

INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES



The New Face of Incentives

The Evolution Continues

Page 12

F&B Strategies Page 18

Think 'New' Page 22

Get Smart Page 28



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INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

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Photo courtesy of Hyatt Regency New Orleans

The Hyatt Regency New Orleans recently unveiled a dramatic \$275 million top-to-bottom renovation.

FEATURES

12 The New Face of Incentives

The Evolution Continues
By Mike Bassett

18 F&B Strategies

How to Play the Game and Come Out Ahead
By Derek Reveron



Photo courtesy of Corporate Meetings Unlimited

22 Think 'New'

It's a New Year. Here's a New Look at New & Renewed Hotels & Resorts
By Harvey Chipkin

28 Get Smart

QR Codes and Other Cool Tools = Smarter Planners
By Derek Reveron



DEPARTMENTS

4 PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE

6 INDUSTRY NEWS

6 EVENTS

7 VALUE LINE

8 PERSONAL BRANDING

4 Things Every Meeting Planner Needs to Know
By Scott Ginsberg

10 ENTERTAINMENT

10 Tips for Acquiring Top Talent
By Ken Deans

32 CORPORATE LADDER

34 READER SERVICES

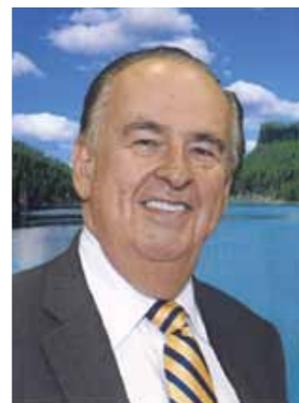
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Publisher's Message

The Evolution of Incentives

Read one research study today, a different white paper tomorrow, and you end up in the same place: Confused as to which way incentive programs are heading. Many insurance and financial company meeting and event planners say the fallout from the troubled economy is keeping them at home, and others say they are off and running to luxurious retreats all over the globe — perception be darned. Still, there is one thing most companies painfully discovered during the recession: Standing still is not a good



thing. The absence of face-to-face meetings and meaningful incentive programs cost them both key people and business to their competitors — savvy competitors that continued to incentivize their top-performers.

Chuck Lane, director of incentive travel and public relations at Humana in Green Bay, WI, says in "The New Face of Incentives," our cover story this month, "Incentive travel, after all, is a business decision, and our competitors have largely decided to also become competitive in this endeavor." Humana will hold its incentive in Hawaii next year because, as Lane reminds,

"The quality of the destinations is definitely a motivator to sell our products."

Jeff Broudy, executive vice president and COO of Philadelphia-based United Incentives Inc., is upbeat about the future of incentives. "There is a lot of activity going on surrounding incentives — particularly a lot more interest among previous participants and new adopters," he says. Broudy says these companies are looking for ways of increasing market share in a flat economy. "It's a competitive reaction," says Broudy. "They're doing it because they're trying to hold on to their sales force or distribution channel, or they are doing it to capture additional market share." Broudy suggests that those companies that maintained their incentive programs have been able to increase their business. "And that attracted attention," he says.

The nature and format of the incentive has a few new twists as well. For example, many programs, especially those that cater to a younger audience, now include meetings and networking opportunities. What's more, says Geraldine Gatehouse, owner of Milestones!, the addition of a corporate social responsibility component gives attendees both a wow experience and the opportunity to "help people change lives at the same time."

Harvey Grotsky

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The St. Regis Atlanta
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JUNE 19–21, 2012 THE AMERICAS MEETINGS & EVENTS EXHIBITION

Baltimore Convention Center
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Contact: 203-840-5975
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JUNE 20–22, 2012 FICP EDUCATION FORUM

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Industry News

Rosen Named 2011 Central Floridian of the Year

ORLANDO, FL — The editorial board of the Orlando Sentinel named Harris Rosen, President & COO of Rosen Hotels & Resorts, the 2011 Central Floridian of the Year, citing the hotelier's "far-reaching philanthropy and work ethic." Rosen's philanthropic endeavors include his earthquake recovery and rebuilding efforts in Haiti; charitable contributions to the University of Central Florida; Rosen's Perfect Pizza, a program designed to bring more healthful foods to public schools and also fund scholarships and educational grants; and Tangelo Park Project, a program Rosen started in 1993, that offers free preschool as well as full college and vocational school scholarships to disadvantaged youth in the Tangelo Park neighborhood. To date, more than 200 students have received a college education from the program.



Rosen truly enjoys giving. "The crazy thing is that giving is so joyful. The return on that investment, if you can put it in business terms, is so unbelievable, I often wonder why people who can don't," says Rosen. "I suspect they don't realize how much joy and gratitude they would receive from giving." Rosen's goal is "to see a Tangelo Park kind of program in every disadvantaged neighborhood in the United States." The hotelier hopes to grow the program via the private sector.

Rosen owns and operates the largest independent hotel chain in Florida with 6,300 rooms or approximately six percent of the total room inventory in Central Florida, which includes seven properties in the Orlando area: three convention hotels within one mile of the Orange County Convention Center — Rosen Plaza, Rosen Centre and Rosen Shingle Creek— and four leisure hotels — Rosen Inn at Pointe Orlando, Rosen Inn closest to Universal, Quality Inn International and the Clarion Inn Lake Buena Vista. www.rosenhoteles.com

Hotel del Coronado Renovates Guest Rooms

CORONADO ISLAND, CA — The historic Hotel del Coronado, a National Historic Landmark located on 28 oceanfront acres, recently unveiled an \$8 million renovation of its 368 guest rooms and suites in the original 124-year-old Victorian building. Featuring sleek new contemporary furnishings, crisp white linens with cream and gray accents, guest rooms at the California icon have been modernized while retaining classic elegance and period style. The guest rooms also feature 42-inch flat-screen televisions, upholstered headboards and executive desks with high-speed Internet access. Many of the guest rooms include separate seating areas with views of the Pacific Ocean, Glorietta Bay and picturesque Coronado Island. The renovation is slated for completion in March. www.hoteldel.com

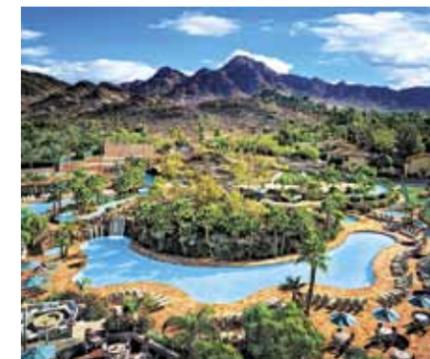


New guest room at Hotel del Coronado.

Iberostar Cancun Reopens

CANCUN, MEXICO — The Iberostar Group acquired and rebranded the former Hilton Cancun as the Iberostar Cancun. Overlooking the Caribbean, the 426-room hotel features several restaurants and lounges, an 18-hole golf course, seven swimming pools, spa and fitness center. The hotel has a 49,000-sf convention center and 60,000 sf of outdoor event space. The Iberostar Group's portfolio includes more than 100 Iberostar Hotels & Resorts, including 18 properties in Mexico and the Caribbean. The brand is heavily represented in Spain as well as in the rest of Western Europe, Eastern Europe and North Africa. www.iberostar.com

Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Debuts Updated Spaces



Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort.

PHOENIX, AZ — Taking inspiration from its desert mountain location in Phoenix, the Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Resort accented the contemporary new design of its lobby and its Palacio event venue with the rich desert tones of its natural surroundings. With 6,362 sf and multiple levels, the Palacio event space is a flexible option for hosting meetings and events. The resort features more than 48,000 sf of flexible function space including three ballrooms and 46 conference rooms. The resort features all-suite accommodations, pools, the Tocaloma Spa, shopping options and unique dining destinations. www.pointehiltonsquawpeak.com

Meeting Value Line



DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld, Orlando, FL. Groups with 10 or more guest rooms are offered rates starting at \$89 on the following 2012 Group Value Dates: April 26–30; May 25–29; June 4–10; July 9–15; August 1–31; September 16–30; October 8–15; November 17–30; December 17–23. Additional group special features include comp guest room wireless Internet; comp meeting space; comp fitness center access; ticket specials at the hotel's Universal Orlando Resort Ticket Center. Email groups@doubletreeorlandoseaworld.com

■ **Westward Look Resort, Tucson, AZ.** Meeting planners are offered winter group value rates starting at \$129/night during select dates in February and March 2012, plus: 10 percent off AV pricing; 50 percent off the resort fee; 3 percent rebate to the master account. For more information, call group sales at 520-917-2458 and ask for the Winter Centennial Meeting Special. www.westwardlook.com

■ **Renaissance Chicago O'Hare Suites Hotel, Chicago, IL.** Meetings booked by March 15, 2012 for any value date in 2012 receive: rebate of 4 percent on revenues of \$10,000–\$50,000; rebate of 6 percent on revenues of \$50,000 and above. Maximum rebate of \$25,000. Added bonus, pick any two: 60 percent attrition; free Internet in guest rooms; comp welcome reception in lobby during check-in; 20 percent discount on in-house AV. View group value dates at www.renaissanceoharemeetings.com.

■ **Sheraton Inner Harbor Hotel, Baltimore, MD.** Meetings booked by March 2012 receive choice of: one welcome reception or 2 percent off master-billed room revenue or 3/25 comp room upgrades. Plus, receive from one to five room-block incentive packages depending on number of rooms booked: two-night weekend stay, parking, two Orioles tickets and breakfast for two on one day. 410-347-1843, www.sheratoninnerharbor.com

■ **Turnberry Isle Miami, Miami, FL.** The Perfect Meetings offer allows planners to choose up to four options: complimentary one-hour reception; site inspection package; 1/40 comp room; no attrition; one free night for each attendee on a return stay; 1/50 comp suite upgrade; 10 percent off AV; and comp high-speed Internet in meeting room. Valid for arrival June 1 through September 30, 2012. Call Ben Baez, director of group sales, at 305-933-6501, bbaez@turnberryislemiami.com.

Personal Branding

By Scott Ginsberg



4 Things Every Meeting Planner Needs to Know

Branding isn't a nicety — it's a necessity.

In the world of event planning, who you are is the greatest indicator of how much you earn. Let's explore a few key ideas to help take your personal brand to the next level:

1. Knowledge

The tendency to hoard knowledge is a seductive one. It makes us harder to replace, enables greater leverage, increases promotability and gives us a competitive advantage. But a lot of the time, in those moments when we operate from a scarcity mentality, we act selfishly with our knowledge. We avoid telling people what we know for fear of losing power. And then everybody loses.

Knowledge might be power, but sharing that knowledge with others is priceless.

Like pushing a rock up the hill with one eye looking over our shoulder, it's not especially productive, it doesn't contribute to the greater good and it rarely proves to be a worthwhile investment of time and effort. But thanks to the connective beauty of the Web — via blogs, social media, discussion boards, forums and other digital platforms — we've found a way to reverse the trajectory. With the click of button, we send the snowball down the hill, hoping it

will grow a little bit more with each revolution, growing a little bit stronger with each person's individual contribution.

Knowledge might be power, but sharing that knowledge with others is priceless. *Are you sharing yours?*

2. Reassurance

When privacy is at stake, reassurance is priceless. I once facilitated a workshop at a document destruction company. Their specialty was paper shredding and hardware demolition, mainly for large financial institutions. Stockbroking firms paid them big bucks to destroy old client records, annual reports and other sensitive materials.

