply." She says that if you do one thing at a time, you'll actually get more done because you'll focus more on what you're doing and get it right the first time.

✓ **Savor your successes.** "We jump from one thing to the next, and we never sit back and reflect on 'I did this really well. I put a lot of thought and effort into this, and I'm really proud of myself.' Those are the things that build us back up."

✓ **Talk to yourself.** "If you're in the car by yourself, I suggest you talk to yourself out loud. People will just think you're on the phone. When you're just thinking about something, it's kind of looping in your head. But when you say it out loud, it's linear. Take some time to reflect on 'What did I do today that made me feel happy or feel competent?' That will give you access to a slew of positive emotions. (Otherwise) you get in the car and you turn on the news. Listening to the news isn't going to change the news."

✓ **Manage expectations.** "I tell people all the time, 'These are the best times to reach me, and I'm not usually available on the weekends and after this time of

the day. Tell me what you need from me and when you need it and give me ample notice, and I will have these things to you in advance. Don't wait until the last minute and expect me to do them at night or on the weekend.' I say this very sweetly. I teach stress management, and if I didn't practice that, I'd be a fraud."

✓ **Take a real vacation.** "Vacate means to make empty, and recreate means to re-create, to make new. I see people on vacation and all they're doing is texting. I'm a big fan of unplugging. What's the worst that will happen if you unplug for an hour?"

✓ **Breathe.** "If you watch people when they read email or they're texting, they're holding their breath. When you are holding your breath, you are putting yourself into the fight-or-flight response. You're stimulating the sympathetic nervous system, which is a stress response, instead of keeping yourself calm. When you're calm, you think more clearly, you notice things more, you're more creative — all the things that we want." Passanisi says that breathing deeply from the diaphragm brings more oxygen to the brain and helps create a sense of calm.

✓ **Get moving.** “One of the things that I encourage people to do is once every half hour, get up and walk around. You need that because people are developing what is called ‘diabesity’ (a term coined to describe diabetes caused by obesity). We’re just not active enough. You really need to get up and move, and while you’re moving, you need to concentrate on your breathing.”

✓ **Look at your schedule with a critical eye.**

“You’re responsible for your own well-being. (Ask yourself) ‘Do I really need to schedule a play date for little Tyrone on Saturday?’ We think we have to schedule them for advanced soccer and gymnastics and cello lessons and Latin class. We’re so overscheduled. And then we think we have to have a couple over Friday night because we owe them. We just keep adding things (to our schedules) and we never take anything off.”

✓ **Build in some “me” time.** Passanisi makes it a habit of blocking out personal time on her calendar and marking it with a big red “X.” Then, when that time arrives, she decides how she wants to spend it. “It may mean staying in bed and reading a great book or taking a yoga class or having lunch with a girlfriend. You have to have pockets of time during the day, during the week and during the month. You have to have boundaries in your schedule that are sacrosanct. You don’t give those up easily.”

✓ **Stay focused on what really matters.** Passanisi recommends taking some quiet time to reflect on those

into your day, and you have to be aware of them when they’re happening.”

More Pointers From Planners

✓ **Work from home.** Lisa Schelle, CMM, director, global meetings & events for Nike Inc., has found a simple yet effective way to achieve more balance. “I try to work

the kiddies. If I take two hours out of my day to go to a class party, I know in advance I either need to start my day earlier, or plan to work a few hours at night after the kids are in bed.”

✓ **Block out time.** DeMarse shared a few more helpful tips. “We are all good about putting appointments or conference calls into our daily calendar,



“I spend a great deal of time up front training and mentoring new employees to handle tasks the way I want them done so when projects arise it is easier to delegate.”

Stacy DeMarse, CMM, President
DeMarse Meetings & Events, Tampa, FL

from home one day a week,” she says. “The elimination of travel time allows me to take care of a few household chores such as laundry, which, in turn, enables me to spend my days off for relaxation and enjoyment. I’m much more productive when working from home, and the change of environment helps me focus and improves my mindset.”

“Working from home is a must for me to achieve a work-life balance,” states Stacy DeMarse, CMM, president of DeMarse Meetings & Events. “This allows me the flexibility to attend events for the children, lunch with my girlfriends and handle all those pesky home repair issues, and work easily around my day. We track our hours to ensure our bill rate/hours worked is a win-win for

but what we struggle with is blocking time to work! If I have a project that requires my undivided attention, I set aside a block amount of time to concentrate fully on that project. In our offices, we use Skype to instant message, so I put my ‘do not disturb’ on, turn my phones off, close down my email and concentrate on the task at hand. I try to block this time in the early a.m., and not longer than two hours at a time. This frees my afternoon up to handle unexpected issues that arise as they do daily in our industry.

✓ **Delegate.** “Learning to delegate is probably one of the hardest tasks a Type A personality can do,” DeMarse continues. “Sometime we think it is easier to just do it ourselves rather than try to explain to someone in detail how we want it done our way. I spend a great deal of time up front training and mentoring new employees to handle tasks the way I want them done so when projects arise it is easier to delegate. I also schedule one-to-one meetings at least one time weekly and give them my undivided attention to guide or assist them.”

✓ **Take personal time.** She also underscores the importance of having a fulfilling life outside of work. “We



Idan Keren, CMM, Senior Director
OKT Meetings, Plainview, NY

both the client and our company. This discipline forces me to plan out my day to ensure I get a full eight hours of work even if I have time scheduled with

usually spend about two weekends per month camping with family and friends. I make it a point, no matter how crazy the week, how stressful the day, to take a deep breath, turn the cell phone off and give my family my undivided attention. Normally, by unplugging from the Internet and cellphone for the weekend, I am ready to take on the challenges on Monday morning. I try to make it a point *not* to check my emails on Sunday night to get a jump on the week. This just means working Sunday night to solve issues instead of Monday morning, and I don’t want to take that precious time away from my family.

“Some weeks I am much more successful than others at following my personal recipe for a better work-life balance,” she admits, “but acknowledging that balance is necessary is the first part of the battle to winning your life back!”

Idan Keren, CMM, senior director of OKT Meetings, works to find the right balance between taking time off to enjoy a vacation and continuing to meet his clients’ needs. “I have my own meeting department. It gives me the flexibility to be able to take some time away if I need to,” he says. “I’m actually leaving on a trip to Europe tomorrow for 5½ weeks for personal pleasure and to enjoy my life a little bit.

“I’m bringing my laptop with me. I’ll be connected,” he admits. “But the truth is, I let all of my clients know ahead of time that I will be gone for this amount of time. I’ve prepared very carefully for this trip. Anything that was taking place during this time I handed off to my colleagues. It’s important that if you want to take a certain amount of time off for your personal life, make sure you let your clients know. They understand. Everybody’s human, everybody needs a break once in a while. I told my clients to expect a delay in my response. I’m not going to respond the same day. That will help me enjoy my time a little more with my wife.”

✓ **Balance “have tos” and “want tos.”** “Balance is sort of like a midpoint between our doing and our being,”

Passanisi says. “It’s a balance point between our “have tos” and our “want tos” and our outer life and our inner life. We have “have to” lists at work and we have “have to” lists at home, but what helps you feel in balance is when you have “want tos” on your daily list. I want to have lunch with a friend of mine that works in another department. Or I want to watch the ballgame tonight with my next door neighbor.

She shared a personal example. “Sitting on the screened-in porch and looking at my lovely garden and having a glass of wine or an iced tea and reading Nora Ephron is a ‘want to.’ So when I know I have time to do that at the end of the day, the day is easier. I’m not easily going to give that up.” As she says, “Don’t put off things that enrich your life and bring you joy.”

✓ **Integrate work-life.** Don England, CMM, vice president of GAGE Creative Event Solutions, describes his personal approach to work-life balance.



