

ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

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THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT



Tame the Attendance Beast

The Beauty of
Family-Friendly
Venues **PAGE 16**

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On the Cover: The Beast welcomes guests to "Beauty and the Beast"-themed attractions, which debuted December 6, 2012 in the New Fantasyland, the largest expansion in the history of the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, FL.

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Tools and Tactics for Success



By the time you read this, we may or may not have tumbled over the so-called fiscal cliff. Regardless, economic uncertainty is no friend of the exhibition industry. The Center for Exhibition Industry Research's Third Quarter Index shows that the Total Index increased, but only by 0.9 percent, a deceleration of growth from the first quarter. Commenting on the Index, CEIR's economist Allen Shaw, Ph.D., chief economist for Global Economic Consulting Associates Inc., noted in a statement, "Concern about the fiscal cliff and the global economy has continued to take a toll in the exhibition industry. The results show that the exhibition industry continues to grow, but attendees and exhibitors are being cautious due to the uncertainty about the global economy."

What's a planner to do? Use all the tools and tactics at your disposal to counter negative trends and keep moving forward! Start with smart site selection guaranteed to "Tame the Attendance Beast" (see our cover story on page 16). Perennially popular family-friendly destinations such as Walt Disney World Resort, Disneyland Resort and Universal Orlando Resort as well as other themed resorts offer added incentives for attendance: Parents who cannot otherwise leave home for a length of time to attend a conference can do so when the kids are included; and the shared experience of memorable events and activities enhances engagement with their association family as well. Family-inclusive attendance creates valuable new sponsorship opportunities, too.

Also necessary now more than ever for successful events are savvy negotiation skills to navigate the resurgent seller's market ("The Tables Have Turned," page 22); and a smart plan to prove meeting ROI for both the organization and its members ("What's the True Value of Your Meeting?" page 26). And, CVBs offer a tool planners can use to prove and leverage the value their meetings bring to a destination: Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP, managing director of empowerMINT.com and the Event Impact Calculator for Destination Marketing Association International, has the details on page 8.

Doing all of this will help to keep the momentum going in 2013. In our forward-looking feature "Outlook 2013" on page 10, Kent Allaway, CEM, CMP, vice president, meetings and trade shows for the Produce Marketing Association, already sees a silver lining: "We're starting to see a good lift in attendance across the board at meetings," he says. "We're also seeing excitement about people getting back to face-to-face meetings after the recession. So I think those things mean we're looking at a good uptick in association meetings and trade shows for 2013."

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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Anaheim's New Virtual Planning Tool Helps Create Events



The Grand Plaza special event outdoor space will debut in Anaheim in January 2013.

ANAHEIM, CA — The Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau (AOCVCB) debuted Grand PlazaVille, a new online application that allows meeting planners to seamlessly visualize their event in the Anaheim Convention Center's newest outdoor space — the Grand Plaza — a 100,000-sf outdoor, multiuse special event space conveniently located outside of the convention center's front entrance. It features a pedestrian-friendly campus with lush landscaping, expansive walkways, dramatic water fountains, ample seating areas and infrastructure necessary to support a variety of special events. According to Charles Ahlers, president of the AOCVCB, "Grand PlazaVille will allow planners the opportunity to use their imagination within the Grand Plaza and truly customize events to meet their exact specifications and see the results immediately. This is yet another way for us to raise the bar for events and meetings at the Anaheim Convention Center that will set our destination apart."

www.anaheimoc.org

IAEE's Expo! Expo! Held in Orlando

ORLANDO, FL — The International Association of Exhibitions and Events' Expo! Expo! was held December 4–6 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL, with an estimated attendance of 2,000 (see photo opposite page). The Trade Show News Network reported that the event featured a busy show floor, networking opportunities and educational sessions such as "How to Execute a Virtual Event: Five Key Building Blocks" or "Seven Rules for Content Marketing – Building Buzz Before, During and After an Event." Social media was the featured topic at the general session featuring Rick Calvert of New Media Expo and Eric Ly, co-founder of LinkedIn and president of Presdo. Also, the chairman's gavel was passed from Doreen Biela to Jason McGraw of InfoComm International. The final day included a luncheon sponsored by Visit Houston, next year's IAEE host. Also, the Pinnacle Award was presented to Patricia Farias Barlow, CEM, CEO of the Puerto Vallarta/International Convention Center and CEO of Farias Global Expos, and the Distinguished Service Award went to Jennifer Hoff, CEM, general manager of VP International. BXB Online, partnering with CNTV and INXPO, offered a virtual extension of the event. www.iaee.com

Group Tours Great Hall Construction at New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center



NEW ORLEANS, LA — Members of the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center's National Customer Advisory Council, composed of meeting planners, were recently escorted on a hard-hat tour of the center's Great Hall construction project. The tour showcased the redesign progress of the building's 60,300-sf column-free ballroom, 4,000-sf junior ballroom and new pedestrian plaza. The redesign also includes a 9-by-45-foot high-definition video display board. The Great Hall is set to open January 25, 2013 in time for Super Bowl XLVII events.