Naturally, prospective clients were skeptical. Outside of the standard disclosure agreements, and outside of whatever trust was established between the firm and the destruction company, there was really no way to guarantee that their information could be fully protected.

So I asked the president how he handled the issue of client privacy. And he said that most of the players in his industry struggled with it to the point that it became a barrier to growth. "But at our company, it's easy," he said, "Most of my employees can't read." Wait. What? That's right. The majority of his warehouse staff was blind, mentally retarded or cognitively impaired. They didn't steal the information because they couldn't read it. That's reassurance. And don't forget, this document destruction company staffed dozens of permanent and temporary workers each year, most of whom could never get a job anywhere else because of their pre-existing conditions. That's reassurance too. *What do you do to deliver it?*

3. Conversations

Our priorities are way out of whack. The assumption is that we need to make something better, sell something cheaper or ship something faster. No, what we need is to have smarter conversations.

We might change the interaction model by being unreasonably accessible where the rest of the world is hard to reach. *That's a smarter conversation.*

We might build our listening platform, by turning social media into a hearing aid while the rest of the world uses it as a sales tool. *That's a smarter conversation.*

We might position ourselves as teachers who solve expensive problems while the rest of the world is selfish with their knowledge. *That's a smarter conversation.*

We might create acts that make emotional connections while the rest of the world is bothering and interrupting people with advertisements. *That's a smarter conversation.*

The point being, customers already have everything they need. Except us. In the flesh. Ready to listen to them. *Are you selling that?*

4. Evolve

It's a hard process, letting go. Especially when the thing we're saying goodbye to is intangible. But as professional meeting planners, businesspeople and entrepreneurs, we have a responsibility to burn ourselves completely: To throw away what we were, what we've done — and where it's taken us — in exchange for the opportunity to grow into something better.

From that place, it's easier to believe in possibilities we never would have allowed before.

People don't just buy the meetings you plan — they buy the person you are, the story you tell and the brand you stand for.

Consider Bob Dylan. He easily could have sung protests songs forever and made a great living. But instead, he let that wear itself out and moved on. Then he went electric. Then he went country. Then he went religious. Then he went Traveling Wilburys. Then he went visual artist. Then he went author. And on and on and on. He let go of who he was so he could become who he needed to be.

Without participating in that mutation, it's hard for us to raise our own bar and almost impossible for us to progress into the next phase of our brand's evolution. *How will you keep your work from growing stale and derivative?*

Remember: People don't just buy the meetings you plan — they buy the person you are, the story you tell and the brand you stand for. This year, take your identity to the next level. **I&FMM**

Scott Ginsberg is an author, publisher, speaker and consultant. He also holds the world record for wearing nametags. Contact him at scott@hellomynameisscott.com.



10 Tips for Acquiring Top Talent

A meeting planner was overheard saying, "This will be your best year ever! Everyone has worked their fingers to the bone, burned the midnight oil and the candle at both ends! I want our company retreat to be the best ever. Let's get a real superstar for our entertainment at our annual meeting this year. But how do we go about acquiring one?"

Believe it or not, this still happens. There

You have now invested several hundred thousand dollars in your event. Don't buy cheap champagne if the artist is asking for Cristal.

are corporate and other events that have extraterrestrial talent like Eddie Vedder from Pearl Jam, The Eagles, Elton John, Huey Lewis and others. So your boss has given you the direction to find entertainment of that stature. Where do you start? How much will it cost? How do I pull it off?

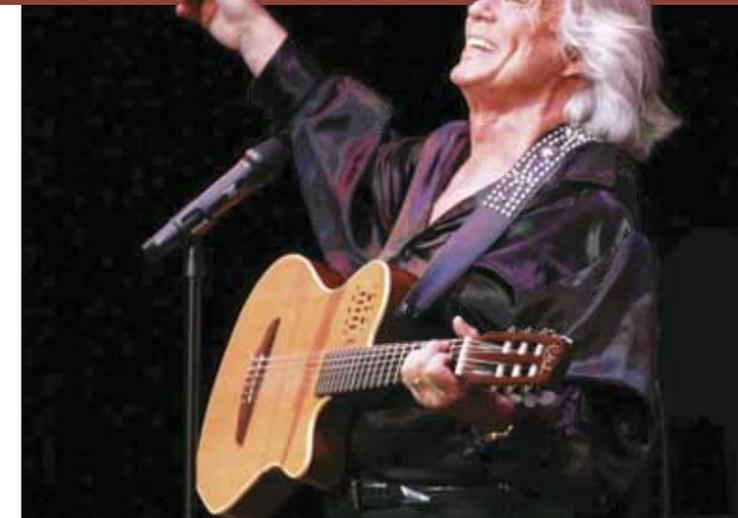
Choosing the Right Entertainment

First you need to decide on what genre of talent you want. Is it a rock band, magician, charismatic speaker or a specialty act like Cirque du Soleil? There are some simple steps to follow.

1. Who is your audience? Your boss may be a big fan of singer/entertainer John Davidson, but the median age of your company is 27.
2. You might want to survey your group to find something a bit more mainstream to your group.
3. Make a list of your top 10 choices. Remember that some artists may not be available when you need them.
4. Once you have your list together, it's time to move to the next step.
 - Call your favorite music purveyor. Some agencies specialize in corporate and special events.
 - Tell the agency what you are doing and ask for availability in your time span and the asking price.
 - Obtain a copy of the artist's rider. This will explain what you need to provide for the artist: sound, lights, video, backline, travel, rooms, food, etc.
5. Your music purveyor will then ask you to formalize an offer. This is where you send a binding letter to them outlining the event and what you are willing to provide and what you will pay the artist.
 - This is one of the most important parts of your negotiation with the agent. You need to specify the amount you will pay for the artist's performance, what you are willing to provide in the way of technical, hospitality and travel. You need to be specific.
 - Just as important as the cost is a complete description of the event, audience and venue. They need to agree that they can perform within your parameters.
6. Communication is key. You need to communicate with the artist's team. The more communication, the fewer surprises.
7. Hire the right team. Make sure that you have hired a compatible sound and lighting production company. This is not something to leave up to an in-house hotel audio-visual company. No matter how much they say they can do it, ask the artist if they have a local vendor they have worked with before. It will make your life much easier.
8. Don't skimp. You have now invested several hundred thousand dollars in your event. Don't buy cheap champagne if the artist is asking for Cristal. Your event will quickly denigrate into disaster. Make sure that the artist production team has fully signed off on your venue and local production company. *Get it in writing!*
9. If any of this is scary or confusing, hire a talent buying professional. They do this all the time, have established relationships with the many talent agencies and usually the artist's management. It may cost a bit more, but you might also save money by avoiding costly mistakes.
10. Enjoy your event. Most of the talent you hire is experienced and knows what to expect and do. Treat them as your guests and peers, not as property that you paid for. They are partners in your journey to a successful event.

Break a Leg

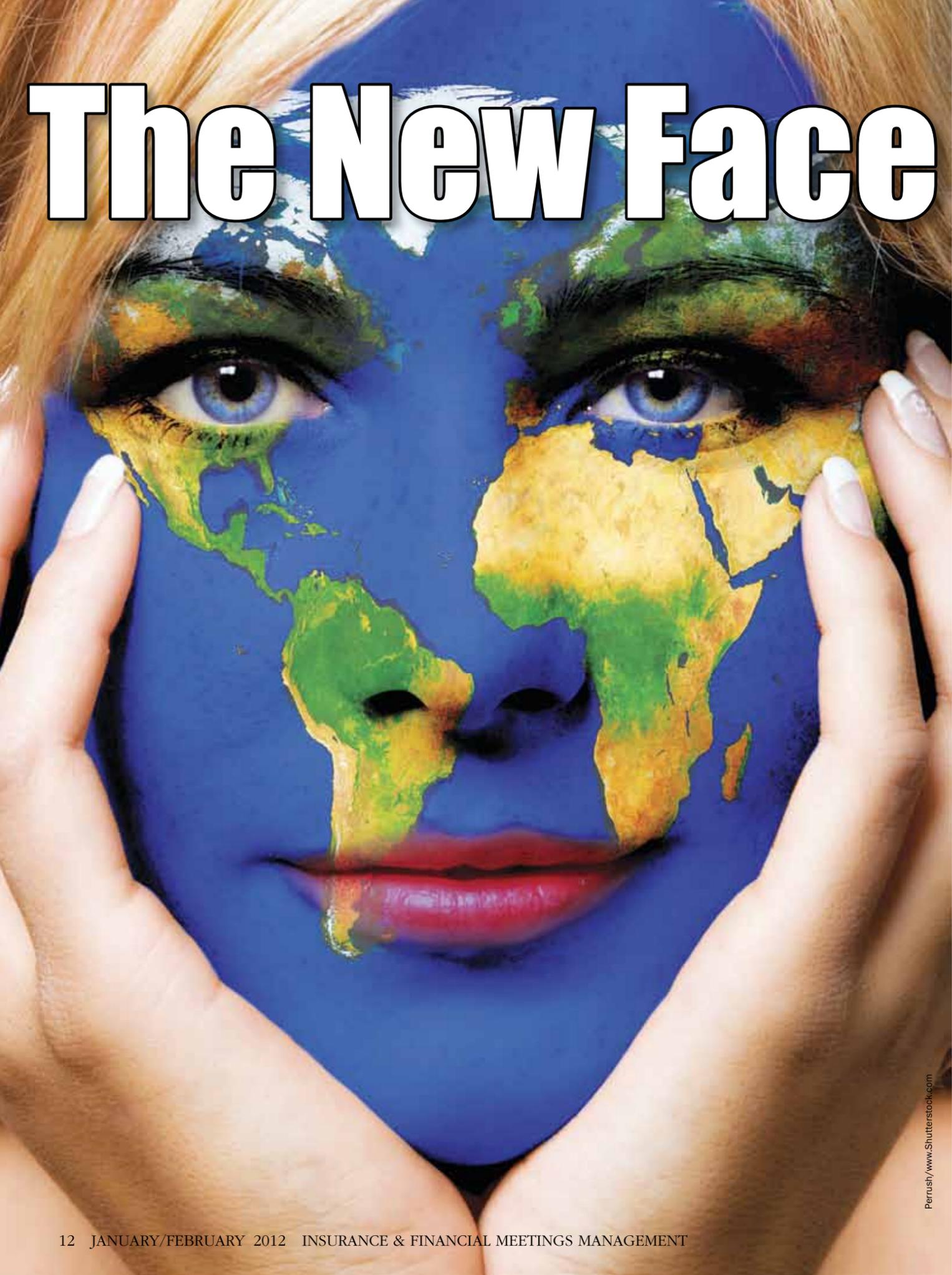
Everyone understands that the goal of every event is to have the audience walk away with a smile. You will encounter some bumps and



Singer/performer John Davidson, who is celebrating 50 years in show business this year, entertains corporate audiences of all ages throughout the U.S.

sometimes unsettled moments during your event, whether it is the stage in the wrong place, loading dock with a broken down linen truck or a weather event. Regardless of all of those obstacles, in the 30 years I have been producing events, they have all managed to come off without the audience knowing anything other than they went to the greatest event of their lives. Never let them see you sweat, run or scream. With that, as we say in the business, "break a leg" and have a great show, because you will. **I&FMM**

Ken Deans has 30 years of experience being a part of or producing ground breaking events for Activision (*Call of Duty: XP*), AT&T, Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival, Catholic Foundation of the Arts, Microsoft, Netflix and many other corporations. Beginning in the early '80s, Deans worked as part of the management for the musical groups Men at Work, Split Enz, Divinyls, Melissa Etheridge, Dave Koz, Alice in Chains and others. His long history and relationships in the music and event industry are called into service by many the top event production companies around the world. Ken can be reached at Ken.A.Deans@gmail.com or 818-206-8830. Reprinted with permission of Mark Sonder Productions January/February 2012 e-zine. www.marksonderproductions.com



The New Face

of Incentives

The Evolution Continues

By Mike Bassett

Asking an incentive industry insider about the state of the industry brings to mind a quote by Mark Twain — “If you don’t like the weather in New England, just wait a few minutes.”