“I do not believe in having a ‘job’ for the duration of our lives. Absolutely, we all have responsibilities that are met through having gain-

“We cannot allow ourselves to remain in a role that is not connected to living a passionate, forward-motion career.”

Don England, CMM, Vice President
GAGE Creative Event Solutions, Nashville, TN

ful employment. Most (of us) have situations that require we start with a job. However, we cannot allow ourselves to remain in a role that is not connected to living a passionate, forward-motion career. I am fortunate. I have a career that I love, and the individuals associated in the meetings and events worlds are often friends. Therefore, you will seldom see me interacting socially where a portion of the evening will not involve my profession. I believe in work-life integration.

“That stated,” he continues. “A good healthy departure of responsibilities through vacations and long weekends

is essential to my good mental health. I keep a fun activity on my calendar at all times to look forward to, whether that is experiencing new activities, visiting friends that live away, or a long outdoor weekend. It keeps me excited to move forward in some of the monotony of life.”

Cautionary Tale

Passanisi shared a cautionary tale she learned from a top executive at a large company who paid a steep price for living his life out of balance. As he explained to his new team, “In my first job as an executive, I burned the candle at both ends. I thought I had to be there all the time. I worked evenings. I worked weekends. I hardly knew my children. I wound up divorced, and my kids hardly speak to me. I am fortunate to have married again, and I have two small children, and I will not make that mistake again. It cost me my family, and my health suffered as a result of it, and I’m not doing that again.”

He then announced his parameters. “These are the hours I will be here to make myself available to you. I’m not going to be here in the evening, and I’m not going to be here on the week-

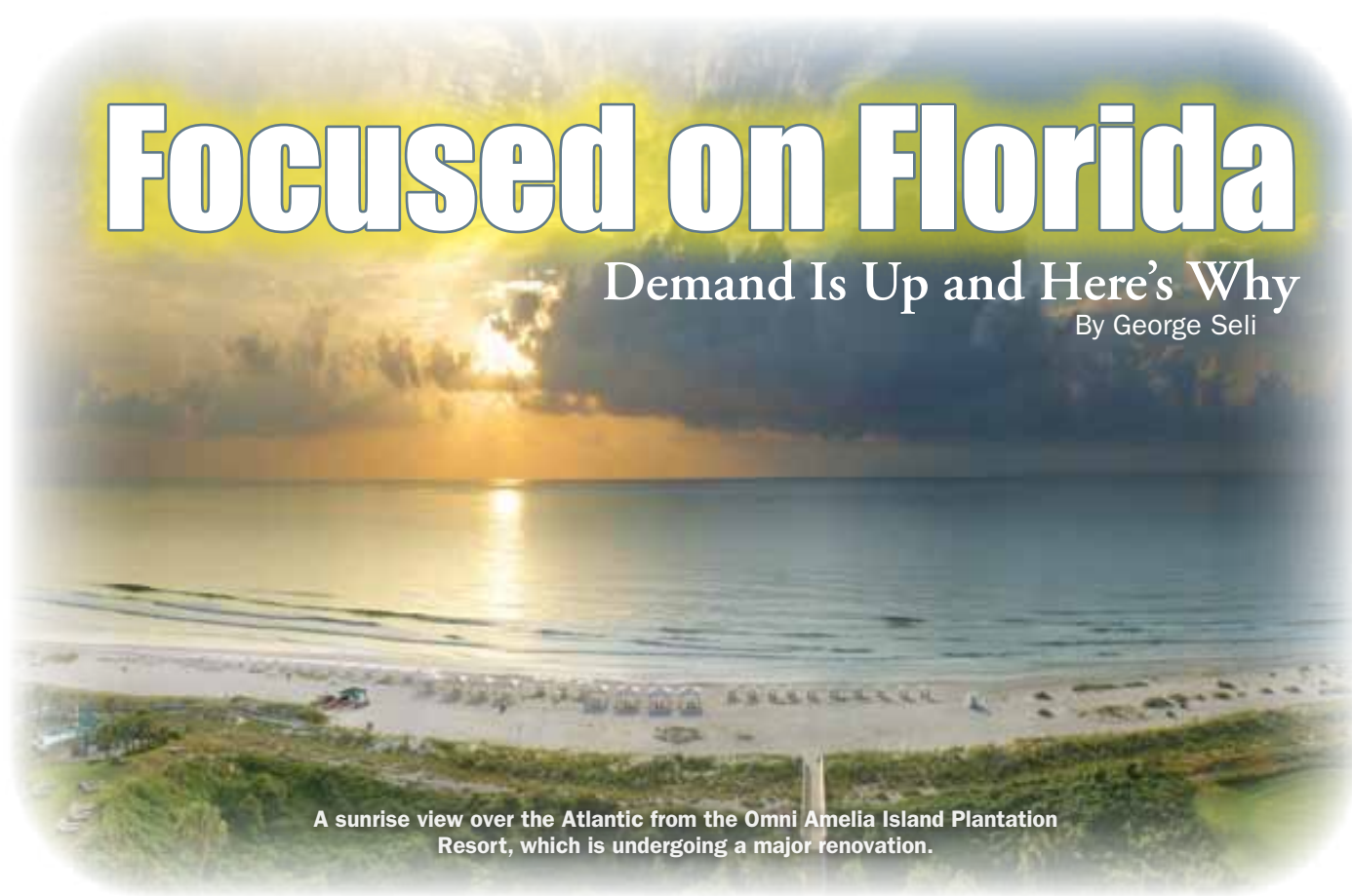
end, and I don’t expect you to be here, either, unless we are in the tail end of a deadline to meet a promise we made to a client. But if you have to do that, I expect you to take compensatory time when that’s over. It’s your responsibility to do that. I’m not going to oversee it. That’s how I’m going to live my life.”

So when Passanisi encounters resistance along the path to balance, such as when people say, “I can’t turn off my phone,” or “I can’t avoid checking emails every five minutes,” or “I can’t stop working late at night and on weekends,” she has a simple, yet empowering answer. “Oh yes you can.” **C&IT**

Focused on Florida

Demand Is Up and Here's Why

By George Seli



A sunrise view over the Atlantic from the Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort, which is undergoing a major renovation.

Photo courtesy of Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort

The magic combination of accessibility, affordability and enticing weather is really working for Florida these days. Both from a planner's and a supplier's perspective, the state is a real hot spot for corporate meetings, and that's not changing any time soon. "The first quarter is when everybody really wants Florida, and I cannot find a hotel the first quarter of '13 in the state right now to accommodate a national meeting," reports Andrea Strauss, president of Hackensack, NJ-based Classic Conferences. "And that includes all parts of Florida, not just Miami and Orlando."

Meanwhile, David Gabri, president and CEO of Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI), has found that the company's 17 properties in the Sunshine State are leading those in California, Arizona and Nevada in terms of demand from corporate groups. "RFPs on a per-month basis are up significantly year on year, and we can feel the demand from Miami up the coast all

the way to Jacksonville and Ponte Vedra, and over to the west coast. Certainly Central Florida, with our Universal Orlando assets and the Peabody Orlando, is in constant high demand," Gabri says.

And that, of course, explains the challenge that planners like Strauss have when it comes to finding hotel space. Gabri adds, "Many of the opportunities that have been on the sale rack the last couple years have been taken by savvy planners. Consequently, space is still there in many cases, but it's not as readily available as it has been in the past." The resurgence in corporate group travel has combined with the fact that Florida

has had "very little new inventory in the last four years," he notes. When a planner does find desirable dates and space in Orlando, Miami, Tampa or another of Florida's prime cities,

Blue Man Group debuted a revamped show earlier this year at Universal Orlando Resort featuring new music, new technology and new experiences.