Members of the customer advisory council and convention center representatives pictured at the recent tour included (l to r) Brad Weaber, CMP, Smith Bucklin; Susan Fischer, Experient; Norris Orms, CAE, HIMSS; Vanessa Mobley, Association Management Center; Lori Jenks, Nielsen Business Media; Linda Still, CMP, American Association for Cancer Research; Tim Ricker, Water Environment Federation; Debra Rosencrance, CMP, CAE, American Academy of Ophthalmology; Allison Box, American Rental Association; Douglas Nichols, Equipment Mechanic I, Convention Center; Melvin Rodrigue, President, Ernest N. Morial New Orleans Exhibition Hall Authority; David Kliman, facilitator; Brian Tully; Patti Palacios, Globaux Source; Katie Riggs, CMP, Raybourn Group International; Ron Estrada, National Council of La Raza; Ellen Silver, American Gastroenterological Association; and Tim Lamont, Helms Briscoe. www.mccno.com



Photo credits: 1. Oscar & Associates Inc.; 2. VisitPittsburgh; 3. Global Spectrum; 4. ASAE; 5. Daytona Beach Area CVB; 6. ASAE; 7. ICCA; 8. Visit Phoenix

1 The opening party for IAEE's Expo! Expo! was held at The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort. IAEE's annual meeting and exhibition convened at the Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, FL, December 4–6 (see story on opposite page). **2** VisitPittsburgh welcomed 17 meeting planners, including association planners, to the city for a familiarization tour during the annual Light-Up Night holiday celebration. **3** Joe Capitanelli, regional marketing director for Global Spectrum and marketing manager at the Global Spectrum-managed St. Charles Convention Center, St. Charles, MO, received the Pacesetter Award from the Convention Industry Council (CIC). (l to r) Karen Kotowski, CEO, CIC; Shura Garnett, R.V.P., Global Spectrum; Joe Capitanelli; and Terri Breining, chair of CIC's Hall of Leaders Advisory Board. **4** Shown at ASAE's Fall Leadership Retreat November 11-13 in Charleston, SC, are (l to r) John H. Graham IV, CAE, president and CEO, ASAE; Joseph M. McGuire, CAE, president, Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers, chairman of ASAE; and Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. **5** Calvary Apostolic Church of Columbus, OH, performed during the Daytona Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau's presentation at the 2012 Rejuvenate Marketplace in Columbus in October. **6** ASAE held its 2012 CIO Summit and Technology Conference & Expo, December 4-6, at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, Washington, DC, with 1,179 total participants. Shown is Reggie Henry, CAE, chief technology officer, ASAE. **7** In recognition of her outstanding contribution to ICCA and the international meetings industry, Anne Wallin Rødven, convention director at VisitOslo, received the Moises Shuster Award during the 51st ICCA Congress in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in October. **8** More than 20 convention and meeting planners visited the Phoenix (AZ) Convention Center for a Buyer's Education Trip in early November.



Meeting Metrics

Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP



How to Leverage the Value that Your Event Brings to the Meeting Destination

According to a study released by the Convention Industry Council last year, meetings in the United States generate \$263 billion in spending, \$11.3 billion in state and local tax revenue and support 1.7 million jobs annually. But what about YOUR meeting? What impact does it have on the meeting destination in terms of spending by your attendees, exhibitors and organization, by the number of local jobs supported and by the amount of local taxes generated?

Those values have been difficult to ascertain and, until now, have been estimates at best. However, our industry has evolved, and so has the methodology used to place a value on our events. In these days of economic awareness, government spending accountability and social conscience, having the ability to bring your meeting's value to the local community that supports it is not only good business but creates good public relations.

In September 2011 Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI), the trade association for convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs), launched a breakthrough tool that can accurately project the economic value of an event to a specific destination, and since that time, CVBs have calculated more than 7,000 events. The Event Impact Calculator (EIC), developed by Tourism Economics, a subsidiary of Oxford Economics, enables subscribing CVBs to accurately measure how your meeting or convention will contribute financially to the host community, both in direct and indirect spending. By providing CVBs with a nationwide standardized platform that is locally customized according to per diem costs unique to their destinations, the online calculator delineates the economic value of your event in terms of sales,

jobs, wages and taxes; and comparing the total value of the event to the hosting costs borne by the community — such as incentives and concessions — reveals the destination's return on investment (ROI). Since its introduction, more than 100 convention and visitors bureaus have become annual subscribers to the online data-centric tool.

Here's how it works: The calculator is programmed to be city-specific because it has downloaded data on costs by sector from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Each CVB is assigned a unique user name and password, which provide access to the model for their destination. The CVB professional who is creating the report enters the type of event (business meeting, conference, trade show), duration and year that the event will be held as well as information on attendance, event costs and contract values. The resulting report summarizes the economic impact of the event, and the destination's ROI. The economic impact is broken down into these categories: amount of direct spending; indirect and induced spending (the ripple effect from direct spend dollars); amount generated in state and local taxes; number of local jobs directly supported by your meeting.

Obviously, the EIC is invaluable to the CVBs, but it also has great value to the meeting planner. For the CVB, the calculator validates the value of their marketing efforts, substantiating the funding they receive from their local government and stakeholders, and allows them to compare the benefits of booking one meeting over another. But for meeting planners, the calculator confirms the value of their meeting, adding to negotiation power, and provides a positive message that supports the value their meeting has for the local economy.

Most organizations are very concerned with social responsibility and are searching for ways to support SR initiatives on a local, national and global basis. In their year-end sustainability report, the American Chemical Society (ACS) used the EIC report figures from their spring 2011 241st National Meeting and Exposition in Anaheim, CA, to show members that the convention generated \$26.81 million

database maintains a thriving, robust, constantly updated collection of meeting and convention histories, input by the CVBs where your meetings took place. These post-event reports are especially important in your individual facility negotiations, and may be accessed at empowerMINT.com.

The best first step when you begin planning your meeting has always been the convention and visitors bureau, the

For meeting planners, the calculator confirms the value of their meeting, adding to negotiation power, and provides a positive message that supports the value their meeting has to the local economy.

in economic value, and supported 5,433 area jobs; the fall 2011 242nd National Meeting and Exposition in Denver, CO produced \$20.75 million in economic value and supported 4,782 jobs. The EIC was an irreplaceable tool in producing this data and allowing the society to substantiate one of the ways in which the organization practices social responsibility. Your meeting may not be on the scale of the ACS conventions, but even the smallest event garners surprising benefits for the community.