Attitudes about incentives change with the release of every new economic report or news bulletin about the latest financial crisis. Optimism one week seems to transform into deep skepticism the next.

“It’s really tough to gauge,” says Bill Boyd, CMP, CMM, CITE, president and CEO of Sunbelt Motivation & Travel in Irving, TX. “For the first eight months of 2011 we were seeing a lot of pent-up demand and people saying ‘let’s go full speed ahead and book programs, get some performance improvement and improve our sales.’ But that’s all come to a screeching halt.”

Boyd believes all of this indecision boils down to one dominant factor — the economy. “A lot of companies out there — particularly in the financial market — are concerned about a double dip recession,” says Boyd. “And there might be some talk about it, then those concerns will start to go away, but then something like the European debt crisis comes up, which weighs heavily on the U.S., and talk of a double dip is back in the marketplace.”

Consequently, companies have stopped making decisions about incentives, Boyd says. His company’s 2011 figures look good because of decisions made late in 2010 and the beginning of 2011, but he is concerned about 2012. “No one is committing, no

one is signing, and everyone is waiting,” he says.

The Numbers Game

The Incentive Research Foundation (IRF), which tracks incentive activity, trends and attitudes through an annual trends report and periodic surveys during the year, is noting much the same thing.

“The data tells us that although the market has started to rebound from where it was in 2009, the general feeling for 2012 is more pessimistic than it was in 2011,” says Melissa Van Dyke, president of the IRF.

The IRF’s Pulse Survey, a poll of in-

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) is an example of an organization that has seen a questionable economy impact its programs. “Our previous incentive trips have become a casualty of a recent administrative cost reduction initiative,” says Karen Knox, CMP, CMM, senior corporate meeting planner with BCBSNC. “I don’t know when — or if — we’ll return to incentives outside of normal commissions and bonuses.”

Jeff Broudy, executive vice president and COO of United Incentives Inc. in Philadelphia, has seen the numbers, but is a bit more optimistic about the future. “There is a lot of activity going on surrounding incen-

“And there’s the irony. The budgets are there — they haven’t been reduced, or if they have, hardly at all. They’re just not using the money to go any great distances.”

Bill Boyd, CMP, CMM, CITE, President and CEO Sunbelt Motivation & Travel, Irving, TX



centive industry professionals taken in the fall of 2011, found that 62 percent of respondents reported that the economy was having a negative impact on incentive program planning. The IRF’s numbers haven’t been that high since July 2009 and demonstrate how much attitudes have changed compared to the spring, when the same survey reported that just 25 percent of respondents believed the economy negatively impacted programming.

tives — particularly a lot more interest among previous participants and new adopters,” he says.

Broudy, who is also chairman of the IRF’s Board of Trustees, thinks that companies that are getting back into incentives and those that are sticking their feet into the incentive pool are looking for ways of increasing market share in a flat economy.

“It’s a competitive reaction,” says Broudy. “They’re doing it because

they're trying to hold on to their sales force or distribution channel, or they are doing it to capture additional market share."

And this kind of reaction is not unusual, he says, noting that so many companies have done away with, or reduced incentives, that those companies that maintained their programs have been able to increase their business. "And that attracted attention," he adds.

Chuck Lane, director of incentive travel and public relations at Humana in Green Bay, WI, agrees that companies are recognizing that eliminating incentives puts them at a competitive disadvantage. "Incentive travel, after all, is a business decision, and our competitors have largely decided to also become competitive in this endeavor," Lane says.

Broudy, like Boyd, has noticed that it is taking a lot longer for companies to commit to and sign contracts. "These kinds of business decisions have migrated up to a much (more) senior level within organizations," says Broudy. "Which means that there is a lot of education of senior management going on about the purpose, the results and the ROI concerning these programs, which is all lengthening the decision cycle a bit."

Staying Under the Radar

Broudy believes that insurance and financial firms are holding more events, but that "they're just more 'cloaked.'" They may not be heavily publicized, but they're out there, and the spend has basically stayed the same."

But companies are still extremely sensitive to perceived extravagance, Broudy says, an observation Boyd shares. The perception issue still lingers, Boyd says, and will continue to do so until the economy perks up and the unemployment rate drops.



"There is a lot of education of senior management going on about the purpose, the results and the ROI concerning these programs, which is all lengthening the decision cycle a bit."

**Jeff Broudy, Executive Vice President and COO
United Incentives, Philadelphia, PA**

"Executives don't want to be seen as fat cats heading out to Europe or Beijing," Boyd says. "They don't want the press to follow them, and they don't want a big blowup like what happened with AIG."

Those concerns have become even more acute recently with the evolu-

tion of the Occupy Wall Street movement. "It seems like every CEO in every company has a bull's-eye on him now," Boyd points out.

Yet, even with those perception concerns still around, most companies still holding incentives are not reducing their spend. For example, While the IRF survey found that 28 percent of respondents expect their budgets to decline, 45 percent expect no change and 27 anticipate budget increases.

"Only one company that we deal with has shortened its incentive trip," Boyd says. "And there's the irony. The

budgets are there — they haven't been reduced, or if they have, hardly at all. They're just not using the money to go any great distances."

Where Is Everyone Going?

According to the IRF report, "destinations reflect economic realities." The IRF found that less than 18 percent of survey respondents are considering incentive destinations in Asia, South America, Africa or the Middle East. Slightly more than 50 percent are considering Europe, but Boyd and Broudy aren't seeing it.

"Europe is dead for us," says Boyd. "That's been ongoing, and it doesn't have anything to do with budgets — most companies can afford Europe in a heartbeat. It's just perception."

Even more favorable exchange rates between the euro and the dollar aren't enough to change minds about Europe. Boyd says he recently made an unsuccessful pitch to a company in which he argued that the more favor-

The Miami Beach area is a popular destination for financial and insurance incentive travel programs.



"Incentive travel, after all, is a business decision, and our competitors have largely decided to also become competitive in this endeavor."

Chuck Lane, Director of Incentive Travel and Public Relations, Humana, Green Bay, WI

able exchange rate made a potential trip attractive. "If you're going to go, now's the time to do it, but that argument's not working," he says. "The planners want to go, but they just know it's going to be rejected by upper management."

Instead, companies appear to be staying closer to home — traditional spots like the Caribbean, Canada, Mexico, Florida and Hawaii. The IRF survey found that 83 percent of respondents are providing incentive travel within the U.S., while 55 percent are going no farther than the Caribbean, and 29 percent are looking at Central America.

Humana had been one of those companies restricting itself to the continental U.S., but Lane says that his company "has finally become more comfortable with public perception trends" and has decided to branch out with its annual incentive. Humana held its incentive at the El Conquistador in Puerto Rico in 2011 and is going to Oahu in 2013.

"I hope this continues," Lane says. "The quality of the destinations is definitely a motivator to sell our products."

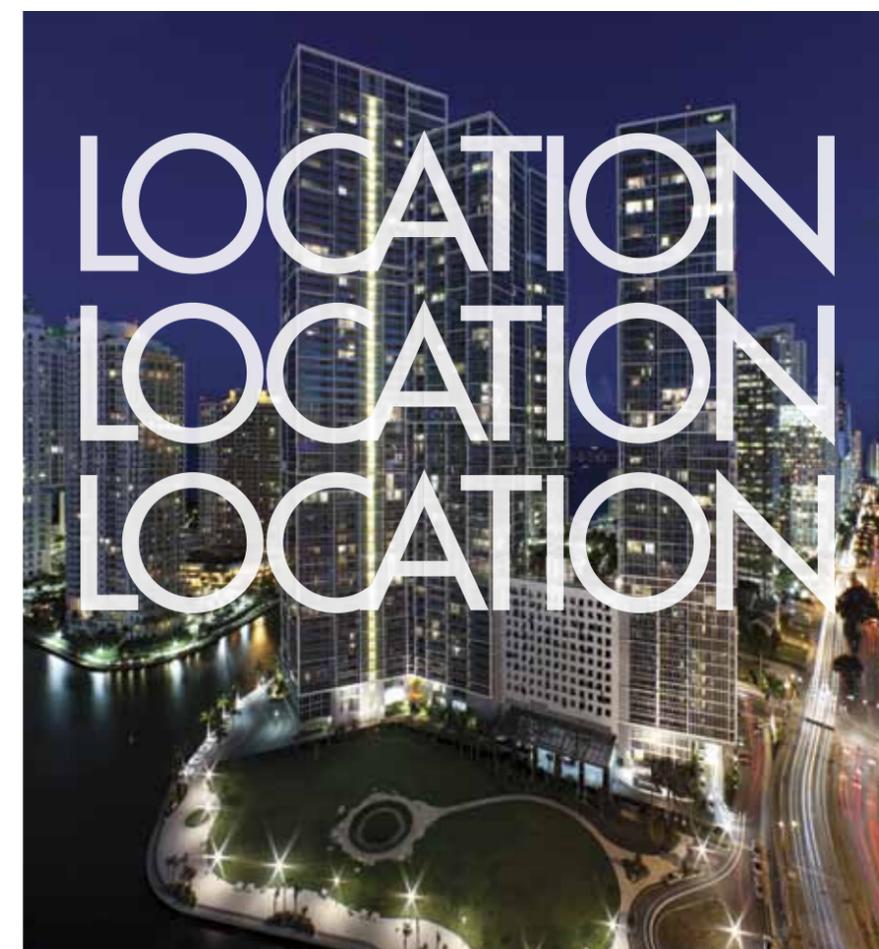
For those looking to go farther afield, Broudy points out that Buenos Aires is "coming on strong. It's in the same time zone as North America, the value is very good, it's an amazing capital city with lots to do, and most people have never been there."

Another potential hot spot is Panama, says Boyd. The opening of the Trump Ocean Club International Hotel and the Westin Playa Bonita means Panama "is coming of age," he says. "It's great when you get a brand new place in the Caribbean to open up — particularly one on the water where you get to see the

Panama Canal. I predict it is really going to be hot."

Companies also have awakened to the value of the all-inclusive, says Boyd. "For a while people were bad-mouthing them, saying that all they had to offer were buffet lines, rot-gut whiskey and bad wine. But, finally, someone decided to start building all-inclusives with signature restaurants and imported wines and — bang — they've become popular."

For example, the all-inclusive



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Photo courtesy of Greater Miami CVB



Photos courtesy of Programa Creciendo Juntos

resort Grand Velas Riviera Maya on the Mexican Caribbean has become an extraordinarily attractive destination, Boyd says. "We spend more time at Grand Velas than any place on the planet."



Geraldine Gatehouse, an independent planner from California, arranged a CSR event in Costa Rica on behalf of a company in Boulder, CO. The volunteers built a classroom for kindergarten students at El Roble, Guanacaste school, which is also used for music and crafts.

The Evolving Incentive

The format and nature of the events themselves are continuing to evolve.