Photo courtesy of Universal Orlando Resort

Gabri's advice is not to underestimate the room block. "More than half of the groups arriving at our Florida properties exceeded blocks last year. In the past, that's not been a problem. But if the planners continue to be conservative in their booking, that could become a problem as demand and occupancy continue to grow," he explains.

Orlando

Consider the occupancy wave that hit Orlando last year. The city welcomed 55.1 million visitors, up 7.2 percent from the previous year, including 3.3 million convention attendees (up 2.7 percent), resulting in 67.6 percent hotel room occupancy (up 5.8 percent). Still, Visit Orlando, the city's CVB, sees room for improvement in its meetings business, and has launched a new marketing campaign designed to showcase the destination's diverse dining, entertainment and other "after meeting" options. The "After Five" marketing campaign was spurred by recent research by Visit Orlando that revealed a misconception among meeting groups, namely that the city is primarily about daytime theme-park activities. In fact, both of Orlando's major theme parks, Walt Disney World Resort and Universal Orlando Resort, have plenty of after-hours recreation available for meeting attendees, with Downtown Disney and Universal CityWalk, respectively.

Recent additions at Universal CityWalk include a newly enhanced Blue Man Group show and Hollywood Drive-in Golf, with two 18-hole miniature golf courses based on classic drive-in era horror and sci-fi movies.

Other news from Universal Orlando Resort includes the announcement that it will build the Cabana Bay Beach Resort next to Universal's Islands of Adventure theme Park. The family-friendly resort, with 900 standard guest rooms and 900 family suites, is scheduled to open in 2014. Universal Studios' "Despicable Me" attraction, a high-tech, 3-D digital adventure with the complete cast of characters from the film of the same name, recently debuted, while Universal's Islands of Adventure just relaunched "The Amazing Adventures of Spiderman" with new animation and high-definition visuals.

News from Walt Disney World Resort includes Downtown Disney,

where Splitsville, a new bowling, billiards, dining and night-life venue, will open in late 2012.

Also later this year, Walt Disney World Resort will unveil phase two of the Magic Kingdom's Fantasyland expansion project, which will include the "Under the Sea, Journey of the Little Mermaid" experience and Be Our Guest Restaurant. There also is news on the Disney hotel front: The new 1,125-suite Disney's Art of Animation Resort recently debuted its "Finding Nemo," "Cars" and "The Lion King" movie-theme accommodations. "The Little Mermaid" rooms are opening September 15.

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The DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld has 60,000 sf of meeting space. Hotel guests receive discounts at the popular SeaWorld marinelife park.

World Resort is slated to open early 2014 with 37,750 sf of function space. In addition, The Spa at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort is scheduled to re-open in early 2013 following an extensive refurbishment that will see the addition of Disney Vacation Club-style room accommodations. The Grand Floridian Resort offers 897 guest rooms and 40,000 sf of function space.

Another major resort for groups who want convenience to Disney's attractions is the 2,265-room Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel, which offers a total of 329,000 sf of meeting space. A similar vantage point to SeaWorld's attractions is afforded by the DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld. Recently graced with a \$35 million renovation, the 1,094-room DoubleTree houses 60,000 sf of meeting space, including the

"We can feel the demand from Miami up the coast all the way to Jacksonville and Ponte Vedra, and over to the west coast."

David Gabri, President & CEO
Associated Luxury Hotels International



12,000-sf Oceans Ballroom and 10,000-sf Great Lakes Ballroom. Meeting space also includes the 13,000-sf Lakes Conference Center and the 20,000-sf Oceans Conference Center. Outdoor events are accommodated on the Tropical Terrace.

Isabel Musial-Dotto, meeting and event planner with New Haven, CT-based WorldTEK Event & Travel Management, has found the Rosen Hotels & Resorts properties work well for groups that want to be removed from, yet accessible to, the theme-park action. Having visited Rosen Centre Hotel for a site inspection this summer, she observes that the "new renovations look great. They did an overhaul of the meeting space, and the layout works really well; it's easy to get around and has a nice, clean feel." Not only does the 1,334-room Rosen Centre offer 106,000 sf of meeting space, but it also is connected via skywalk to the Orange County Convention Center



Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando features 1,500 guest rooms, 445,000 sf of meeting space and the Shingle Creek Golf Club.



Photo courtesy of DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld

(OCCC). It also has completed a multimillion-dollar remodel of the third of its three 2,500-sf Presidential Suites, as well as its 14 two-bay (520 sf) and three-bay (780 sf) hospitality suites.

Meanwhile, next to the OCCC is Rosen Plaza Hotel, with 60,000 sf of meeting space. Rosen Plaza has completed a renovation of its 800 guest rooms, as well as its hallways and hospitality suites. The 1,500-room Rosen Shingle Creek, located a mile from the OCCC, boasts not only 445,000 sf of meeting space including three column-free ballrooms, but The Shingle Creek Golf Club, home of the Brad Brewer Golf Academy. The expansive meeting space also includes 50,000 sf of outdoor space, a 40,000-sf outdoor event lot and 250,000 sf of exhibition space. The upscale resort also features the full-service Spa at Shingle Creek and 15 dining/lounge options.

Each of these Rosen hotels has been designated a Two Palm Green Lodge by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and all three have recently begun providing free Internet service in guest rooms, public areas and meeting spaces.

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate is a magnet for meetings that incorporate golf events with its two championship golf courses and David Leadbetter Golf Academy. Scheduled to open in 2013 is a new 55,000-sf conference center with a 28,800-sf ballroom, boosting the resort's total meeting space to 100,000 sf. The 720-room four-diamond property features the Mokara Spa and 850-foot lazy river.

Tampa

With the Republican National Convention held in late August at the Tampa Bay Times Forum, the Tampa area welcomed about 50,000 out-of-state delegates, journalists and party volunteers, which represented significant business to area hoteliers and merchants. Two hotels that have always drawn significant corporate group business are the Innisbrook and Saddlebrook resorts.

Located in Palm Harbor about 25 minutes from the Tampa International Airport, the 608-room Innisbrook Resort offers 65,000 sf of meeting space, the Innisbrook Golf Institute, 11 tennis courts, a nature preserve and the new 20,000-sf Indaba Spa with 12 treatment rooms. The resort completed a com-



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prehensive \$26 million renovation in 2009.

Among several new guest-room upgrades at the 800-room Saddlebrook Resort is the iBAHN ETVi platform, delivering an IP-based, high-definition TV viewing experience. Saddlebrook's partnership with iBAHN also provides the resort's conference center with broadband offerings covering every technical demand. Saddlebrook houses 90,000 sf of function space, including 10 outdoor banquet facilities, a five-acre Teambuilding Course, two 18-hole golf courses and 45 tennis courts.

Brookfield, WI-based Milwaukee Electric Tool recently held a national sales meeting at Saddlebrook, bringing in about 325 attendees, most of whom were relatively young, active types, relates Bridget Van Lare, supervisor of sales operations, who planned the event. Given that demographic, the Saddlebrook and local area were a good choice, with participants enjoying golf, tennis, fishing and canoeing outings, as well as a game night. "In the back of the property they have a prominent tent



The AAA Five Diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club features the largest spa in north Florida, 36 holes of golf and 250 guest rooms.

structure where we arranged for a live band and attendees played dodgeball on the tennis courts, ping pong and more," Van Lare says. "It was really impressive what we ended up doing with the space, and the resort staff were very accommodating. We had the vision of what we wanted, and they helped us source local providers for the gaming." When it came to business, Van Lare was pleased with the logistics of the meeting sessions: "I liked how the meeting space was all

together in one area, and we had the ability to secure all of it right from the beginning."