It should be noted that as essential as it is, the EIC in no way minimizes the importance of maintaining historical data, which shows trending over the years for your meeting and is a necessary part of your RFP. DMAI's empowerMINT

destination expert. When you begin researching your next potential meeting location, ask whether the CVB is one of the more than 100 that subscribes to the EIC. If they do, ask them to create your report. As your partners in meeting planning, the CVBs will be happy to work with you in articulating and leveraging the value of your event.

See related stories on pages 22 and 26.

AC&F

Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP, is the managing director of empowerMINT.com and the Event Impact Calculator for Destination Marketing Association International. She previously served as executive vice president and chief strategy officer for the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau, as well as a distinguished career in sales with Marriott.

OUTLOOK 2013

There's a Silver Lining to the New Normal

By John Buchanan

After a deep and enduring recession that led to unprecedented drops in attendance, sharply reduced budgets and downsized planner operations, the association meeting market is on the road to recovery.

"Budgets are growing," says John S. Parke, CMP, founder, president and CEO of Dennis, MA-based performance improvement firm Leadership Synergies, which has a large roster of association clients. "And the reason they will is that they have to go up in order to account for the improving economic climate. One of the leading indicators of change within organizations, relative to the economy and levels of activity, is that people have more meetings



Kent Allaway, CEM, CMP
Vice President, Meetings and Trade Shows
Produce Marketing Association
Newark, DE

"The other good news is that we're also starting to see a good lift in attendance across the board at meetings. We're also seeing excitement about people getting back to face-to-face meetings after the recession."

to talk about change, to talk about new initiatives, to talk about organizational strategies. And a leading indicator of increases in those kinds of activities is more meetings. And to hold more meetings, you have to have bigger budgets."

Kent Allaway, CEM, CMP, vice president, meetings and trade shows, at the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) in Newark, DE, shares Parke's optimistic assessment. His budget will increase about 7 percent for next year, after rising just 4 percent last year.

PMA also will slightly expand the number of meetings it holds. "The other good news," says Allaway, who heads a six-person meetings team, "is that we're also starting to see a good lift in attendance across the board at meetings. We're also seeing excitement about people getting back to face-to-face meetings after the recession. So I think those things mean we're looking at a good uptick in association meetings and trade shows for 2013."

Johnnie White, executive director of the Center for Education at the Cardiovascular Research Foundation (CRF) in New York City, and incoming chair of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), agrees that attendance at association meetings and events is finally returning to pre-recession levels. "I think we'll see continuing increases in attendance in 2013," White says. "It may be slight, but I think there will be an increase. And I think the growth that we are going to see will be from attendees that come from outside the U.S. More and more associations are attracting more and more attendees from somewhere else in the world, and I think that is going to continue. That's where the growth will continue to be."

But the overarching factor, White says, is that organizations and individuals are spending money again to go to meetings. "And that means they will travel more to go to events if they see value in them," he says.

Deborah Sexton, president and CEO of PCMA in Chicago, is more cautious in her predictions for next year. "I think budgets are going to remain flat," says Sexton, a widely respected industry observer and leader. "There are still a lot of unknowns in the market about what the next few years are going to look like. So I think a lot of people are going to remain cautious. I don't think many organizations are going to actually reduce budgets any further. But I don't see them going up either."

And even if budget increases exceed even the most optimistic expectations, expenditures will never get back to pre-recession peaks, says Michael Lyons, who joined Norwalk, CT-based AIBTM as its exhibition director in October. "The change is per-

manent," Lyons says. "The cutbacks are clear, and they are not going away. And those changes have been made to accommodate pressures on budgets."

Amy Ledoux, CAE, CMP, senior vice president, meetings, expositions and events at ASAE in Washington, DC, says she is "cautiously optimistic" that the worst days of the meetings indus-



Johnnie White
Executive Director
Center for Education
Cardiovascular Research
Foundation, New York, NY

"I think we'll see continuing increases in attendance in 2013. It may be slight, but I think there will be an increase. And I think the growth that we are going to see will be from attendees that come from outside the U.S."

try downturn are a thing of the past and that a number of major industries are enjoying robust growth. "For example," Ledoux says, "many medical associations are doing very well, and things are very much on the upswing. In 2011-2012 we, too, at ASAE have seen attendance and exhibit sales on the rise again."

David DuBois, who took office as president and CEO of Dallas-based The International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) in October after long stints at MPI, PCMA and as head of the Fort Worth Convention & Visitors Bureau, also is cautiously optimistic about the near-term and long-term futures of the industry. He cites new research from CEIR's Predict Conference in New York that meeting growth is now tracking with increases in GDP. "That does mean that growth is still a little bit sluggish," DuBois says. "But the important thing, in terms of what the CEIR research has shown, is that we have seen some growth for the last eight consecutive quarters."

Lyons agrees with DuBois that the meetings industry is now poised to recover and grow along with the U.S. economy. Lyons believes that a combination of synergistic factors will start to build real momentum on both fronts next year.

"We're still coming out of a long recession," he says, "but all indications are positive for 2013." He notes that a number of industry surveys have confirmed that in recent months. "And even though budgets are being watched carefully, most of the indications we're seeing are showing there will be an uptick in spending compared to 2012."