Financial imperatives seem to be having some impact. According to the IRF survey, 41 percent of respondents say they are reducing the number of room nights of their incentives, while 41 percent are shrinking their non-meal components.

But there are also more fundamental changes happening within incen-

those that are high-performing, and they want access."

This is particularly true of the younger generation of incentive attendees, says Broudy, who believe they've become part of an exclusive group, feel they have something important to say and treasure information as currency. "So access appears

in the marketplace tell her that incorporating CSR components into incentives continues to catch on with larger companies, particularly those that already have CSR strategies in place. Bill Boyd also sees that there is much more in the way of CSR programming being built into incentive programs, particularly by insurance and financial services firms that have been concerned about perception issues.

But CSR has certainly not been universally adopted. The IRF's Spring Pulse Survey found that about one in four respondents is incorporating CSR components in their incentive programs.

"The momentum seems to have slowed a bit, and I'm not entirely sure why," Gatehouse says. "For me it makes perfect sense. You can take someone to a memorable destination, give them that 'wow' experience and still help people change lives at the same time."

Gatehouse suggests that many planners still may not be familiar enough with CSR to easily incorporate it into their programming. Additionally, cutbacks in planning departments along with mandates to do more with less make adding new features to programs more problematic.

"Many planners are being asked to

to be a dominant benefit," he says, which means there is more time being built into incentives for meetings and networking opportunities with the group.

More corporate social responsibility features are becoming part of the incentive landscape, but at a still uneven pace, says independent planner Geraldine Gatehouse, owner of Southern California-based Milestones!, a company that specializes in CSR events.

Her experience and contacts



"You can take someone to a memorable destination, give them that 'wow' experience and still help people change lives at the same time."

Geraldine Gatehouse, Owner
Milestones!, Vista, CA

tives, Broudy says. For example, he has found that the meeting component of the incentive now involves more than just "show and tell," and incorporates features in which attendees learn, ask questions and get access to upper management.

"There was a time when the main idea behind an incentive was 'just wine and dine me and take good care of me,'" says Broudy. "Well, that's become the baseline, and people expect that. But now these attendees are seen as real assets, particularly

do more work than they used to, so planning for CSR is perhaps just one more thing to do," she says. "And that's unfortunate, because research shows that good people want to work for companies that do good things."

Non-Cash Incentives

The IRF survey found that when it comes to non-cash merchandise incentive programs, 24 percent of respondents believe the economy will have a negative impact on their programs, 27 percent anticipate no effect and 25 percent expect a positive influence. Seventeen percent expect to see positive changes, such as adding individual travel and/or increasing the value of merchandise or gift cards to their programs.

Broudy suggests that the biggest trend is the use of store value cards for just about everything — "because they are so easy." Also, he says the trend within merchandise continues to hover around the technology

Hole No. 10 at the Grande Dunes Resort Club, an 18-hole Myrtle Beach golf course, was recently named the "National Golf Course of the Year" by the National Golf Course Owners Association of America.

space, as well. His observations are reinforced by the IRF survey, which finds that the type of merchandise being offered within non-cash incentive programs include gift cards (46 percent), clothing/apparel (43 percent), electronics (42 percent), luggage (34 percent) and jewelry/watches (33 percent).

Clearly, the state of the incentive industry will continue to be as changeable as the weather and mirror the fickle economy here and around the globe. Those insurance and financial services companies that maintain their tried-and-true incentive plans are sure to emerge as leaders when the dust settles in a few more years.

I&FMM

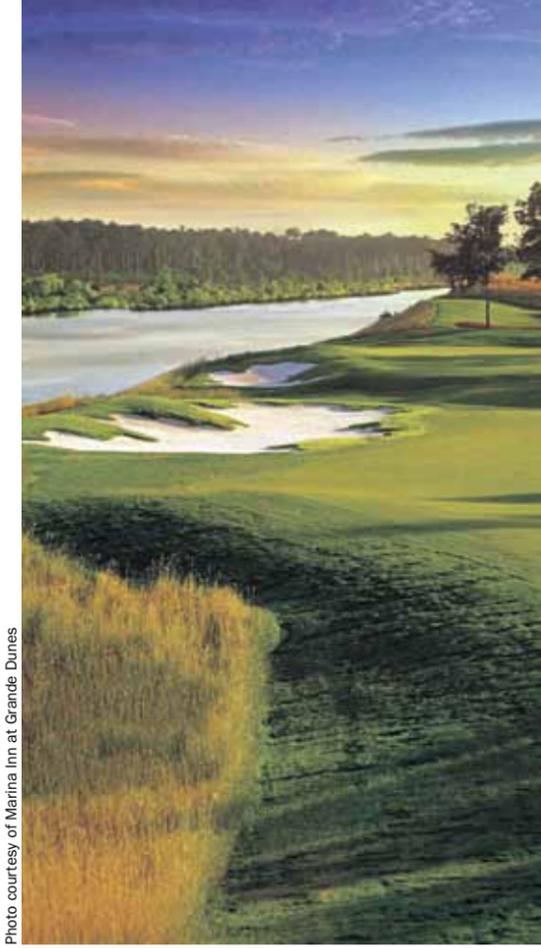


Photo courtesy of Marina Inn at Grande Dunes

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Among meeting planners, one of the most crucial food and beverage trends is to obtain greater value for budgets amid rising food, fuel and transportation costs. Savvy planners aggressively negotiate lower food and beverage costs with hotels, and the hotels strive to win the business with fair deals that still reap profits. You could say it's a real cat and mouse game with both sides alternately coming out ahead.

According to veteran meeting planners, hotels have plenty of incentive to strike food and beverage deals. For example, Eldon Gale, director of meeting and event management for Nationwide Insurance and a board member of the Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP), says, "Hotels are so hungry for business that they have been more willing to negotiate food and beverage contracts than they otherwise would have been. It is something that is almost universally given because it is something that hotels can control."

F&B Strategies

How to Play the Game and Come Out Ahead

By Derek Reveron

Two Key Strategies

Planners cite two key strategies for mitigating growing food and beverage costs: First, be creative with menus and change banquet event orders (BEOs) to get the most value. Second, negotiate long-term food and beverage contracts. Both strategies are crucial, says Gale. "Banquet event orders are a

"If you have an opportunity to sit down with a chef, more often than not that person will know exactly what your needs are. I've always had positive experiences doing that."



Eldon Gale
Director, Meeting & Event Management
Nationwide Insurance
Columbus, OH

main focus of our negotiations because they are such a big part of our overall meeting expenses. We are always negotiating current and long-term food and beverage pricing. It is essential. It's a main focus because food and beverage is such a big part of our overall meeting expenses," Gale emphasizes.

Gale transacted a multiyear agreement that resulted in big savings for his company for three 2011 meetings held at a hotel in Nationwide's headquarters city of Columbus, OH. "We negotiated a set menu price for each year. We also had a set discount on food and beverage that didn't go up.

If we didn't like what was on the menu or felt we didn't have enough variety, we could go to the

conference service manager or chef and ask for changes and recommendations," says Gale.

Another way to cut costs is by slimming down menus, adds Gale. "Menus tend to be larger than they necessarily need to be to try to appeal to all tastes and palates, and that builds in costs. The menus offered things like pork, fish, beef and chicken in one meal. We understood our group's preferences and knew we didn't necessarily need all that variety. So we talked to the conference services manager and chef about our specific needs," Gale says. Beef was chosen as one of the main entrées, and the portion size was reduced from six to four ounces.

He spared no food and beverage detail, including breaks, in the process of shaving costs. "Breaks generally include items like cookies, brownies and fruit and have more than you need. More often than not, people want to grab a snack and



Photo courtesy of Corporate Meetings Unlimited

quick beverage. We asked the hotel to put together a break package that could help us control our consumption costs. The hotel says breaks run \$16 to \$22 per person and we needed to spend closer to \$16 including coffee, tea, bottled water and soda. We dropped some of the snack items to make up the difference," says Gale.

The agreement resulted in significant savings. "If you factor in the traditional annual increase of five to seven percent in food and beverage costs, which we didn't pay, I would guess we saved up to 15 percent (on each of the three meetings). We knew going into each meeting what it would cost. We came in under budget, and everybody was happy all around with the meeting and savings program," says Gale.

Savings on multiyear food and beverage contracts differ depending on the hotel, location, group size, type of meeting and the property's willingness to negotiate, says Carol

Gillenwater, president and founder of Corporate Meetings Unlimited in The Woodlands, TX.

But should meeting planners always expect to get some kind of discount on multiyear food and beverage deals? "If I were a hotelier, I would say that's not true. But as a planner, if you're negotiating a food and beverage contract, you should always ask for a discount and act like you expect to get it," Gillenwater advises. When negotiating BEOs, Gillenwater adds, "You have to get a feel for the hotel, how hungry for business it is, how the short and long-term booking is going, whether you have worked with them before, the degree to which they will negotiate and on which items."

In 2006, Gillenwater negotiated a three-year food and beverage contract for a financial firm that held meetings in Houston in 2007, 2009 and 2011. Big savings were realized for the meetings, especially the 2011 event, which was held for three days

for 600 financial executives, managers and employees. The food and beverage package consisted of a banquet, three dinners, three lunches, five or six breaks and a reception on the first night. "Each year we paid about a two percent increase for food and beverage costs and saved a total of about 8 to 11 percent. It's worth it to hotels because they don't have to worry about selling the space for those years. You have to be careful with deals like this because if the market costs of food go the other way, you could actually lose money, but historically that hasn't happened," says Gillenwater.

Menus Are Not Set in Stone

Whether negotiating multiyear or one-off food and beverage deals, it literally pays to focus on every single aspect of the BEO, including meals, breaks, buffets and bar. Consider menus to be a rough guide for developing BEOs, says Gale. "The thing that I keep in mind more than anything is

Cutting Edge F&B Trends for 2012

Fairmont Hotels & Resorts catering managers and conference services share a glimpse of what to expect in F&B in 2012 and beyond.