Jacksonville

The big news in the Jacksonville area's meetings industry is quite arguably the \$85 million "re-imagining" of the Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort, scheduled to be completed in spring 2013. Highlights of the project include 155 additional oceanfront guest rooms and suites, increasing the total room count to 404; the addition of 30,000 sf of meeting

space, increasing the total meeting space at the resort to 80,000 sf; new dining venues, including Bob's Steak & Chop House; and a new infinity-edge pool featuring the largest pool deck in Northeast Florida, according to the resort. The resort's new welcome center showcases pool and ocean views through floor-to-ceiling windows. Golfers can enjoy 54 holes of Audubon International Certified Sanctuary championship golf.

Strauss is planning a sales meeting for a large pharmaceutical company at the Omni in October, and recently staged a similar meeting for another pharma company at the resort. "I do about 30 programs a year all over Florida, and I feel this property is just magnificent. I'm pitching it to so many of my customers right now because I just think it's a win-win for everybody," Strauss says. Nearby is the 446-room Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island (48,000 sf of function space). Strauss feels that the renovated Omni is "really going to give the Ritz a run for its money." And a little competition, after all, is good for corporate clients.

First impressions on attendees count, and "once you get to the Omni, it has this

gorgeous sense of arrival with a new building that's all about water: all you see is the infinity pool that drops down eight feet into another huge pool and then the ocean." The meeting space, sequestered in a separate conference center, also is impressive, with the Amelia Ballroom, Cumberland Ballroom, "and they're now building the Omni Ballroom, which faces a lawn area where you can do a teambuilding event," Strauss notes. "They've also added a new 5,000-sf restaurant where the golf shop is, Marsh View Bar & Grill, with a firepit. We're going to use that for an opening welcome reception to get people out on the golf course the first night, and they're going to be able to play glow-in-the-dark golf while they're having dinner." With eight restaurants onsite, planners don't have to transport attendees downtown for a dine-around, she points out. Yet another appealing special event locale is Walker's Landing, "which is a self-contained building that sits on the bay, and it's just this very peaceful, serene property. We're doing maybe two of our evening events there," she adds. According to Strauss, Amelia Island and Fernandina Beach is an "up and coming" area, and planners have at their disposal the Amelia Island CVB (www.ameliaisland.com), to assist them in bringing their group to "Florida's Favorite Island" and enjoy historic sites ranging from Fort San Carlos to the state's oldest continuously operating bar, the Palace Saloon.

Near Jacksonville in St. Augustine is a well-known desti-

nation for Florida-bound groups: The Renaissance World Golf Village Resort, Convention Center and Beach Club. The 301-room, AAA Four Diamond resort is adjacent to the World Golf Hall of Fame: The two facilities afford a total of 101,000 sf of function space. The resort's newest outdoor function space is La



"I cannot find a hotel the first quarter of '13 in the state right now to accommodate a national meeting."

Andrea Strauss, President
Classic Conferences, Hackensack, NJ

Terrazza, which accommodates groups of up to 2,000 guests and features advanced technology and power capability, comparable to that provided in indoor ballrooms. In addition, attendees can now enjoy privileges at the exclusive Serenata Beach Club on Ponte Vedra Beach, which offers a 12,000-sf oceanfront clubhouse. The Renaissance resort provides a complimentary shuttle to and from Serenata for individual guests (based on availability), as well as to and from downtown St. Augustine, America's oldest city. Founded in 1565, St. Augustine features the historic Castillo de San Marcos fort, the quaint St. George Street, Old



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Town Trolley Tour, St. Augustine History Museum, Spanish Quarter, The Oldest Wooden Schoolhouse, and many other points of interest.

Ponte Vedra Beach is also home to the famed Ponte Vedra Inn & Club, built in 1928 and joined by the Lodge & Club in

1989. The 250-room Inn & Club offers more than 30,000 sf of function space, while the 66-room Lodge & Club offers 13,000 sf. The AAA Five Diamond property's amenities include the largest spa in north Florida at 30,000 sf, 36 holes of golf, including links-style with ocean breezes, 15 tennis courts and four heated pools in a beachfront setting.

Daytona Beach

Daytona offers groups free-time options as diverse as the Richard Petty Driving Experience, Museum of Arts & Sciences and the five-star Rose Villa in Ormond Beach, housed in a home built in the late 1800s. While the newly refurbished Pier is surely the historical centerpiece of Daytona, the Ocean Center convention and entertainment complex is the focal point of its meetings industry.



The Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa in Destin has expanded its outdoor deck areas, which overlook the Gulf of Mexico.

The Ocean Center convention facility, just 400 feet from the Atlantic Ocean, offers 164,000 sf of exhibit space, 32,000 sf of meeting space and a 12,000-sf banquet hall. The hotels in the surrounding Ocean Walk Village include the Wyndham Ocean Walk

Resort, Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort and the Ocean Walk Shoppes and Ocean Center. In total, the Village offers groups 300,000 sf of meeting space and 1,200 guest rooms. This summer, the 212-room Shores Resort & Spa in Daytona Beach Shores began offering complimentary transfers for resort guests to and from the Ocean Center. The Shores Resort offers 20,000 sf of function space.

Destin

The Emerald Coast town of Destin certainly has its share of greens, with 1,080 holes of golf on renowned courses such as the Regatta Bay Golf & Country Club and the Plantation Golf Club. On the cultural side, planners will note institutions such as The Destin History & Fishing Museum, Fort Walton Beach's U.S. Air Force Armament Museum and Point Washington's Eden State Gardens & Mansion.

On the meetings front, Destin is home to Northwest Florida's largest full-service beachfront resort hotel, the 598-suite Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, offering more than 32,000 sf of indoor meeting space and 20,000 sf of beachfront deck space. Its recent \$6.5 million renovation has resulted in expanded deck areas overlooking the Gulf, a new beachside restaurant and bar, and 32,000 sf of remodeled meeting space.

Atlanta, GA-based Lane Company, a property management firm, recently held its first national conference — and first Florida meeting — at the Hilton Sandestin, bringing in 250 attendees. "We were very impressed with the level of customer service that they provided on the sales end, and then you know it's going to be great in person," remarked Ka'Ren Sarvis, CTD, Lane's director of marketing and training. "As a meeting planner you're always running in a million different directions and have a million things on your mind, and they had a gentleman who was assigned to me (as a convention services manager), and he was incredible. If I needed more Starbucks, I could say 'I

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wish I had a Starbucks,' and within 10 minutes it appeared in front of me. If somebody needed the temperature changed a little or extra water, if I needed extra markers at a table, any little detail that I needed, I didn't have to leave the conference." The resort also provided the group a private section of the beach for a teambuilding event that involved building sand castles. "It was just a huge hit, everybody loved it," Sarvis says.

She also relates another example of how the Hilton went "above and beyond" for the group, following an unfortunate incident on the charter bus ride back to Atlanta. "There was a mechanical issue with the bus, and it looked like the group may not be able to get back in a timely manner," Sarvis relates. "So I called the resort, and they said they could work out something with their shuttle service to pick up the group and bring them back to the resort. They were so willing to go the extra mile to help us out if we needed them to. We ended up getting everything worked out, but just knowing we had them as a back up (was helpful). I've had some great service in all my years as a planner, but never had anyone go that far."

Naples

Naples, on the state's southwest coast, bills itself as the "Golf Capital of the World," with the most golf holes per capita in the U.S. And home to the town's first course, built in the 1920s, is the 317-room Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club situated on the Gulf of Mexico, offering 34,000 sf of meeting space. And in



The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club is Southwest Florida's only beachfront resort with an on-property golf course.

fact it's the only beachfront resort in Southwest Florida with an onsite golf course. The 18-hole course was recently refurbished with new grass on all fairways. Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club, which also boasts a world-class spa and award-winning tennis center, completed a \$22 million renovation in 2010 that included guest rooms and the addition of a \$4 million pool complex. HB's on the Gulf, a great place to watch the spectacular sunsets over the ocean, is the city of Naples' only beachfront restaurant. Outdoor event areas include poolside and beachfront options.