THE PENDULUM SWINGS

Naturally, a recovering meetings market means increasing

demand for hotel rooms. And, in turn, that demand has swung the proverbial pendulum from a seller's market that created once-in-a-lifetime bargains to a seller's market hoteliers aim to exploit in order to recoup the historic losses they generated during the recession. (See related story on page 22.)

"Rates are going up," Parke says. "Contract and attrition terms are going to become more severe. Cancellation terms are going to start to show up again. Rates for meeting rooms and the cost of food and beverage are going to go up. And all of those kinds of requirements are going to start to be more enforced because the hotels have the leverage now based on demand. But on the other hand, that kind of leverage only comes to you if you have the availability of rooms and space when planners want them. So the impact will vary from destination to destination and hotel to hotel."

Ledoux concurs that the negotiating leverage is quickly returning to the hotel side — and will stay there for a while.

"Many associations have been able to negotiate favorable rates for their attendees as well as favorable rates for the organization in hotels and facilities over the past few years due to the economic downturn," she says. "Now that the economy and face-to-face meetings are on the incline, it is a greater challenge in booking meetings for associations regarding finding dates, rates and space that work for the organization. This shift also impacts associations and their members due to the fact that the planner may have been able to negotiate lower room rates and now the rates are higher and the same goes for pricing on food and beverage and other services. And the shift to a seller's market is going to impact association budgets and attendee expectations."

BIGGER CONCERNS AND ISSUES

One current factor that will surely have more impact on the industry than a seller's market is the lingering economic crisis in

"I think a lot of people are going to remain cautious. I don't think many organizations are going to actually reduce budgets any further. But I don't see them going up either."



Deborah Sexton
President and CEO
PCMA
Chicago, IL

Europe, DuBois says. "That is the elephant in the room," he says. "Many of our show organizers do business internationally, whether that means inbound or outbound. So a big question is what will be happening in Europe. And that is of concern to association convention organizers — for meetings here and overseas."

The issue is crucial, DuBois says, because in recent years growth among international attendees has been a key driver of the industry — especially before the recession.

Lyons, who now manages a portfolio of major international events under the AIBTM banner, shares DuBois' concern. "What's happening in Europe is of concern to everyone," he says. "And the continuing concern is that what's going on there will start to have a ripple effect on the U.S. market, because the two regions are very closely tied together. On the other hand, however, the indications from Europe seem to be that they think they have now righted their ship. But it's still something that's being watched very closely because of the impact it could have on attendance at international conferences. And we've even seen that at our AIBTM show."

Meanwhile, however, White has seen growing attendance at CRF's overseas events. "We decided a couple of years ago to start doing more events outside the U.S. to provide more exposure to people elsewhere in the world about what we do," he says. "And



David DuBois
President and CEO
International Association of
Exhibitions and Events
Dallas, TX

Only 25 percent of IAEE's members attend their annual meeting. "So the opportunity to get the other 75 percent to experience what happened at those meetings via hybrid technology is enormous."

that has helped us tremendously in terms of the overall success of our meetings."

ATTENDEE-EXHIBITOR ENGAGEMENT

Another issue that in the long run will be more important than any fluctuations in the European economy is a steadily growing focus on new and better ways to foster interaction between attendees and exhibitors at conferences and trade shows. That's because at their most fundamental level, the very purpose of exhibitions at such events is for sellers to successfully write business with qualified buyers in attendance.

As a result, a long-emerging trend toward pre-set appointments— and now fully developed hosted buyer programs — has become mainstream.

Lyons notes that AIBTM has been one of the biggest innovators and most productive practitioners when it comes to hosted buyer programs, which are now included at all of its global iterations.

"Hosted buyer programs are now a concept that has been widely

"But I also believe there is a silver lining to (the new normal) for the people who have survived. People were forced to...re-evaluate their situation and look at new ways of doing business to be more effective and productive."



Michael Lyons
Exhibition Director
AIBTM
Norwalk, CT

embraced," Lyons says "That's because the issue that overrides all others today for exhibitors is ROI, and that means putting qualified buyers that have been fully vetted in front of exhibitors so business can get done in an effective and efficient manner."

Although not a lot of selling and buying gets done at White's meetings, which are intended to provide continuing education to doctors, he agrees that industry-wide, attendee-exhibitor engagement strategies have become a universal topic of debate and analysis. As a result, he expects the deployment of hosted buyer programs to continue to increase. "Exhibitors more and more want to know in advance they're going to be meeting with some key buyers," he says. "And more and more, exhibitors at major shows have been demanding more of a guarantee of ROI."

Allaway and PMA have been using their own version of a hosted buyer program for the last three years. Exhibitors "nominate" the buyers, both from the U.S. and around the world, that they are most interested in attracting. Then PMA goes about luring a consensus-based roster of well-vetted attendees whose airfare and accommodations are paid in full. However, unlike with textbook hosted buyer programs, pre-set appointments are not required. "We don't tell buyers they have to be in a particular place at 2:30 this afternoon," Allaway says. "It's just logically assumed they will get together at some point. But we leave that up to them."

Of particular interest to exhibitors at PMA's annual show are

"Now that the economy and face-to-face meetings are on the incline, it is a greater challenge in booking meetings for associations regarding finding dates, rates and space that work for the organization."



Amy Ledoux, CAE, CMP
Senior Vice President, Meetings,
Expositions & Events
ASAE
Washington, DC

buyers from Latin America, because the show is a very efficient and cost-effective way to build export sales of fresh produce to geographically feasible markets for perishable products.

DuBois agrees that given the success of hosted buyer programs in major industries, their broad application in the next few years is inevitable. As a result, IAEE is now pondering how to create one. "We're always working on new ways to engage attendees with exhibitors," DuBois says. "For example, for the past four years, we've had a program we call 'Deal Center' that is designed to create more interaction between attendees and exhibitors on the show floor. And we spend a lot of time educating our exhibitors with things like webinars. Now we, too, are looking at developing a hosted buyer program. We're looking at all of our options for 2013."