- **Food trucks head indoors.** Street food has come a long way from pretzels and hot dogs, and many destinations are experiencing an explosion in gourmet food trucks. With tasty menu offerings that are quick and easy to create and serve, the food truck phenomenon has gained a devoted following. Recently, Fairmont staff has brought in these mobile operations as a fun option for meetings and events, which are also a quick, affordable lunch option. For a recent event, Fairmont Newport Beach, California created a custom food truck, which offered small bites including Lobster & Fontina Mac-n-Cheese, Kurabuto Pork Belly Sliders with Espresso BBQ sauce, Saltimbocca on a stick with sage and fig glaze and Yellowtail Tuna Tacos. The day of the event, meeting attendees gathered around, ordered from the window and devoured every morsel. It was a huge success.
- **Beer takes center stage.** The craft beer trend continues to grow in popularity, and Fairmont's meeting teams are helping planners appeal to newly minted connoisseurs by booking beer meisters instead of wine sommeliers for events. At The Fairmont Washington, DC, the World of Beer and Tapas Flight has been booked faster than anyone can say hefeweizen. Starting with Slow Braised Pork Belly paired with Sierra Nevada, India Pale Ale, a beer meister takes guests through New World Tuna Salad with Widmer Hefeweizen; Beef Tenderloin and Duvel, a strong golden ale; and Miniature Guinness Crème Brûlée with Guinness Stout. Attendees tend to consume less when drinks are incorporated into food stations, but beer tastings are also a great way to point guests toward interesting food pairings they might not otherwise know about.
- **Meet the farmers.** Planners know that a great way to create a memorable event is to weave the local community and culture into the agenda. Menus featuring local food and produce are one popular way to do this, but to really have an impact, Fairmont hotels are bringing in the farmers themselves. At Fairmont Pittsburgh, food stations highlighting individual local farmers and vendors take interaction to a fresh level. At one event, attendees were able to chat up Maggie Henry from Henry Family Farms as they sampled her Organic Braised Pork Tacos while quizzing her and four other farmers about products, farming practices and more.
- **Special diets don't need special prep.** Dietary restrictions are nothing new for meeting planners, but with health and wellness issues on the rise along with requests due to allergies, planners need to juggle cost, taste and function to create menus that are delicious and healthful for everyone in attendance. At Fairmont, Lifestyle Cuisine Plus caters to guests who have specific diet-dependent conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and celiac disease, as well as unique dietary preferences including macrobiotic, raw and vegan diets. At The Fairmont Orchid in Hawaii, luncheon banqueting menus can include items such as Cucumber Gazpacho with Hilo Hearts of Palm (Raw); Ahi Sashimi, Tomato Mushroom Relish, Brown Rice and Baby Greens (Dash/Heart Healthy); Mango Summer Rolls with Peanut Dipping Sauce (Gluten Free); Buckwheat Noodle Stir-Fry with Carrots, Organic Bok Choy and Shiitake Mushrooms (Vegan); Almond Butter Crusted Salmon, Fresh Corn, Brown Rice Risotto and Swiss Chard (Diabetic) and Whole Grain Carrot Cake with Whipped Hilo Avocado (Macrobiotic). www.fairmont.com — DR

that hotel menus are not necessarily a hard and fast final representation of what the hotel is able to do or willing to do for you. Menus can be pretty pricey. You have to work with them on where they meet and don't meet your budget, and most hotels are willing to do that," Gale reveals.

That's also the strategy of Molly Hawkins, meetings manager, Special D Events Inc., a corporate meetings and events management company located in Royal Oak, MI. "Some meeting planners believe that what menus have is pretty much all you can get. That's absolutely not true," Hawkins advises. "You can customize menus, remove items to reduce costs or add things."

Hawkins says that the most effective thing she does to reduce food and beverage cost is focus on the BEO. "We have a template with a checklist that includes 50 to 100 basic items that we use and, depending on the meeting, we may create more. An important thing to remember about the BEO is if something is not on there it's not going to get done. You can't have too many details, and the best way to save money is to have all of them on paper ahead of time. That way you're not experiencing last-minute changes and additions, which can add up in onsite charges," she says.

Hawkins shaved expenses of a BEO for a 2½-day meeting in 2011 in Chicago for 400 attendees.

The meeting did not offer any dinners. Instead, there were two lunch buffets. "At both lunches, we eliminated a chicken dish, salad option and a few side dishes from the menu. We served Chicago-style pizza, Chicago-style hot dogs, cucumber salad and bread sticks. There was plenty of food, and we saved a few dollars per head on costs. We also served the dessert from lunch at the afternoon break to reduce break costs," says Hawkins.

During the lunch, the less expensive appetizers were displayed while the more expensive items were passed around by waiters. Why? The costliest appetizers tend to last lon-



Photo courtesy of Corporate Meetings Unlimited
Carol Gillenwater, president of Corporate Meetings Unlimited, reminds planners negotiating BEOs to remember ancillary charges such as chef's and bartender's fees.

ger when passed around because people tend to take fewer of them, Hawkins explains.

Local and Green Options

Although meeting planners and corporations are keenly conscious about food and beverage budgets, there is a budding green trend to serve locally grown food at meetings, which can be more expensive. "Environmentally interested companies are willing to pay for it, but it doesn't necessarily have to cost more. Sometimes it can be as simple as a planner holding a meeting in Texas serving wines produced and bottled in the state to be sensitive to the environmental impact," says Gillenwater.

At one corporate meeting in Texas, Gillenwater planned a reception based on buying locally and creating healthful menus. People arriving at the hotel reception entered by walking on a green carpet. Chefs at food stations prepared locally grown vegetables using a variety of healthful cooking methods. Meanwhile, the growers were on hand to explain that the food was fresh and locally grown without pesticides. "You're beginning to see more things like that," says Gillenwater.

Gale agrees and notes that some of Nationwide's meetings encourage healthful eating. "There are a couple of meetings that we do for some divisions of our company that don't allow us to serve cookies, candy and sweets

of any variety. Everything has to be fruit and protein bars. These divisions have a big push for productivity and work-life balance, and managing your diet is all a part of that," says Gale.

No matter what kind of menu is planned, it literally pays to talk to the chefs as well as conference service managers about the details of BEOs, according to meeting planners. "CSMs aren't necessarily experts on food and beverage. If you have an opportunity to sit down with a chef, more often than not that person will know exactly what your needs are. I've always had positive experiences doing that," says Gale.

Setting the Guarantee

One of the trickiest details of the BEO is figuring the guarantee for the food and beverage function. Hotels typically require the guarantee in writing on the BEO a specified number of days before the event. If the guarantee is significantly inaccurate, it could offset savings gained by juggling other parts of the BEO. Gillenwater suggests that planners be tight with guarantees without low-balling because it could backfire and result in added costs or a shortage of food.

However, there is some room for error, she says. "A lot of planners

don't know that they have about a 5 percent fudge factor to play with. Say you think 180 people will attend, but you are not sure. You can easily guarantee five percent less than what you are comfortable with because most hotels will accept a five percent overage of your final guarantee. If you have an extra five percent show up, you are covered. If you have fewer people show up, you pay the hotel," says Gillenwater.

Another way to determine guarantees is to use the total number of tickets that attendees require for seating. Or, more accurately, peg the guarantee to the number of RSVPs. But don't base guarantees just on the number of people who register for a meeting.

Also, some planners use historical attendance and guarantee data as a general guideline for determining the figure for the most recent meeting.

"But as a planner, if you're negotiating a food and beverage contract, you should always ask for a discount and act like you expect to get it."



Carol Gillenwater
Founder and President
Corporate Meetings Unlimited
The Woodlands, TX

Remember, don't focus cost-saving efforts only on meals, say planners. Sometimes, planners focus on the menu prices and ignore the ancillary charges such as bartending fees," says Gale. Also, Gillenwater suggests planners become very familiar with hotel food and beverage profit margins. "It can help, depending on the market. A lot of big hotels have revenue managers. They look at a piece of business and figure out how much money they have to make in order to tie up meeting and room space, and food and beverage profits are a big part of that," says Gillenwater. **I&FMM**

When the Winter Olympics was coming to Vancouver in 2010, Tahira Endean, director, creative and production at Cantrav, a western Canada destination management and meeting planning company, was bringing in a number of incentive and other groups in time for the event. Hotels were opening across the city, and many, including the Fairmont Pacific Rim, were not scheduled to open until just before the Games. "I was still in hard hat for some inspections of the Fairmont," says Endean, who called the Olympics "one big incentive trip." She says, "Contracts were being signed when hotels still weren't sure they'd be open."

As it turned out, Endean's meeting went well and guests were able to enjoy a brand new hotel without glitches. Still, it's an ongoing question among planners about being first into a new hotel — or even into a hotel that's been significantly renovated. Hoteliers are reassuring but planners have too much at stake to simply take their word for it.

The economy has had an impact on planner choices. On the one hand, those planners being cautious about justifying their meetings may stick with a tried-and-true destination. However, with so little new inventory in the marketplace, those hotels that are able to open are finding a pent-up demand among planners who prefer new hotels because they offer the latest in technology and amenities.

Maureen Santoro, manager of groups operations for Atlas Meetings + Incentives in Milford, MA, says she will seek out new or renovated properties in cities "where my clients hold frequent meetings. If a client is going to a city for the first time, new or renovated is not the most important factor."

The reason: "New properties," says Santoro, "often appeal to clients who want to be seen as being hip and current, but the larger appeal is because of fresh surroundings, new soft goods, latest technology, dining and conveniences."

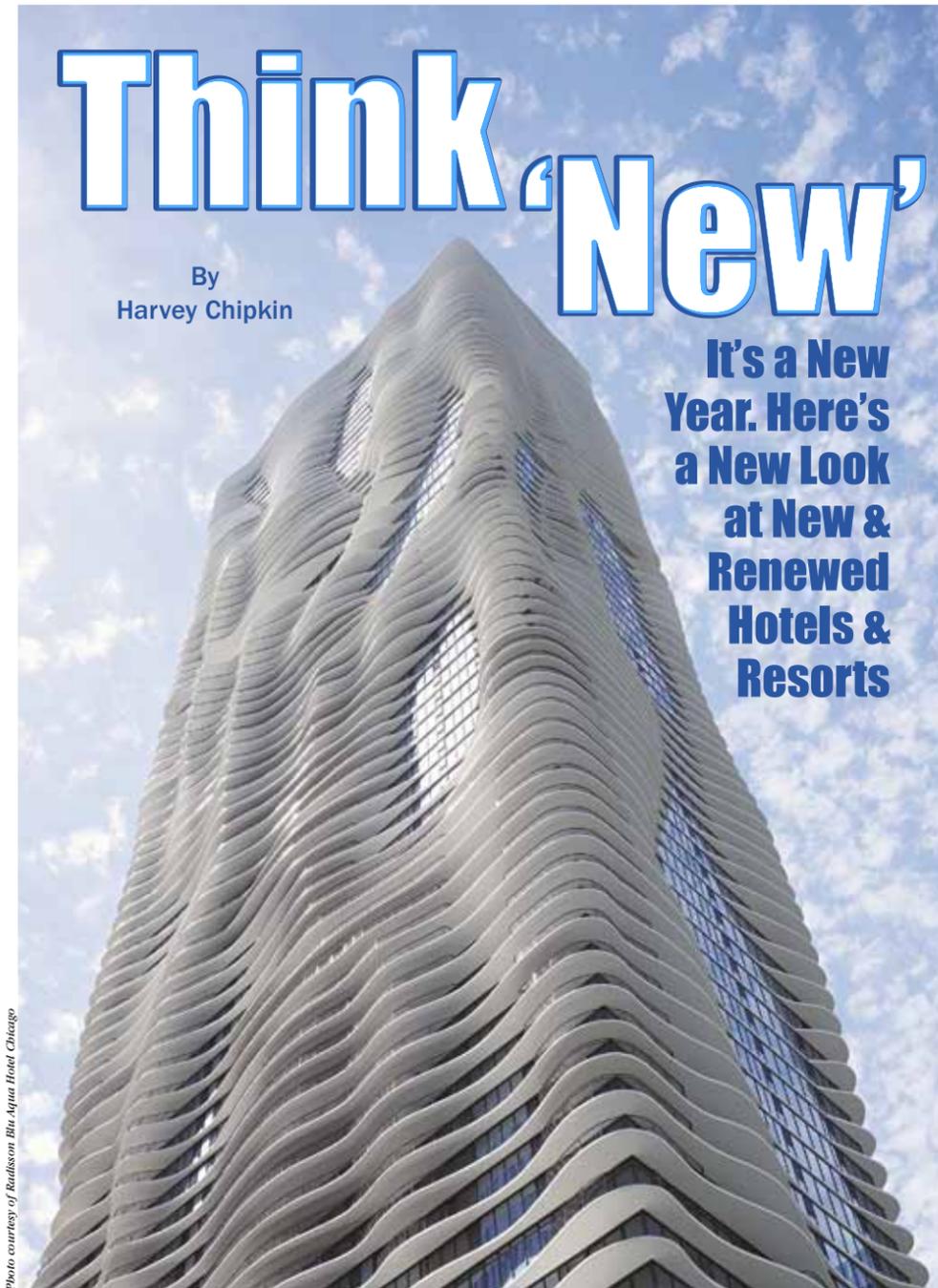


Photo courtesy of Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel Chicago

The new Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel occupies the first 18 floors of the 81-story Aqua Tower, recently dubbed "Skyscraper of the Year" by Emporis.