Like many Florida towns, Naples is about more than golf, beach and R&R. Attendees can find at least 100 art galleries here, as well as opportunities to experience indigenous flora and fauna. For example, NGALA, a private wildlife preserve, has an opulent tented facility that planners can rent, while The Conservancy of Southwest Florida's Naples Nature Center, which is completing a major renovation in the fall, also is on hand.

Palm Beach County

While the Omni Amelia Island conducts an \$85 million re-imagining in Northeast Florida, PGA National Resort & Spa in Southeast Florida is aiming to finish an \$80 million revitalization in October, covering its 379 guest rooms, the new Fazio Course (formerly The Haig and one of five championship golf courses), Bar 91 and Palm Terrace. PGA National Resort, home of the PGA Tour's Honda Classic, is located in Palm Beach Gardens, convenient to Palm Beach International Airport. The AAA Four Diamond resort offers 40,000 sf of meeting space.

Larger groups interested in Palm Beach County may consider the legendary Boca Raton Resort & Club, a Waldorf Astoria Resort, which offers 1,047 guest rooms and 146,000 sf of meeting space,

along with the 12,000-sf Boca Country Club and an in-house event production company called Boca By Design. Attendees have no shortage of diversions here, from two 18-hole championship golf courses to The Forbes Four Star Spa Palazzo. While in Boca, groups can pay a visit to the Boca Raton Historical Society, Boca Museum of Art as well as Mizner Park, an upscale shopping and dining complex.

Miami

One of the most significant developments in Miami's meetings scene is Trump Hotel Collection's purchase of the iconic Doral Golf Resort & Spa this summer. Through the fall of 2013, Trump will be investing more than \$200 million in a property-wide renovation that covers the resort's 700 guest rooms, 86,000 sf of meeting space (including a 24,000-sf ballroom) and all four golf courses including the legendary Blue Monster course. The resort will remain open during the renovation. Other highlights on the Doral's nearly 800 acres include the McLean Golf School and the 50,000-sf Pritikin spa with 33 treatment rooms.

Meanwhile, the AAA Four Diamond Turnberry Isle Miami has joined Marriott's Autograph Collection, a portfolio of world-class, independent boutique and luxury hotels, which will enable groups to earn Marriott Rewards points. The 408-room resort offers a 40,000-sf conference center and a private beach club that can accommodate events with up to 500 at-



An event setup at the Magnolia Courtyard at Turnberry Isle Miami. The resort also offers a private beach club for group events.

tendees. Turnberry Isle has recently partnered with the elite Cañas Tennis to provide its guests with the opportunity to receive tennis instruction from players ranking in the top 10 for doubles and singles, as well as nationally ranked juniors. Other highlights include two 18-hole Raymond Floyd-redesigned championship golf courses, a three-story Spa & Fitness Center and acclaimed Chef Michael Mina's award-winning Bourbon Steak restaurant.

With elite resorts such as the Doral and Turnberry, attendees may feel no need to venture off-property, but planners can cer-

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tainly entice them with venues such as the new South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center, Coral Gables Museum and Miami Seaquarium. And Villa Vizcaya, a National Historic Landmark and public museum representing the Gilded Age of the 1910s, is available for offsite events that are truly one of a kind.

Fort Lauderdale

Like the rest of Florida's vacation spots, Fort Lauderdale has been experiencing a spike in visitation over the past year. According to the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau (GFLCVB), the city ended 2011 with the highest December hotel occupancy in the state, fueled in part by an 8 percent increase in international growth. Nicki E. Grossman, GFLCVB president noted that key growth areas include leisure, international, meetings and corporate groups, and film projects.

The Lauderdale Convention Collection is comprised of six hotels with a combined 2,700 guest rooms located within 1½ miles of the waterfront Broward County Convention Center. All of the hotels in the collection offer ocean or Intracoastal views and are near dining and entertainment venues. They include the Embassy Suites Fort Lauderdale, Harbor Beach Marriott Resort & Spa, Hilton Fort Lauderdale Marina, Hyatt Regency Pier Sixty-Six, Renaissance Fort Lauderdale Cruise Port Hotel and the Sheraton Fort Lauderdale Beach Hotel.

"I've had some great service in all my years as a planner, but never had anyone go that far."

Ka'Ren Sarvis, CTD
Director of Marketing & Training
Lane Company, Atlanta, GA

The Broward County Convention Center recently announced that it has been awarded Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) for Existing Buildings: Operations & Maintenance Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. The LEED certification process, which



The exclusive Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo offers a dozen dining options with tropical and waterfront views.



Meeting attendees who stay at Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo can indulge in a wide variety of water sports including kayaking, snorkeling, scuba diving and deep-sea fishing.

began in 2008, resulted in the 600,000-sf facility being converted into an energy-efficient and environmentally sound, carbon-neutral building. And speaking of sustainability, the oceanfront Hilton Fort Lauderdale Beach Resort, the first hotel in Fort Lauderdale Beach to be awarded a Florida Green Lodging designation, is now installing wind turbines on the roof of the 25-story all-suite resort that will function as an alternative energy source for the property.

Key Largo

Just south of Miami is Key Largo, the northernmost of the Florida Keys island chain, which terminates in Key West, the southernmost point in the U.S. Key Largo's claim to fame is the popular underwater John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, the "Diving Capital of the World," which attracts scuba enthusiasts year-round to its Bahamas-blue, crystal-clear water. Meeting attendees can partake of diving or snorkeling activity from a home base such as the 280-room Ocean Reef Club, situated on 2,500 tropical acres at the northern end of the island. Here, attendees will really feel like they have stumbled upon a Caribbean island-style paradise. The exclusive and oh-so-private Ocean Reef Club is a self-contained, member-owned property, which has its own airstrip, 175-slip marina for flats and deep-sea fishing charters, shopping village, 12 dining options with tropical and seaside views, two 18-hole golf courses, tennis courts and more. The club houses 30,000 sf of function space, including a 7,500-sf ballroom. Groups can hold a dinner on a chartered yacht, participate in a cooking school teambuilding program or embark on an eco-tour. There's an extensive menu of organized group activities from beach olympics and cardboard boat regattas to hermit crab races and golf cart scavenger hunts. Groups can choose casual or gourmet dining, and the resort's mobile kitchen can cater events on the beach.

Key Largo is just minutes by car from mainland Florida and thus convenient for groups. Yet in general, Florida's cities boast convenient access, with four major international airports in Miami, Fort-Lauderdale-Hollywood, Orlando and Tampa, respectively, and secondary airports in Southwest Florida, Palm Beach and Jacksonville. Combine that with relative affordability, top-tier resorts and Floridian recreation, and groups can have their key lime pie, and eat it, too.