HYBRID MEETINGS

Another major trend is the surging interest in, and rush to create, hybrid meetings. Although they were once feared as a danger to face-to-face events, they are now understood to be a powerful weapon in an association's arsenal when it comes to either creating incremental new interest in face-to-face events or generating new revenues streams from educational content.

Major industry organizations including IAEE, ASAE and PCMA now agree that hybrid meetings are essential to the long-term health of association activities, DuBois says.

"According to data gathered by ASAE, less than 20 percent of association members actually attend meetings in person," DuBois says, adding that only 25 percent of IAEE's members attend their annual meeting. "So the opportunity to get the other 75 percent to experience what happened at those meetings via hybrid technology is enormous."

PCMA and Sexton have been pioneers in championing hybrid meetings to the industry. "Our example is a perfect example of what can happen," Sexton says. "Our hybrid events have successfully driven attendance to our face-to-face meetings. If the technology is managed effectively, it drives your educational brand and it drives a bet-

ter understanding that you can get the education online. But you can't get the peer-to-peer collaboration and networking you get at a face-to-face event. And as people realize that, they become more interested in your face-to-face events."

But even members who will never attend a face-to-face event are prospects for valuable educational content that can be sold as a standalone product.

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White and CRF have been monetizing content for four years. As a result of their success, White expects that innovative ways to generate income from content will become a bona fide industry trend, starting in 2013. "And what we've found is that once they've experienced it, people want more and more," he says, adding that the key to sustained success is not to cannibalize the most important content that is a draw for an association's major meetings.

THE HOTEL PERSPECTIVE

One lingering trend from the last few years is an abbreviated booking window for some meetings that now can present challenges for planners, based on availability.

"We continue to see shorter lead times in planning a lot of meetings," says Sherry Romello, senior director, Hilton Meetings And Product Management, in McLean, VA.

As a competitive strategy since the recession, Romello says, hoteliers have been working to leverage brand loyalty with more and more meeting-related amenities popular with planners and attendees.

"I think pretty much all hotel brands have adopted that kind of strategy if meeting business is important to them," Romello says. "And Hilton certainly recognizes the importance of meeting business. So we know that there are ways we can leverage our relationships to better understand what planners need and what we can bring to those relationships."

Nevertheless, Romello acknowledges that the pendulum is swinging back to a seller's market.



Betty Wilson
Vice President, North America
Divisional Sales
Starwood Hotels & Resorts
Stamford, CT

"One of the biggest concerns we're seeing is about managing risk, which is resulting in shortened booking windows...it can also mean repositioning or reimagining how meetings and trade shows generate revenues."

"But is it fully back to a seller's market yet?" she says. "I don't know that anyone can say that. And it also varies by market. There are some that are incredibly strong, but there are others where hotels are still willing to work with you."

Meanwhile, Betty Wilson, vice president, North America divisional sales at Stamford, CT-headquartered Starwood Hotels & Resorts, sees what she considers to be an important issue among association planners.

"Hilton recognizes the importance of meeting business. So we know that there are ways we can leverage our relationships to better understand what planners need and what we can bring to those relationships."



Sherry Romello
Senior Director
Hilton Meetings and Product
Management
McLean, VA

"One of the biggest concerns we're seeing is about managing risk, which at times is resulting in shortened booking windows," Wilson says. "But it can also mean repositioning or reimagining how meetings and trade shows generate revenues, especially amid generational and demographic changes that impact attendance."

Despite such challenges, however, Romello is confident that meeting demand will come back. "I definitely think we will return to pre-recession 2008 levels," she says. "It will be a slow, steady return, but I think it will happen."

THE NEW NORMAL

Even though most industry observers see significant upside potential for the meetings market next year, daunting challenges remain. And top among them is a reality altered by the recession and its aftermath.

That new reality is now commonly known as "the new normal." "The new normal is something everyone talks about now," Lyons says. "And the new normal is the result of what we have all gone through over the last four years. It's a fact that the playing field of the convention industry has been altered. Among the changes have been cutbacks in staffing and budgets, and that has changed the role for many people, such as meeting planners who have been impacted by all that. But I also believe there is a silver lining to it for the people who have survived. And that is that people were forced to take a step back and re-evaluate their situation and look at new ways of doing business to be more effective and productive."