Javier Cano, general manager at the new 1,001-room JW Marriott/Ritz-Carlton Complex at the center of the LA Live entertainment development in Los Angeles, concedes, "There is always some level of hesitation with a new project that's coming on board. Planners worry about delays and how quickly staff can ramp up the operation. In the end, we opened six weeks early, and our

message from the beginning was not to talk about delays."

Big hotel companies usually bring in reinforcements to open major locations. As Cano says, "We were blessed in being able to bring in unbelievably experienced people. This was a big hotel in a big location and a big priority for Marriott. We are trying to position it as a meeting destination, and it was really important for

Think 'New'

By
Harvey Chipkin

It's a New Year. Here's a New Look at New & Renewed Hotels & Resorts

us to get out of the chute quickly and at the top of our game."

In the case of LA Live, says Cano, "For all intents and purposes, we were not just a new hotel but a new meeting destination. Los Angeles is a warm weather destination but a lot of planners had not been thinking of downtown Los Angeles."

FICP Chooses New

To spread the word to planners, LA Live was able to convince the Financial and Insurance Conference Planners (FICP) to schedule their fall 2012 annual meeting at the JW Marriott. The JW Marriott at LA Live together with the Ritz-Carlton offer 100,000 sf of meeting and event space in the Gallery Collection, and the hotel is across the street from the Los Angeles Convention Center.

Steve Bova, executive director of FICP, says that when booking a meeting for planners, it's a strong positive to have a new hotel so attendees can familiarize themselves with it. "We want to showcase the different things you can do and different venues. We try to be a little more out there as far as where we choose to go.

"If we were a plumbers association," says Bova, "education and networking might be the main reasons for the meeting. In our case, that

showcasing is a large part of it. In fact we have never gone back to the same location, although that's not to say we wouldn't."

Also in the case of FICP, says Bova, "Two out of our three nights are offsite sometimes in hotels, sometimes not. That is an important consideration in our venue choice."

With the difficulties of the economy in recent years, says Bova, "We've learned that whatever locations our members select, better metrics must be involved. That doesn't mean they won't go to certain places but they have to be better prepared for why they were selected."

Aggressive Rates

Speaking of metrics, there is frequently value to be found in booking a new hotel. Jim Glickman, president and CEO of LifeCare Assurance Company, says his group booked the Hilton Anatole in Dallas for a 2013 conference of 1,000 people before he saw the completion of a massive renovation.

"The renovation didn't enter into it," says Glickman, adding, "We do tend to get better offers for new and renovated hotels, and that is a major factor. We have probably signed more contracts with new and renovated hotels because they are more aggressive on rates."

Of course, rates are important, but as Glickman says, "We've been comfortable with booking hotels that were not open. We had our conference at the Hilton Americas-Houston in 2004 and signed that contract before they opened."

However, even Glickman asserts, "We would not usually go into a hotel as soon as they open; there are too many risks. However, we went to the Houston property just two weeks after they hosted Super Bowl, and we were

"We've learned that whatever locations our members select, better metrics must be involved. That doesn't mean they won't go to certain places but they have to be better prepared for why they were selected."



Steve Bova
Executive Director
FICP
Chicago, IL

pretty sure they would be ready for that. Ordinarily, we would wait two or three months after a hotel opens."

And, as Glickman succinctly puts it, "We've never seen a hotel in worse shape after a renovation than it was before."

Technology Pluses

Technology is key in choosing a new or renovated hotel, according to Annette Chinn, president of Emeryville, CA-based Streamlinevents, who sees new hotels as offering more advanced technology, particularly Internet (wired and wireless), electronic (and customizable) signage/reader boards; infrastructure for meetings technology; and use of technology in overall guest experience (mobile information, use of iPads, interesting in-room technology, etc.).

In the room, a new or renovated hotel might mean, says Chinn, more power for plug-in devices; work desks and chairs; and in-room flat-screen high-definition televisions.

As a result of their technological benefits and for other reasons, says Chinn, "We do not avoid new or renovated hotels; we actively seek them out. Also, almost all of our clients encourage us to seek out new and renovated hotels."

"ABC Company may have held their incentive in Hawaii this year, so DEF Company needs to raise the bar a bit to appeal to those agents. This is where a new property or destination may be key."



Maureen Santoro
Manager of Group Operations
Atlas Meetings + Incentives
Milford, MA

Chinn mitigates any concern about a hotel's opening in time by monitoring timelines and construction delays; and by implementing contractual protection against delays both in physical structure and service staffing levels, as well as post-opening issues. With all that, Chinn does not book a hotel until it has been open for three months.

Like Glickman, Chinn sees opening rates as "a huge value-add, and a situation we seek out. By taking a risk on a new property, there should be substantial concessions made by the

hotel. On the flip side, we try to be good partners and ensure that rates are reasonable," she says.

"Our tech clients," explains Chinn, "are frustrated with hotels that do not provide enough power and Internet, and have an antiquated view of technology pricing. A pricing plan that recognizes the Internet as central to doing business today is essential. We too often see pricing that is out of line with the basics of supporting meetings and events. New hotels usually offer better overall pricing based on how guests use technology."

Location Is Key for Insurance Meetings

Santoro says decisions completely depend on the situation, partially based on the industry. "In the insurance industry where corporations are trying to get agents to sell their product versus a competitor's product, location is key. ABC Company may have held their incentive in Hawaii this year, so DEF Company needs to raise the bar a bit to appeal to those agents. This is where a new property or destination may be key." Also, she adds, "The desire/curiosity factor of some

well-seasoned travelers to experience something new and to be able to say 'I've been there' can be appealing and help increase participation."

Santoro does believe that "It always takes a new property a bit of time to get the kinks out. I look for properties managed by entities well-known for their training and that are large enough to be able to move experienced staff to the new properties for the break-in period."

Repositioning Renovations

Some hotel marketers have moved

away from the term "renovation," because it implies something less than a serious change in how a hotel looks and operates.

"We do not use the word renovation," asserts Michael Smith, general manager of The Hyatt Regency New Orleans, which was heavily damaged in Hurricane Katrina and finally reopened after a number of false starts and a capital expenditure of \$275 million. "That sounds like new curtains and a new coat of paint. This is a total transformation from a bricks and mortar hotel to a contemporary building

filled with marble and glass and featuring natural light."

Smith says his team consulted more than 800 planners and transformed the hotel in response to them. "Our business model was based on those studies and is simple. We had to have the ability to be self-contained; to not rely on citywide meetings; to have the ability to meet, feed and breakout and exhibit with a comprehensive F&B package for multiple groups or one large group."

At Loews Hotels, according to Michael Dominguez, vice president,

A Sampling of New Projects

- **Grande Lakes Orlando**, which is comprised of a 582-room Ritz-Carlton and a 1,000-room JW Marriott, has completed a guest-room redesign costing \$28 million. The 4,293-sf Royal Suite was unveiled in early 2011 as the largest Ritz-Carlton suite of its kind in the U.S. Grande Lakes has a total of 147,000 sf of meeting space with six ballrooms all on one level; and 40 breakout rooms on the lower level, as well as more than 107,000 sf of outdoor space.
- In October **MGM Grand Las Vegas** began a \$160 million renovation of all 3,570 guest rooms and 642 suites in the main tower. The first set of redesigned guest rooms opened in November. The redesign of all rooms should be completed by September 2012. The 5,044-room MGM Grand offers 600,000 sf of meeting space, including the freestanding 92,000-sf Marquee Ballroom and the 16,800-seat Grand Garden Arena. The top two floors of MGM Grand offer 51 two-story Skylofts. Located adjacent to the main resort is The Signature at MGM Grand, a luxury all-suite, non-gaming, non-smoking hotel comprised of three towers, each with 576 suites. The Mansion is an upscale, exclusive hotel within the MGM Grand.
- **Caesars Palace** in Las Vegas has opened the 668-room Octavius Tower, with 60 suites and six luxury villas. The resort's sixth tower offers a private entrance, separate hotel lobby and direct access to the pool and gardens. The opening comes shortly after the return of Celine Dion and Elton John, the opening of Central Michel Richard from the famed chef and other projects. The property now offers 3,348 guest rooms, 23 restaurants and cafés, and 300,000 sf of meeting space.
- **Revel** is scheduled to open in Atlantic City in May 2012 with 160,000 sf of meeting and convention space. The ratio of group space to guest rooms is the second largest on the East Coast. The resort can accommodate three meetings of 500 simultaneously. Dining, entertainment, shopping, fitness center and the beach are all accessible to conference-goers. Meeting space includes: a 70,000-sf event center for up to 5,500 including a 30,000-sf columnless ballroom; a 30,000-sf meeting center with 20 meeting and boardrooms; 60,000 sf of indoor hospitality space; and 90,000 sf of outdoor event space. The resort also will offer 12 restaurants, a 22,000-sf spa and a 5,500-seat theater.
- **The Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek** opened recently with 400 guest rooms and suites overlooking a 10-acre lake and convenient to Walt Disney World parks. The resort boasts 25,000 sf of indoor/outdoor function and meeting space, a spa and five dining options. Event space features include 19-foot ceilings in the ballrooms and Grand Foyer; a 14th floor boardroom overlooking the lake; and access to the conference concierge.
- **Hyatt Regency New Orleans** reopened following a six-year, \$275 million redevelopment. Located adjacent to the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, the hotel now boasts 1,193 new guest rooms and 200,000 sf of event space. The 32-story property offers the most meeting space of any hotel in the city, as well as the ability to self-contain group events of all sizes — with two new 25,000-sf ballrooms, 64 meeting and banquet rooms, 19 executive level meeting rooms, seven permanent boardrooms and more than 80,000 sf of exhibition space. In 2012, the new Loyola Avenue Streetcar Line will make the hotel even more connected to city attractions.
- **Gaylord Entertainment** announced plans for a resort and convention hotel in Aurora, CO. Less than 10

- minutes from Denver International Airport and 25 minutes from downtown, the resort is scheduled to open for business in mid to late 2015. The property is expected to initially feature 1,500 guest rooms; 400,000 sf of exhibition and meeting space; and a dramatic atrium with views of the Rocky Mountains.
- **Grand Hyatt San Francisco's** multiphased \$70 million renovation continues with the completion of \$14 million in upgrades to meeting facilities. The redone facilities include a Grand Foyer boasting 5,700 sf of flexible meeting space as well as the hotel's Theatre Level meeting rooms and Conference Theatre. The hotel has a total of 27,000 sf of renovated event space. All 659 guest rooms have also been redone.
- **Hyatt Regency Atlanta** has completed a \$65 million renovation including modernization of the iconic atrium. The atrium now features new large tile flooring, wider escalators and a redesigned front desk area with walnut pod-style desks for a more personalized check-in experience. Two new restaurants have also opened in the hotel, which offers 1,260 guest rooms and 180,000 sf of function space.
- **Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel** opened in Chicago on November 1, 2011 with 334 guest rooms and suites, and more than 28,000 sf of meeting and event space, including the 12,041-sf Atlantic Ballroom with 20-foot-high windows overlooking Lake Michigan. Hotel features include an 8,000-sf fitness facility, an indoor basketball court, a movie screening room, an indoor lap pool, and an 80,000-sf green roof and recreation deck.
- The **Omni Dallas Hotel** opened on six acres of an eight-acre site in downtown Dallas, connected via a skybridge to the 2.1-million-sf Dallas Convention Center. The remaining two acres are slated for dining, retail and other development. The hotel offers 1,001 guest rooms and more than 110,000 sf of meeting space. To maximize accessibility to the convention

- center, the hotel's meeting spaces are concentrated on the lower levels.
- **Hilton Carlsbad Oceanfront Resort & Spa** will open in summer 2012 in Carlsbad, CA, with more than 25,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space. That includes a 5,900-sf oceanfront ballroom and 10,600 sf of outdoor space featuring oceanview gardens. The 215-room resort will have an oceanview swimming pool and easy access to the beach.