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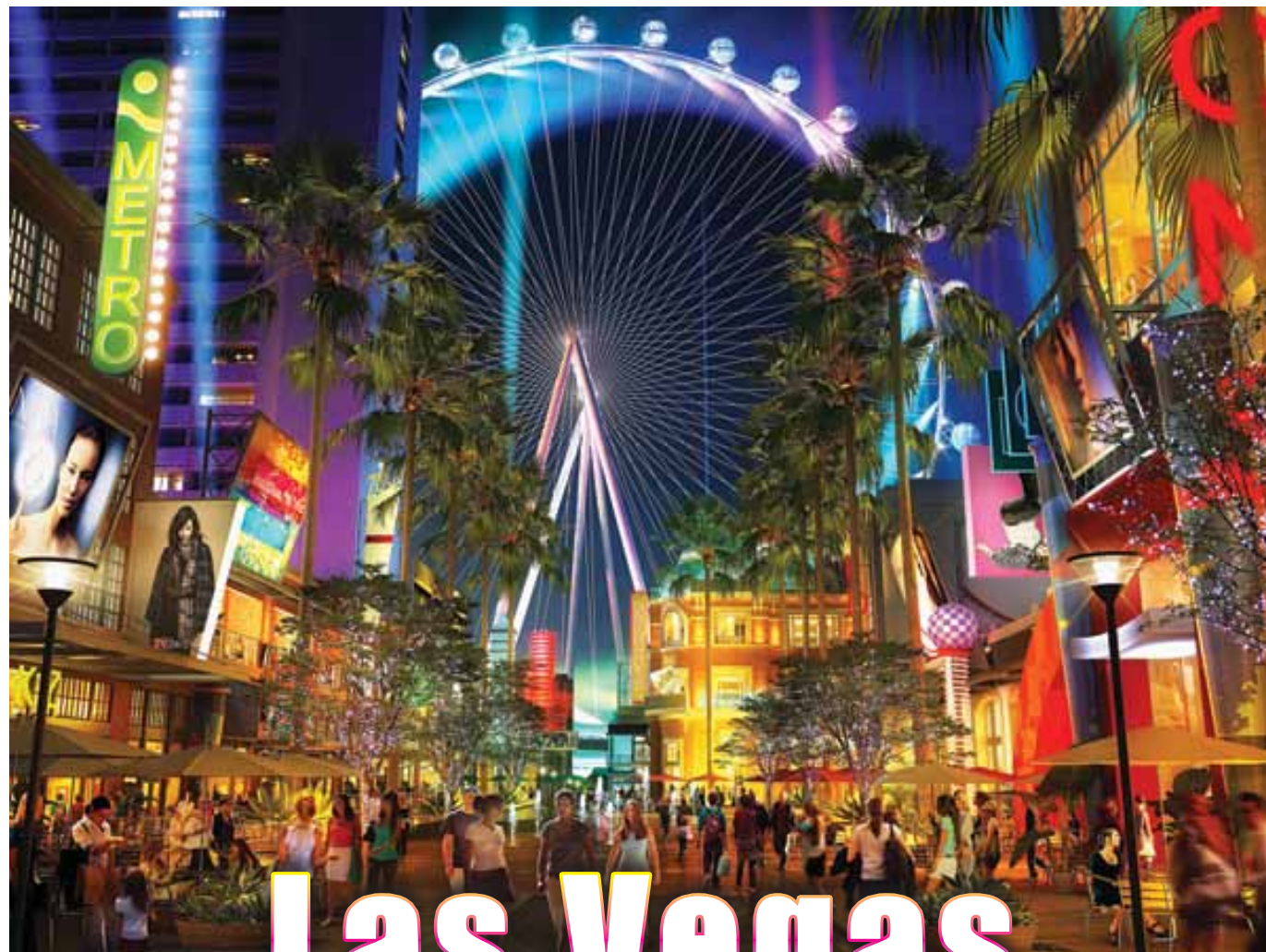
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Las Vegas never sleeps nor rests on its laurels as “The Entertainment Capital of the World.” Rebounding from the recession and perception issues surrounding corporate meetings, Las Vegas relentlessly continues to renovate, re-invent and refresh so that each visit to Las Vegas is a new and exciting experience. Entertainment news dominates Las Vegas headlines, from Caesars Entertainment’s Linq (above), a 200,000-sf retail, dining, entertainment and hospitality district coming in 2013, to new Blue Man Group shows at the Monte Carlo Resort & Casino in October to the recent announcement that Tim McGraw and Faith Hill will appear at The Venetian in “Soul2Soul,” the biggest musical event in its history.

Meanwhile, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) continues to aggressively market the destination to the world after boosting efforts about three years ago to increase ap-

By Derek

Reveron
pearances at trade shows in the United States and abroad. Their efforts are reaping grand results. This year, Las Vegas is expected to set a new record of 40 million visitors, thanks partly to a resurgence in meetings and conventions, according to the LVCVA. In 2011, the number of conventions and meetings in Las Vegas jumped 5.7 percent while convention attendance increased 8.8 percent.

The surge helped Las Vegas reach the pinnacle for the 18th consecutive year as the city was named the No. 1 North American trade show destination in 2011 by the *Trade Show News Network*. Last year, Las Vegas hosted 55 of North America’s largest trade shows. Hotel pricing power has risen along with convention and meeting statistics. The city’s average daily room rate increased 10.7 percent in 2011.

Groups flock to Las Vegas partly because of its enormous

Photo courtesy of Caesars Entertainment

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amount of meeting space, led by the city's three convention centers: The Las Vegas Convention Center, Mandalay Bay Convention Center and the Sands Expo & Convention Center offer a combined total of nearly 5 million sf of meeting, exhibit and convention space. A fourth convention center is under consideration. According to news reports, developers are seeking investors to build the 1-million-sf AeroQuestUSA International Trade and Conference Center on 200 acres west of the airport.

The Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC), generally acknowledged as one of the best and largest, continues to be a valuable resource for large and small groups. The LVCC operates the LVCC, which recently implemented a digital signage network and expanded its free Wi-Fi service to all public areas. The LVCC also installed free Wi-Fi in all of the center's public areas, including meeting rooms, the grand concourse, lobbies and hallways.

Meanwhile, the LVCC's nearly \$900 million expansion plan, put on hold during the recession, will soon undergo a review, according to Jeremy Handel, LVCVA senior manager, public affairs. In other news, McCarran International Airport opened the domestic gates of its new \$2.4 billion, 14-gate terminal, the largest public works project in Nevada's history.

Reno and Lake Tahoe

Las Vegas is, by far, Nevada's most well-known destination.



"What Las Vegas has done so well is become an international destination that offers so many appealing reasons to come here, so high attendance is that much easier to achieve."

Megyn Wolff, CEO
Vegas Events Inc., Las Vegas, NV

However, Reno and Lake Tahoe are very popular when it comes to attracting corporate and incentive groups. The two destinations offer their share of world-class resorts, more than 50 golf courses and a range of outdoor winter activities that groups can't find in the city of Las Vegas.

Reno and Lake Tahoe also offer value. Room rates and amenities are up to 30 percent lower than those in competing destinations, according to the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority. Reno also offers convenient air access. The Reno-Tahoe International Airport offers non-stop or one-stop flights to almost all major U.S. cities. In 2011, the airport was named the second most efficient airport in the U.S. and Canada by the Air Transport Research Society.

Reno-Tahoe also offers its share of meeting space. The Reno-Sparks Convention Center offers more than 500,000 sf of flexible exhibit and meeting space. And, the 7,000-seat Reno Events Center is next door to the 28,000-sf Reno Ballroom.

Las Vegas Has It All

A key to Las Vegas' success is its ability to change and evolve so that it continually provides a memorable overall experience as groups return year after year. There is always something new and exciting to see, hear or do. "What was a regional destination 20 years ago is now an international hotspot that offers nearly everything for any kind of group, large or small," says Megyn Wolff, CEO of Vegas Events, a Las Vegas-based destination management company (DMC) that handles meetings and incentives for corporate groups. "As a result, the number of reasons why groups like Las Vegas continues to grow. What Las Vegas has done so well is become an international destination that offers so many appealing reasons to come here, so high attendance is that much easier to achieve. It's not just



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Lee Anne Short
Chief Operations Officer
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Ms. Carla Alarcon
Director of Marketing
Open Systems, Inc.

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Photo courtesy of Vegas Events Inc.

The Keep Memory Alive Event Center is a truly unique venue for up to 700 guests designed by Frank Gehry, which includes 199 windows in an undulating stainless steel canopy.

about gaming and entertainment. It's a destination for cuisine. There are famous chefs here. It's a nightlife destination with some of the most gorgeous nightclubs. It's a shopping, resort and spa destination. It's a golf destination. Other destinations don't have all of the elements that Las Vegas has," adds Wolff.