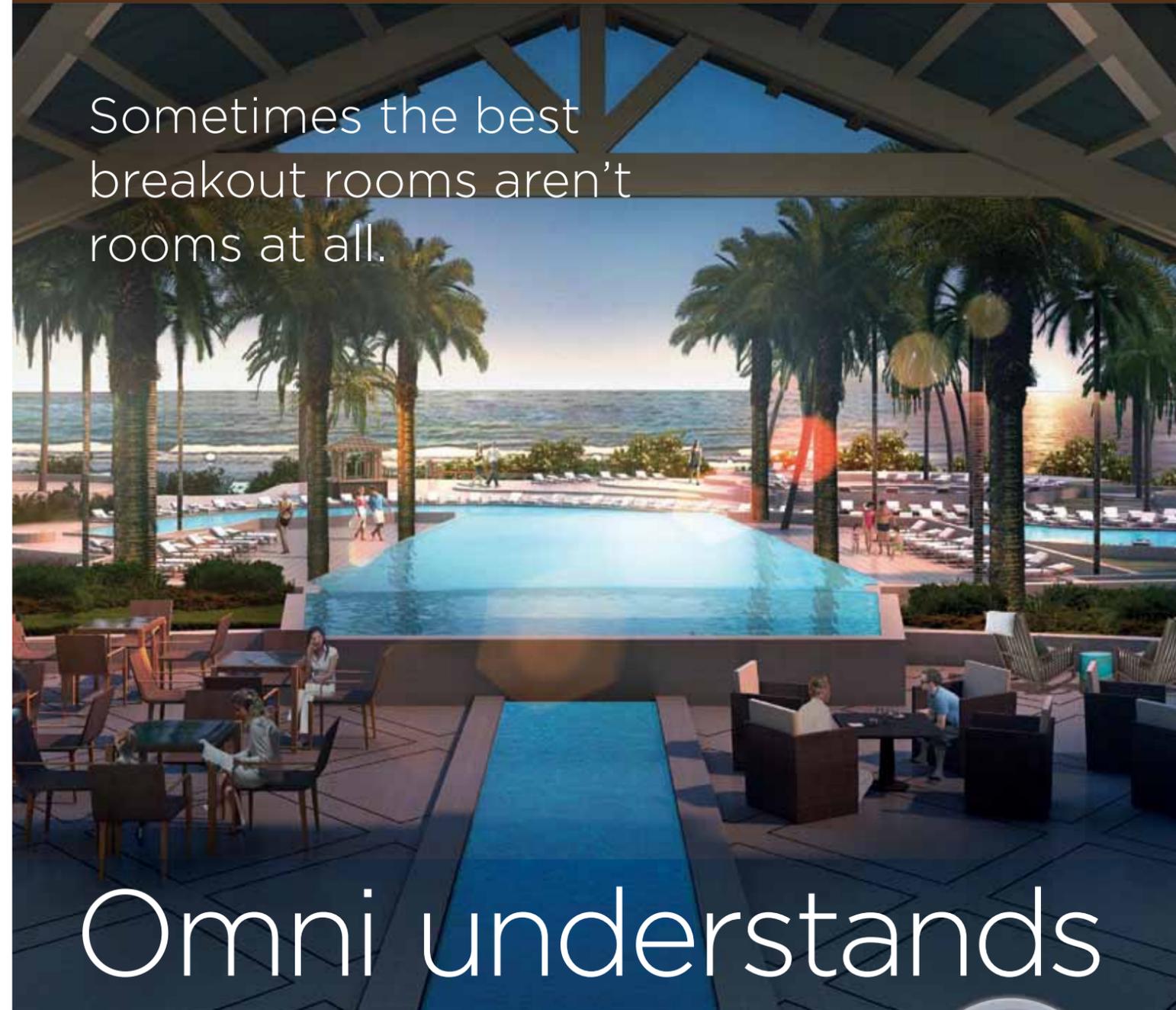
That means that the role of planners will continue to evolve, Ledoux says. "A planner that will be viewed as a valuable asset to their organization will always be looking at how they can improve the meeting operations end of things as well as the meeting experience," she says. "It is important that all aspects of a meeting are now reviewed with a critical eye. To do things a certain way because that is how they have always been done will set an organization's meetings up for steady decline. The model and the approaches need to be challenged to help the organization innovate so to remain relevant to both attendees and exhibitors."

That, Ledoux says, is the most important aspect of the new normal.

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Tame the Attendance Beast

The Beauty of Family-Friendly Venues Lies in Their Value and Universal Appeal

By Stella Johnson

How important is it for association members to be able to include family and friends at an upcoming meeting or convention away from home? Very.

That is the conclusion of a recent survey of 4,300 global business travelers of all types by Wyndham Hotels, said to be the largest hotelier in the world with more than 7,000 properties in its portfolio.

Backed by impressive statistics, Wyndham revealed that 52 percent of U.S. business travelers have had family members or guests join them while away from home at one time or another, as compared to 33 percent of rather reluctant business travelers from the U.K.

Furthermore, among all who do travel on business, nearly half have tacked on some leisure time while on the trip, while a quarter of those polled say that they always do.

This may be even more the case for convention-goers whose companies may or may not be paying for their attendance at an industry association event. Beyond the desire of a shared experience is a golden opportunity to combine a family vacation with business by extending the stay for a few extra days in a value destination rich in entertainment and attractions.

Association meeting planners, who are tasked with identifying ideal family-friendly meeting properties, already know that theme-park granddaddies such as Walt Disney Parks and Resorts and Universal Orlando Resort can be counted on to deliver a successful experience. But they're also finding that less-familiar themed resorts are gaining in popularity, from the northwoods-themed Great Wolf Lodge resorts to the Africa-inspired Kalahari Resorts and beyond.

RUSTIC RECREATION

The rustic Great Wolf Lodge resorts are distinguished by their



The Beast welcomes guests to "Beauty and the Beast" attractions in the newly expanded Fantasyland in Walt Disney World Resort. A family joins Belle and Lumiere in a storytelling adventure at Enchanted Tales with Belle.

impressive indoor water parks. Great Wolf offers 10 meeting-style, but very family-oriented resorts located throughout the U.S.

Last April, the Michigan State Police Troopers Association (MSPTA) based in East Lansing, MI, booked the Great Wolf Lodge in Traverse City, MI, for a quarterly meeting. Due to the group's statewide membership, events are generally held at different locations throughout Michigan.

The Traverse City resort features state-of-the-art meeting space for smaller groups, with flexibility for conferences, training sessions, workshops, catered banquets and networking events. In addition, there are themed dining rooms for individual diners or small groups. Family-oriented suites, which incorporate specialty sleeping quarters for kids, include the Wolf Den, KidKamp and KidCabin. There also are Whirlpool Fireplace Suites and Loft Fireplace Suites.