Photo courtesy of Revel
Revel, on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City, opens in May.

- **Hilton-Americas Houston** completed an \$11 million major renovation project in the fall; all 1,200 guest rooms and meeting spaces were completely redesigned. Directly connected to the George R. Brown Convention Center, the hotel offers 91,500 sf of meeting space.
- **Hilton Palacio Del Rio** in San Antonio, TX, just completed a \$33 million guest-room renovation that will be followed next summer with a \$4 million update on the Corte Real and Salon del Rey ballrooms. Floor-to-ceiling windows will be installed to allow maximum natural light. The 482-room hotel features a unique meeting venue across the street housed in a historic two-story structure steps from River Walk. — HC

global sales, the brand is spending more than \$100 million on five properties. “We are looking at this as the reinvention of these hotels,” says Dominguez.

“I just did a presentation and somebody asked ‘What are the ‘ah ha’s’ out of this recessionary period; what innovations have come out of it?’ My answer seemed to be odd but it was, what we learned from our customers is that reinventing means getting back to basics. The basics still revolve around the experience. We get so caught up in technology that we

“We have probably signed more contracts with new and renovated hotels because they are more aggressive on rates.”



Jim Glickman
President and CEO
LifeCare Assurance
Woodland Hills, CA

forget about what might be fresh and memorable to customers. As a result we are reinventing the arrival and restaurant experiences. And this is critical to groups because when we asked planners what mattered most to their overall expedience, it was the sense of arrival and restaurants.”

The Power to Impress

Dominguez continues, “The incentive market is coming back, and that makes arrival and dining even more crucial. In the lobbies we are going to an open concept instead of the long, front desk. We want all these lobbies to deliver the same wow experience.

“We do have great meeting space,” says Dominguez, “but a group’s second most important experience is in the lobby and public areas. We are trying to enhance that to make sure the public spaces come to life, that there is a vibrancy to them.”

As for planner reservations about

renovated hotels being done on time or in the midst of construction, Dominguez says, “We have always been a conservative company and don’t stretch those time lines. We give ourselves enough cushion to make sure it happens and there is no inconvenience to guests. In fact we make it all least impactful to groups through communications.”

And to avoid any jitters about booking a hotel that has been closed for six years, Smith says of the Hyatt Regency New Orleans, “We opened in October but did not book any meetings until after January.”

Carlson not only opened a brand new hotel in Minneapolis recently, but a brand new brand within a brand at the Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel Chicago.

“There used to be a sentiment among planners, not to book a hotel until it had been open a year,” says Kaaren Hamilton, vice president of global sales for Carlson, who adds, “There was an appetite to book this particular hotel ahead of its opening. There isn’t a lot of new inventory out there, and our planners were seeking the latest, not so much for aesthetics but for the infrastructure. The technology built into this building is incredible.”

The building is LEED certified, and 90 percent of the meeting space has floor-to ceiling windows, according to Hamilton. Although Blu is new to the U.S., she says, “it is well-known globally, and many of our customers know it from international meetings. In fact we reached out to those customers who knew the brand already first — more than two years ago.”

And, in fact, says Hamilton, “The building was available for hard-hat tours for 18 months before opening. One reason is that the exterior was instantly iconic so that it made an impression even before the hotel was finished.

“We did not experience any instances of people saying they absolutely

wouldn’t book the hotel right after opening,” she continues. “There is an appetite today for more adventure and there isn’t that much product opening.

“In addition,” says Hamilton, “we never execute a first event on paying customers; after a period of intensive training, we will do a number of internal events. And planners are aware of that.”

What’s New Is Old Again

When it comes to renovating, operators see no choice but to do so regularly — even at a relatively new hotel. That was the case at Grande Lakes Orlando, which opened in 2003, but which just underwent a \$20 million redesign. “We always want to make sure we keep the product up to speed,” says Karen Englund, director of sales and marketing. “We used a contemporary design palate, as well as construction projects on our new 4,300-sf Royal Suite.”

While the hotel is undergoing renovation, says Englund, “We always have model rooms and bring planners through those; we provide them with what they need to know to anticipate their own experience.”

Grande Lakes will begin working on its meeting space upgrade in 2012, taking a little space out of service at a time during the low-occupancy periods of August and September.

And to prove that a new hotel does not have to have a soft opening, the Omni Dallas Hotel opened in November “with a bang,” according to Ed Netzhammer, managing director. Within a half hour of opening, 2,000 people were hosted for lunch.

In fact, according to Netzhammer, the original “early 2012” opening date was moved back to November 11, 2011 to take advantage of that 11-11-11 date with promotions and special deals.

And the outlook is good. As of early December, says Netzhammer, “We already have 22 pieces of business in the financial and insurance business — almost all in 2012 and almost all sizable in the range of 1,000 or more people.”

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Many of the latest technologies are available on mobile devices such as smartphones, which are rapidly becoming the coolest and most ubiquitous meeting planning tools of all. More planners are using smartphones, especially iPhones, Androids and BlackBerrys, to conduct business before, during and after meetings. More than 80 percent of meeting professionals use mobile devices such as smartphones for their jobs, according to MPI's FutureWatch 2011 survey.

Technology evolves so rapidly, it's important that planners stay informed about the latest tools and learn how to use them to increase efficiency and cut costs. That's a major reason why the Financial & Insurance Conference Planners (FICP) conducted its first Technology Showcase at the annual conference held in November in San Antonio. Mobile apps, QR codes and social media technology suppliers demonstrated their products and made them available for planners to try. In addition, a technology expert held a session on the latest technology trends. “It provided an introduction of some of the latest technologies,” says Zint. “A lot of meeting planners have not been exposed to these tools, and won't start using them until they see how they work and get an idea of the return on investment. Also, some companies are cau-

QR Codes

Quick response (QR) codes allow mobile devices to retrieve information by scanning barcodes. Several websites including *www.quickmark.com* and *www.mobiletag.com*, allow people to download or create their own QR codes. Meeting planners are finding more uses for QR codes. For example, attendees can use a smartphone to scan a QR



Karen Shackman, President
Shackman Associates, NY, NY

“We are constantly rethinking and working in different ways to use new technology to take advantage of what New York City offers.”

code posted outside a meeting room to get information such as a copy of the presentation, speaker bio or link to a social media website discussing the topic. Attendees can use QR code-enabled devices to exchange electronic business cards or “friend” each other on Facebook.

Smartphones with QR code-reading capability are also popular for teambuilding activities. Shackman Associates, an award-winning New York City-based DMC specializing in international and domestic corporate meetings and incentives, created a QR code-driven scavenger hunt last year. The activity hunt took place in Central Park during an incentive for 80 execu-

player, dog walkers and a variety of characters. They were strategically positioned in places like the Alice in Wonderland statue and near Victorian Gardens. They had to interact with the characters to find QR codes on them. They scanned the codes with iPhones to receive clues on where to go next,” says Shackman.

The use of QR code technology is a relatively recent development for many planners of financial meetings

and incentives, including Shackman. “All of this technology is new and this is really one of our first tastes of doing this. We've done a number of scavenger hunts over the years, but we are constantly rethinking and working in different ways to use new technology to take advantage of what New York City offers,” says Shackman.

Meeting Apps

More planners are using apps to provide meeting information such as agendas, session handouts, attendee lists and feedback surveys. The FICP provided its first conference app for attendees during the 2011 annual conference. The app included lists of

> QR Codes and Other Cool Tools = Smarter Planners

Not so long ago, state-of-the-art technology for meeting planners in the financial and insurance industries consisted of land-line telephones, fax machines and word processors. Today, planners are gradually adopting — or likely to eventually adopt — relatively new technologies and tools such as

meeting apps, QR (quick response) codes, RFID (radio frequency identification), augmented reality, cloud computing and Google+, among others.

Emerging technologies are changing meeting planning. “Meeting professionals today are more efficient, productive and savvy because of the

technological advances of the past decade,” says Todd Zint, CMP, CMM, head of meetings and event strategy for Austin, TX-based NFP. “This evolution has provided a paradigm shift in the meeting industry; planners have moved from a primarily tactical role to a more strategic role mainly due to

tious about adopting technology such as social media for meetings due to the regulatory environment for financial firms and the need to protect information privacy.”

New technologies that financial and insurance meeting planners are starting to adopt include the following:

tives of an overseas financial firm. The group was divided into about eight teams, each equipped with at least one iPhone loaded with a QR code-reading app. “It was part technology, part scavenger hunt, part sightseeing and part educational. They searched for people in the park. We had a sax

attendees for networking purposes, access to Twitter and Facebook and some news. Next year, the FICP plans to provide an app with even more functions as well as an enhanced technology showcase with more panels and discussions.

By Derek Reveron

NFP also uses apps for meetings. Says Zint, "NFP has leveraged mobile application technology to enhance the user experience, deliver a hybrid marketing strategy where attendees can view event logistics through a customized conference app as an alternative to printed agendas, and for analytics collected to determine general tool adoption, attendee usage, frequency and duration." Zint could not provide more specifics about NFP's use of technology in meetings due to company policy and Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) regulations.

Planners can find some of the coolest and latest meeting apps at www.meetingapps.com. The site provides a comprehensive listing of meeting apps that are compatible with iPhone, Android, BlackBerry and iPad. The apps are categorized by topics such as meeting management, audiovisual, GPS and Global Maps. Apps are also categorized by their compatibility with mobile devices. A "Cool Tools" category includes apps that perform a range of functions, including augmented reality, guest management, people location and exchange of business information between mobile phones. Also, sites such as www.grupio.com, www.eventkaddy.com and www.geniemobile.com are producing low-cost, do-it-yourself meeting apps with easy-to-follow tutorials.

"Attendees could use AR to see camera-provided images of meeting room locations with information layered onto the image."

Dan Parks, President
Corporate Planners Unlimited, Dana Point, CA

as museums, restaurants and shops. To post their arrival or location, users can log onto the FourSquare website, or send a text message or use a geo-location app. FourSquare users also compete to win prizes and badges for the most check-ins at a location. Moreover, meeting planners are even using FourSquare to drive teambuilding contests such as scavenger hunts.