Despite recent rate hikes, Las Vegas is still a value destination. "This is the smartest place to have a meeting. Hotels keep adding more amenities and services, and the rates are tough for other destinations to beat," says Wolff. "That's important because companies are being more careful and financially responsible with their money. They are looking for alternative elements to their program that are more fiscally responsible and yet still productive and successful. We have worked creatively with clients to help them trim their conference offerings in order to meet their budgets rather than canceling events altogether. Holding a corporate or incentive meeting in Las Vegas just makes good business sense. In business continuously since 1997, we are pleased to assist our clients to achieve their event goals, and it brings us a great amount of satisfaction to be a part of their success," she adds.

The Best of Both Worlds

Marilu McQuilkin, director of meetings and events for Cherokee Automotive Group, a Cary, NC-based auto industry media company, frequently meets in Las Vegas partly because of the value it offers. The company attracted more than 1,000 auto industry executives, salespeople and dealers to its 2011 Used Car Week Conference at the Red Rock Casino, Resort & Spa, located about 10 miles from The Strip. The 800-room AAA Four Diamond property offers more than 94,000 sf of meeting space and four ballrooms ranging from 5,000 sf

to 20,000 sf. The group enjoyed activities at the 72-lane bowling center, the 25,000-sf spa and nine restaurants, including T-bones Chophouse and Lounge, an upscale steak house.

Red Rock also hosted the Used Car Week Conferences in 2007 and 2009, and recently inked a two-year deal to host the event in 2014 and 2016. McQuilkin explains, "Because we signed a two-year contract, they were able to come down in our room rate a little bit. We are guaranteed during the time we are there to have the lowest rate for our attendees. We get some staff rooms at half off the contracted rate and get a discount on using the hotel's in-house AV service."

Cherokee Automotive Group also chose Red Rock because of its location, which provides less temptation for attendees to skip meetings, educational sessions and breakouts. "We wanted to be in Las Vegas, but not on The Strip," says McQuilkin. "Our attendees appreciate that because so many auto industry events are held on The Strip. The Red Rock has a shuttle service that goes to The Strip, so we have the best of both worlds without much attrition in our session attendance."

The Red Rock's layout also played a role in McQuilkin's decision. "At a lot of hotels on The Strip, attendees have to walk through the casino to get to the conference space, and you lose attendees to gaming. With Red Rock, having the conference space, meeting rooms, breakout rooms and ballrooms on one level, and the casinos on a different level, attendees don't have to pass the casino to get to meeting space. And because all of the meeting space is on one level, you don't end up spending more money on signage for directions, because you always want attendees to have an easy time finding their space," says McQuilkin.

The ability of properties to support meeting staff plays a key role in obtaining return business from planners, and that's an area in which the Red Rock gets high marks, according to McQuilkin.



Photo courtesy of Red Rock Casino, Resort & Spa

Cherokee Automotive Group (inset) held its 2011 Used Car Week Conference at the Red Rock Casino, Resort & Spa because of the great value and its location off The Strip.

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“There’s a limit to how many staffers we can bring,” she says. “Putting on meetings for that many people over an entire week, we really need the hotel staff to be an extension of our staff and rely on them to take care of our needs even with other large groups in the hotel at the same time. They did



Photo courtesy of RE/MAX

More than 5,000 people attended the 2012 RE/MAX R4 in Las Vegas. Golf is just one of the many recreational and entertainment activities that Las Vegas offers for meetings and events.

that. I’ve been at properties that don’t do it, and the experience is completely different,” she says.

Powerful Attendance-Builder

Las Vegas is a favorite destination for many reasons, says Pam Newman-Harris, vice president of RE/MAX Event Management. RE/MAX, a Denver-based international real estate franchise company, held its annual RE/MAX R4 convention and meetings for executives, managers and brokers in Las Vegas in 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2012. The RE/MAX R4 also is set to also return to Las Vegas in 2013 and 2014. The company held R4 at the Mandalay Bay Hotel & Casino in 2011 and 2012, and will return in 2014. More than 5,000 people attended the 2012 R4, says Newman-Harris.

Why does RE/MAX repeatedly return to Las Vegas? “Our attendance is always higher when we meet in Las Vegas. We have people in more than 80 countries and this year, people from more than 56 countries attended. That’s because there is such a variety of things to do. It’s also because the airlift is very convenient, and the marketing that Las Vegas does outside of North America is so powerful that it makes people want to go. Las Vegas also is more cost-effective than other destinations. Instead of paying for food and beverage in a hotel banquet space, you can have people do their own thing in the evenings, which they want to do anyway,” adds Newman-Harris.

Downtown Booming

Downtown Las Vegas is getting a boost with several new

projects and attractions. The 650-room Downtown Grand Casino & Hotel is scheduled to open in 2013. Also, The Golden Gate Hotel & Casino is adding a five-story tower scheduled to be completed this year. Also downtown, the Las Vegas Mob Museum opened in February. The museum features a variety of interactive exhibits showcasing the history of the mob, particularly gangsters who operated in Las Vegas. Special packages and rates are available for groups of up to 500 for a dinner or reception.

The Smith Center for the Performing Arts is now open downtown. The world-class facility offers three performance venues — Reynolds Hall, Cabaret Jazz and Troesh Theater, each of which is available for group rentals.

Guns & Ammo Garage is a modern indoor shooting range for high-powered handguns, machine guns and rifles. There are even “Tommy Guns,” the Thompson submachine guns made famous by the mob in the 1920s and 1930s. The venue offers meeting space that is available for corporate groups.

New and Noteworthy

The MGM Grand Hotel & Casino is remodeling the 3,570 guest rooms and 642 suites in its main tower. The AAA Four Diamond resort is opening blocks of rooms as they are finished, and the entire project is expected to be completed soon. The remodeling includes sustainability technology such as LED lighting; solar shades; new thermostats; upgraded showers and faucets; and biodegradable bath amenities. The MGM is the first property in Las Vegas to showcase an interactive wall in the Grand Lobby. The wall is composed of three 16-screen sections measuring 16-by-9 feet that stream Twitter feeds from guests using the @MGMVideoWall handle. The 5,044-room MGM Grand provides 600,000 sf of meeting space, including the 92,000-sf Marquee Ballroom.



“Our attendance is always higher when we meet in Las Vegas. That’s because there is such a variety of things to do. Las Vegas also is more cost-effective than other destinations.”

**Pam Newman-Harris, Vice President
RE/MAX Event Management, RE/MAX, Denver, CO**

Several projects have been underway in and around Caesars Palace Las Vegas. In January, the resort increased its number of guest rooms to 3,960 with the opening of the 688-room Octavius Tower. In addition, the 180-room Nobu Hotel is debuting late 2012 at Caesars Palace with the 11,200-sf Nobu restaurant and lounge. Across from the hotel, Caesars Entertainment is developing The Linq, a 200,000-sf retail, dining, entertainment and hospitality district, which will debut in 2013. The Linq will feature the Las Vegas High Roller,



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Marilu McQuilkin, Director of Meetings and Events
Cherokee Automotive Group, Cary, NC

one of the world’s tallest observation wheels, and 107 feet taller than the London Eye. The wheel will provide 28 cabins designed as transparent spheres, each of which will accommodate up to 40 people. It will take 30 minutes to make one revolution on the wheel.

SkyVue, the third largest observation wheel in the world, is scheduled to open across the street from the Mandalay Bay Hotel & Casino in July 2013.

Delano Las Vegas, a 1,100 all-suite hotel, will open in 2013 at Mandalay Bay, replacing THEhotel. The property, a partnership between MGM Resorts International and Morgans Hotel Group, will feature the “Delano lifestyle” of luxury and service at the Delano South Beach in Florida.