The amusement side of the lodge includes the Northern Lights games arcade for the whole family and MagiQuest just for kids, but the real attraction is a 38,000-sf, year-round, indoor water park called Bear Track Landing. It offers nine slides, two

pools, a four-story, interactive water fort, plus other water features such as jumbo whirlpools, individually allocated for adults or teens.

MSPTA's Marketing Director Pat Strzalkowski sums up the experience: "Our members love that they can bring their families. It enables them to spend time together and stay involved with the association. And, while at the lodge, everything is under one roof. Attendees are able to check in with their families during meeting breaks, and can quickly meet up with them when business is completed. There are so many entertainment options to choose from that, aside from our dinner buffet, we have not found it necessary to organize any specific activities for our members, which is great for planners."

At the April meeting there were approximately 165 departmental members in attendance from all over the state, and most of them brought their families, totaling more than 400 people, including spouses and children. This was the association's fourth meeting at the Great Wolf Lodge since 2008, and its popularity with the group has been proven by both attendance numbers and the number of requests it gets to return.

"Our members also appreciate that the Great Wolf Lodge extends

a special discount through its Howling Heroes program to military, law enforcement, firefighters and other first-responders,” Strzalkowski says. “It provides an option to visit the lodge when the MSPTA is not holding a meeting on-site. This relationship has developed into more than just a business partnership. We will definitely return in the future.”

Strzalkowski says that the troopers utilized meeting space to accommodate an executive board session for approximately 20 people. “Concurrently, meeting space was used to conduct a training session for 125. Finally, there was a session for all attendees at this conference. We held a pizza buffet that provided an excellent dinner option for all. The staff at the lodge did an outstanding job serving our members and keeping food stations supplied. We timed dinner so everyone could return to the water park before story time in the lobby — something both children and parents thoroughly look forward to and enjoy at the end of the day. We also held evening hospitality rooms where our members visit, share stories and reenergize,” Strzalkowski says.

SAFARI SO GOOD

The Kalahari Resorts and Convention Centers in Sandusky and Wisconsin Dells are designed for family fun all under one roof, and are purpose-built to accommodate conventions large and small. They both feature huge indoor and outdoor water parks along with their authentic African art and artifacts, and safari-style décor, restaurants and retail outlets. Sandusky’s indoor water park is the nation’s largest while the Dells indoor water park is the biggest in the Midwest. The Sandusky Kalahari Resort also offers the 115,000-sf Safari Outdoor Adventure and Animal Park for all ages. The Wisconsin Dells resort boasts a 110,000-sf indoor theme park with Ferris wheel, climbing walls, bowling, mini-golf, go carts and more.



The indoor water park at the Kalahari Resort and Convention Center in Sandusky, OH, is the largest of its kind in the nation.



Pat Strzalkowski
Marketing Director
Michigan State Police
Troopers Association
East Lansing, MI

“Our members love that they can bring their families. It enables them to spend time together and stay involved with the association.”

\$1 million in upgrades and contains approximately 750 rooms and suites, and its own 100,000-sf convention center. The African theme is carried throughout the convention centers as well. Conference attendees who elect to stay beyond the meeting are offered discounted group rates.

In 2014, the safari travels east and lands in the Poconos, PA, where Kalahari will open its first resort in the Northeast. It will offer 450 guest units, 65,000 sf of flexible space as part of its phase-one opening, spa venues, an 18-hole golf course and popular outdoor activities such as horseback riding, archery, fishing, snowshoeing, sporting clays and more. It also will feature an indoor and an outdoor water park, a 30,000-sf theme park, and two full-service restaurants, among other options. Phase two (2017) and phase three (2020) will see additional guest rooms and meeting space, as well as other features.

CARIBBEAN COOL

Nelson Flores of the Puerto Rico Manufacturers Association (PRMA) in San Juan, PR, has given the El Conquistador Resort, a Waldorf Astoria Resort in Fajardo, PR, a “thumbs up” for 10 consecutive years now. “El Conquistador is simply the best hotel for conventions in Puerto Rico,” notes Flores, director of special events. “We use it for every aspect of our annual four-day meeting including lodging, meals, meetings, evening events, shows and dancing, all in one location.”

It’s easy to see why the famous resort (a member of The Waldorf Astoria Collection) is such a winner with the group, as it drives attendance year after year.

Located in an old fishing village, some of the grand hotel’s special features include five themed villages, a championship golf course, a casino, tennis courts, a Golden Door spa, and almost two dozen restaurants, eateries, bars and lounges. But the newest addition is a \$12 million water park, which makes the resort perfect for kids who come along with a parent or two.

The Coqui Water Park is a state-of-the-art aquatic playground for both children and adults. It is themed after the nearby El Yunque rain forest. Special water features include a tower with three high-speed water slides, an 8,000-sf river where guests swirling around in inner tubes can flow along its waters through the park, and an

infinity-edge swimming pool among many other highlights. In addition, the resort provides golf demonstration clinics, guided environmental tours in the El Yunque rain forest, novelty sports such as beach baseball and a kids club call Camp Coqui.

Also on-property is a 15-screen cinema and Trappers Turn, a 27-hole golf course featuring golf carts with GPS technology. The 884-room Sandusky resort claims to have the region’s largest resort convention center with 215,000 sf of flexible space including a 38,000-sf ballroom, after a recent expansion. The convention center now can accommodate up to 5,200 attendees. The Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin recently invested more than

infinity-edge swimming pool among many other highlights. In addition, the resort provides golf demonstration clinics, guided environmental tours in the El Yunque rain forest, novelty sports such as beach baseball and a kids club call Camp Coqui.