During late 2010, a financial corporation conducted a scavenger hunt in Chicago using FourSquare. The activity was part of a four-day incentive for more than 70 top sales performers. The group was divided into teams of five or six people. Teams competed to acquire a list of things at several locations, including museums, statues, pubs and a park, explains Dan Parks, president of Dana Point, CA-based Corporate

Planners Unlimited. "Each time they found what they were supposed to, they checked into FourSquare to get clues to the next location. Clues within FourSquare might include a text, a link or photos. Clues were also hid-



"They checked into FourSquare to get clues to the next location. Clues within FourSquare might include a text, a link or photos. Clues were also hidden at the locations. We also used Twitter and Facebook to give clues."

den at the locations. We also used Twitter and Facebook to give clues. For example, we might send them to Facebook to look for clues in photos of somebody's profile. They were

also given a small budget," says Parks.

Parks says that apps such as FourSquare allow meeting planners to tailor activities to the needs and demographics of attendees. "We like to create our own game for our clients, and we can do that with FourSquare. With the Chicago group, it was mostly people in their 30s with a strong amount of technology usage and smartphones. That's the kind of group for which this works best," Parks added.

Other cool tools include audience response and networking systems that can be used in meetings, incentive programs, education sessions and training classes. Attendees can use apps to provide feedback

to speakers through the Web, Twitter or texting. Speakers can then display audience responses in real time via PowerPoint and other formats. For instance, www.polleverywhere.com allows planners to get feedback for free from groups of 40 people or fewer. Users pay a monthly fee for larger groups. For example, groups of 2,500 are charged \$375 a month. SpotMe allows attendees to use smartphones to locate one another with radar technology. A SpotMe-equipped smartphone vibrates when it nears another phone with the same app. Users also can use SpotMe to com-



plete polls, network with each other and request more information.

Augmented Reality

Augmented Reality (AR) is an emerging technology that promises to have practical uses for meeting planners. The technology superimposes interactive information such as data, images and graphics on a digital image in real time. Parks compares AR to the view of reality as seen through the eyes of the robot in the movie "The Terminator." Meeting planners will eventually use augmented reality via smartphones equipped with cameras, GPS and compasses, says Parks.

James Spellos, CMP, author, speaker and founder and president of Meeting U, a New York City-based company offering customized technology solutions for meeting professionals, sees great potential in the use of AR. "Attendees could use AR to see camera-provided images of meeting room locations with information layered onto the image," explains Spellos. "AR can also be used to locate nearby restaurants, shops, hotels and other places."

Financial industry trade show exhibitors could even use AR to provide real-time views of booths with information superimposed on the image. Augmented reality apps providers include www.layar.com, www.goldrun-go.com and www.wikitudo.com.

RFID

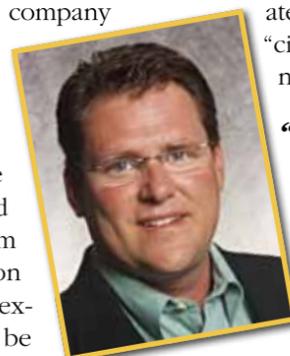
Meeting planners are starting to adopt Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) to collect attendee information and data. An RFID system consists of a small transmitting chip, a reader and software to manage attendee information. The RFID chips can be attached to nametags and read by RFID sensors outside or inside meeting rooms. Among other uses, RFID can track attendee movements among meeting rooms, determine which sessions people attend and record how long they remain at each one. Planners

can use the information to respond in real time to higher- or lower-than-expected attendance.

Zint describes how NFP has used RFID: "We have used it for the last couple of years. RFID was used to evaluate demographic behavior trends attending specific breakouts while at the same time tracking participant duration for continuing education credit reporting. The solution was also used during a trade show-style event capturing connections and later formatted and distributed to sponsors based on contribution level," says Zint.

Google+

Another promising cool tool is Google+. It enables planners to create specialized subgroups or "circles" of everyone connected with a meeting in-



Todd Zint, CMP, CMM, Head of Meetings & Event Strategy
NFP, Austin, TX

"For every meeting goal or objective, there is most likely a meeting technology available to deliver desired outcomes. It is imperative that meeting professionals embrace these innovative solutions."

cluding vendors, attendees, employees, program content creators, transportation suppliers and hotels. Through Google+, planners can share and get feedback on documents, video, files, photos and other content. Creating circles is easy, as is selecting content to share. Google+ apps are available at www.google.com/+.

Cloud Computing

Cloud computing, which stores data in a remotely managed server, offers much promise for meeting planners of financial companies. Cloud users can access, manage and change information and data using any Web-enabled device. The cloud is useful for meeting planners who spend lots of time on the road. For example, a planner could use an iPhone to access a meeting contract

proposal saved on a home PC and vice-versa. Some cloud systems automatically update all versions of a file in different devices if only one copy is altered. Such a feature could be helpful to planners who travel and constantly enter new contacts into their smartphones. Cloud services include www.dropbox.com, www.sharefile.com, www.sugarsync.com, www.apple.com/icloud and www.google.com/apps/intl/en/business/cloud.html.

Meeting planners for financial firms can use the cloud to store information collected during a meeting or conference and ensure that only people onsite can access the data. However, some financial firms are cautious about how they use new technologies due to FINRA regulations on social networking websites and business communications. "Some financial firms don't even

allow the use of social media such as Facebook or LinkedIn due to the need for secrecy. When you have those kinds of concerns it impacts meeting planners," says Zint.

However, financial industry planners continue to adopt new technologies. "Meeting-related technologies can have a tremendous impact benefiting stakeholders, including planners, meeting hosts and conference attendees," says Zint. "For every meeting goal or objective, there is most likely a meeting technology available to deliver desired outcomes. It is imperative that meeting professionals embrace these innovative solutions which can be attained through educational opportunities through webcasts, case studies, online groups and/or industry association meetings," he advises.

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JW Marriott Starr Pass Resort & Spa, Tucson, AZ, has named **Kimberly Dunnegan** as a remote senior sales executive responsible for the Chicago/Midwest area as well as all central states. She formerly served as senior sales manager for the Marriott western Southwest sales office in Irvine, CA.

The Puerto Rico Convention Bureau has named **Neil J. Mullanaphy**, CHME, as senior vice president of sales based out of the Washington, DC, office. With more than 26 years of sales and marketing experience, he formerly served as executive director of sales and marketing for the Hawaii Convention Center/SMG.

Michael Masterson was named director of sales and marketing for Starwood Hotels & Resorts Hawaii, which is comprised of three resorts: The Westin Kaanapali Ocean Resort Villas, The Westin Maui Resort & Spa, Kaanapali and Sheraton Maui Resort & Spa. Masterson, who has more than 20 years of experience in hotel sales and marketing, most recently served as director of sales and marketing for The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua.

Brian Jones was named director of sales and marketing for The Pierre, A Taj Hotel, on New York's Central

Park. He most recently served as senior vice president, sales, Morgans Hotel Group.

Chateau on the Lake, Branson, MO, has named **David Hume** as director of sales. He was director of sales and marketing for Mission Point Resort, Mackinac Island, MI.

Laura Van Winkle-Mascari was named senior sales manager for Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort & Spa, Kona, HI. She was marketing and club coordinator at Hilton Grand Vacations in Waikoloa.

Jim Pedone was named director of sales and marketing at Miramonte Resort & Spa, Indian Wells, CA. With more than 20 years of luxury hotel experience, he most recently was executive director of sales and marketing for La Quinta Resort & Club and PGA West, La Quinta, CA.

Paige Cabacungan was named director of sales and marketing for The St. Regis Princeville Resort, Kauai, HI. Cabacungan, who brings more than 22 years of hospitality sales and marketing experience, formerly served as director of sales and marketing for The Westin Maui Resort & Spa and The Westin Kaanapali Ocean Resort Villas.

Blue Harbor Resort & Spa, Sheboygan, WI, has appointed **John Klemme** as senior sales manager. He was sales manager at Osthoff Resort on Elkhart Lake, WI.

The Westin Resort & Casino, Palm Beach, Aruba, has named **Michele Frank** as director of sales and marketing. Frank, who has more than 20 years of hospitality experience, most recently served as director of sales at The Westin Diplomat Golf Resort & Spa, Hollywood, FL. **I&FMM**

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Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau	15
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Omni Hotels & Resorts	972-871-5623	www.omnihotels.com	Mark Wykes	mwykes@omnihotels.com
Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate	407-238-6526	www.omnihotels.com/findahotel/orlando-championsgate/meetingfacilities.aspx	Group Sales	mcocha.leads@omnihotels.com
Palm Beach County Convention & Visitors Bureau	561-329-3753	www.palmbeachfl.com	Donna Del Gallo	ddelgallo@palmbeachfl.com
Pointe Hilton Resorts	602-870-8188	www.pointehilton.com	Staci Valentino	PHXSP-salesadm@hilton.com
Ponte Vedra Inn & Club	800-234-7842	www.pontevedra.com	Tony Fitzjohn	sales@pvresorts.com
Reunion Resort, a Grand Golf Resorts of Florida Collection	877-449-9768	www.grandgolfresorts.com	Group Sales	groups@salamanderhotels.com
Rosen Centre Hotel	407-996-9840	www.rosencentre.com	Todd Frappier	tfrappier@rosencentre.com
Rosen Plaza Hotel	407-996-9700	www.rosenplaza.com	Victoria Hall	sales@rosenplaza.com
Rosen Shingle Creek	407-996-9939	www.rosenshinglecreek.com	Leslie Menichini	sales@rosenhotels.com
Royal Caribbean International	800 762-0458	www.royalcaribbeanincentives.com	Lori Cassidy	royalmeetingsandincentives@rccl.com
Santa Fe Convention & Visitors Bureau	505-955-6210	www.santafe.org	Mary Pat Kloenne	mpkloenne@santafenm.gov
The Shores Resort & Spa	386-322-7262	www.shoresresort.com	Group Sales	salesadmin@shoresresort.com
South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa	702-797-8050	www.southpointcasino.com	Maureen Robinson	sales@southpointcasino.com
Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau	212-757-5944 ext. 237	www.myswitzerland.com/meetings	Caroline Pidroni	scib.usa@switzerland.com
Talking Stick Resort	480-850-7777	www.talkingstickresort.com	Group Sales	sales@talkingstickresort.com
Tulalip Resort Casino	360-716-6500	www.tulalipresort.com	Troy Longwith	sales@tulalipresort.com
Universal Orlando Resort	888-322-5531	www.uomeetingsandevents.com	Group Sales	meetings@universalorlando.com
Vdara Hotel & Spa	866-760-2489	www.vdara.com	Stephanie Windham	swindham@vdara.com
The Venetian/The Palazzo	702-414-4202	www.venetianpalazzomeetings.com	Chandra Allison	chandra.allison@venetianpalazzo.com
Walt Disney World Resort	321-939-7112	www.disneymeetings.com	Anne Hamilton	meetings@disneyworld.com
Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort	800-524-4939	www.swandolphinmeetings.com	Eric Opron	meetings@swandolphin.com
Washington Hilton	202-328-2080	www.hiltonsofcdc.com	Group Sales	dcawh-salesadm@hilton.com
Washington State Convention & Trade Center	206-694-5030	www.wsctc.com	Michael T. McQuade	sales@wsctc.com
The Westin Casuarina Las Vegas Hotel, Casino & Spa	702-836-5934	www.westin.com/lasvegas	Sandra Horvath	shorvath@westinlv.com
The Westin La Cantera Resort	210-558-2229	www.westinlacantera.com	Group Sales	info@westinlacantera.com
Wild Horse Pass Hotel & Casino	520-796-4923	www.wingjariver.com	Denise Heintz	denise.heintz@wingjariver.com
Wynn/Encore	888-320-7117	www.wynnmeetings.com	Steve Blanner	hotelsales@wynnlasvegas.com

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