The M Resort Spa Casino continues to expand its meeting and event space. The resort has added 25,000 sf of meeting space called the M Pavilion, 7,200-sf of special event space known as LUX, and the Villagio Del Sole outdoor events plaza, which features 100,000 sf of event space and a stage. The 390-room resort now offers a total of more than 92,000 sf of meeting space.

One of the largest LEED-certified meetings complexes in the world is comprised of the Venetian | Palazzo and Sands Expo and Convention Center. The 3,000-suite Palazzo is a AAA Five Diamond property and is LEED Silver-certified. The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino offers 4,000 suites and is the largest AAA Five Diamond property in the U.S. and is LEED-EB Gold-certified. Both resorts are adjacent to the Sands Expo and Convention Center.

Looking to make it easier for guests to navigate the entire complex, the Venetian | Palazzo recently launched a new mobile app — VP Pocket Concierge. Users can get directions to

any location within the complex by using an interactive map and searching a list of resort landmarks.

The Tropicana Las Vegas has completed a \$180 million renovation. The project includes the resort’s 1,375 guest rooms, casino and conference center, and increases total flexible meeting space to more than 100,000 sf. The conference center offers a 25,000-sf Grand Ballroom divisible into nine breakout rooms; a pillarless 25,000-sf exhibit hall and a business center.

Planners seeking ample meeting space, stylish guest rooms and a unique mix of on-property activities need look no further than the South Point Hotel & Spa. The property hosts meetings ranging in size from 10 to more than 4,500 attendees. Groups can enjoy a 16-screen movie theater, a 64-lane bowling center and nine dining choices, including Michael’s Gourmet Room, frequently dubbed by experts as one of Las Vegas’ top restaurants.

Groups seeking a facility with cutting-edge technology can consider the MGM Resorts International’s properties — Aria Resort & Casino, MGM Grand Hotel & Casino, Bellagio, Mandalay Bay, Monte Carlo, The Mirage, Luxor, New York-New York, Circus Circus and Excalibur. The properties recently started offering free smartphone apps that allow meeting planners to send event information such as schedules, news and registration to attendees. Another technological service offered by all MGM Resorts International properties allows guests to use Passkey’s GroupMAX booking system to make reservations via any Internet-connected device. Planners also can access reservation data through the system.

At Aria Resort & Casino, planners can use control panels or wireless touch panels to operate lighting, music, DirectTV and cable TV in meeting rooms. The AAA Five Diamond resort also offers videoconferencing, HD projection screens and plasma TVs, fiber optic cable and a state-of-the-art sound system. Aria is located at CityCenter and offers 4,004 guest rooms and 300,000 sf of meeting space.

Groups looking for an ideal business meeting property can consider the Vdara Hotel & Spa, located at CityCenter. The property specializes in groups ranging from 10 to 300 people and offers 10,000 sf of ground-level conference space.

Station Casinos operates 16 properties in Southern



Performers spring up from the center of the pool on a tree-like platform at Le Rêve, the long-running show at Wynn Las Vegas.

Photo by Tomasz Rossa



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Nevada, including the Red Rock Casino, Resort & Spa and the Green Valley Ranch, Resort, Casino & Spa, a boutique luxury AAA Four Diamond Resort. The Mediterranean-style Green Valley Ranch offers 500 rooms and 79,000 sf of meeting and event space, including four ballrooms. The 2,000-seat Grand Events Center features musical acts, and the eight-acre Backyard Pool area has four locations that can accommodate up to 4,500 people for events. There also is a 10-screen movie theater, 30,000-sf spa and several full-service restaurants, including Hank's, a top southern Nevada steak house.

In Reno, the Grand Sierra Resort & Casino is undergoing a \$25 million renovation that includes the convention center, spa and health club. The project also includes the Cantina, a new Mexican restaurant and WET, a new country-western dance hall. The 1,900-room resort features 200,000 sf of meeting space and a 1,800-seat Grand Theatre. Chef Charlie Palmer offers three restaurants — Charlie Palmer Steak, Briscola and Fin Fish. Groups also can enjoy a 50-lane bowling center.



Photo by Erik Kabicki/REINA

"We are creating a show that will be completely different from what we've done before — and might ever do again," said Tim McGraw and Faith Hill at a press conference announcing their Soul2Soul shows starting in December at The Venetian.

Close to the Action

Announced as the biggest musical event in its history, The Venetian in August started selling tickets for Soul2Soul, a show starring Tim McGraw and Faith Hill in the intimate Venetian Theater. The concerts will include many of the No. 1 hits that have made them, both in their own right, two of the most significant entertainers of our generation. Soul2Soul opens on December 7 and covers 10 weekends through April 2013.

"We are creating a show that will be completely different from what we've done before — and might ever do again," said McGraw and Hill at a press conference. "In arenas and stadiums,

you're always faced with the challenge of finding ways to make people feel closer to the action, no matter where they might be sitting. Now everyone will be close, so it opens up all kinds of creative possibilities, and we're looking forward to exploring those so that we can really give our fans something truly special."

"It's not every day that Las Vegas welcomes such stellar star power to the Strip," said John Caparella, president and chief operating officer of The Venetian, The Palazzo and Sands Expo. "Tim McGraw and Faith Hill are country music's first couple, and we are proud to have such extraordinary talent. When they hit our stage in December it will surely be the hottest ticket in town."

In other "close-to-the action" entertainment news, Blue Man Group, the wildly popular music and technology show, debuts a new production at the Monte Carlo Resort & Casino in October. The blue-hued men combine everything from theatrical percussion and robots to comedy, puppets and multimedia.

Le Rêve, French for "the dream," is quite a unique experience as it is performed in a circular theater with a pool in the center. Guests are so close to the action, they are splashed as the athletic performers ascend from the water or drop down from the ceiling. Special effects, lighting and live music complement the various dance sequences. The show is presented Friday through Tuesday at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. at Wynn Las Vegas. Le Rêve The Dream offers Splash Zone, Premium, Dream and VIP seating for every performance, as well as packages for groups.

With several of the world's most glamorous properties, more than 150,000 hotel rooms, thousands of square feet of meeting space and an endless variety of entertainment options, Las Vegas will continue to welcome even more meetings of all types and sizes from around the globe, all the while enhancing its status as one of the world's premier meetings destinations.

C&IT



Photo ©Paul Kohnik

Opening at Monte Carlo Resort & Casino in October, Blue Man Group is combination of science, comedy, music and vibrant visual effects, providing audiences with a fully immersive experience.



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The National Conference Center, Leesburg, VA, has named **Jordan A. Waddell** as sales account executive responsible for small meetings. Prior to joining NCC, she was an English language teacher in Qingdao, China and a resident hall director at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

Kiawah Island Golf Resort, Kiawah Island, SC, has appointed **Jessica Morse** to its group sales team, mid-Atlantic

market. She was metro market sales manager for Starwood Hotels and Resorts in Atlanta.

Hilton Orlando, Orlando, FL, has named **Mona Ingram** as director of sales and marketing. She most recently was vice president of Colorado-based Sceptre Hospitality Resources.

L'Auberge Del Mar, Del Mar, CA, has named **Sandra Rankin** as national sales manager responsible for the Orange

County, CA, and Southeast U.S. markets. She was senior sales manager for the Hilton San Diego Bayfront, Hilton La Jolla Torrey Pines and DoubleTree by Hilton San Diego Mission Valley.

The Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa, The Pueblo of Santa Ana, NM, has named **Troy Wood** as director of sales and marketing. He was part of the leadership team for the pre-opening and opening at the Grand Hyatt and Hyatt Regency San Antonio. **C&IT**

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