Palomino Island, the resort’s private, 100-acre tropical island for water sports, from snorkeling to windsurfing, and from hiking to horseback riding, is also a hit with groups that bring family members and guests.

The 750-room El Conquistador is also impressively designed for meetings, exhibitions and conventions with 100,000 sf of flexible indoor/outdoor meeting space including the 21,090-sf Grand Atlantic Ballroom — the largest in Puerto Rico — and the 19,982-sf Grand Caribbean Ballroom.

When PRMA held its 84th annual convention at El Conquistador this past June, they booked 400 guest rooms for the 225 members who attended the convention, plus hundreds more by way of family, friends and other visitors.

“We are always very happy with the turnout of our convention at El Conquistador,” says Flores. “To us, it is very important that our members are treated to excellent service, and we get that level of treatment year after year from the people at the resort. In fact, we just signed on for two more years.”

BIG PARKS FOR SMALL GROUPS

Meeting planners who organize small events should not be deterred from investigating the many attributes of holding a meeting in a themed or amusement park — even big ones like Six Flags, which has 17 amusement parks in the U.S. According to a Six Flags source, association groups are made welcome by “walk-right-in” benefits, and special pricing arrangements for groups of from 10 to 1,500 people.

Christal Rogers, president and founder of Precise Plans in St. Louis, MO, planned one such event at the Six Flags St. Louis location several years ago as a third party for a small religious organization. It was so successful that they are repeating the event in 2013.

“We selected Six Flags because of its convenient location, plus they have more activities to choose from than the smaller parks in our area,” notes Rogers. “Six Flags offers arcades, a wide selection of cuisine ranging from Chinese to French, not to mention water rides.”

According to Rogers, the purpose of the day’s outing was simply to allow the members of the group the opportunity to know one another outside their normal setting. “The group is a very tight-knit organization that normally meets three times a week for various faith-based purposes. These get-togethers were always on a strict schedule and time frame. So, the purpose of this Six Flags outing was an opportunity to get together at a fun location and just ‘let their hair down,’” she says. “They didn’t want a lot of scheduled meetings or strict time lines to adhere to, so any planned activities that we did have for the day were kept to a minimum.”

Although the group — nearly 40 ranging in age from 10 to 55



The new \$12 million Coqui Water Park at El Conquistador Resort in Puerto Rico is themed after the nearby El Yunque rain forest.

years old — did not use any formal meeting space, they met up at designated times and places throughout the day in order to maintain some cohesiveness.

“The younger set immediately ran off to hop on the nearest ride,” adds Rogers. “The rest of the group (35 and older) explored the park and got to know each other. But at 3 p.m., the group convened at the American Thunder restaurant for mid-afternoon lunch. Later on at about 7 p.m., the group met up again at the Old Glory Amphitheater for a concert of headline performers. So it was a long day but a rewarding one, so much so, we’re hoping to repeat it again in the spring.”

The main thing for this small nonprofit was that there was something for everyone at the park. “We didn’t organize any specific activities because there is already so much to do at Six Flags,” she says. “We did receive a group discount by purchasing the tickets in advance through the corporate office and ended up paying about a third of the regular ticket price.”

For larger groups, Six Flags St. Louis is surrounded by a dozen hotels/motels surrounding the park, appealing to every budget, including Holiday Inn Six Flags where kids eat free and Yogi Bear’s Jellystone Park Resort, less than a mile from Six Flags, where “Yogi” makes daily appearances, and a new conference center has been added to the complex.

WHAT’S NEW AT DISNEY AND UNIVERSAL

According to Global Industry Analysts’ March 2012 business report on the status of theme parks, the world’s fascination with theme parks remains strong, with the U.S. continuing to lead the global theme park market. GIA also predicts that over the coming years the “park within a park” concept will become a more evident trend, and that even now, the majority of theme parks are expanding to include more hotel rooms and add secondary attractions to attract more visitors.

One only has to survey the Walt Disney Parks and Resorts brand to see how true this is. The Disney empire in America includes the original Disneyland Park and Disneyland California Adventure, located in Anaheim, CA; while the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, FL, includes Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Hollywood Studios and Disney’s Animal Kingdom. Here’s what’s new:

Orlando's Walt Disney World

Fantasyland will nearly double in size as Magic Kingdom's largest expansion ever is completed in stages through 2014. The expansion will be completed with the opening of the Princess Fairytale Hall in 2013 and the Seven Dwarfs Mine Train in 2014. Officially open on December 6, 2012 are the Storybook Forest and the Enchanted Forest areas. The many experiences in the Enchanted Forest include Under the Sea — Journey of the Little Mermaid, a ride-through attraction based on Disney's popular animated classic film. The attraction also will provide large groups with a variety of venues for private events, as well as other entertainment options. Enchanted Forest attractions with a "Beauty and the Beast" theme include the interactive adventure Enchanted Tales with Belle and the 550-seat Be Our Guest restaurant, housed in a recreation of the Beast's castle.

Walt Disney World Resort recently debuted the Art of Animation Resort, featuring themed guest rooms and suites celebrating some of Disney's most acclaimed animated films such as "The Lion King," "Cars," "Finding Nemo" and "The Little Mermaid." Approximately 2,000 units offer 1,120 suites and 864 guest rooms.

Avatar is coming to Disney's Animal Kingdom with themed lands from the James Cameron blockbuster movie. Construction of the first Avatar attraction will begin in 2013.

Downtown Disney soon will welcome Splitsville, a 50,000-sf multipurpose entertainment complex with bowling and billiards, dining and dancing. Other new Disney Downtown options include AMC Theaters' first "fork-and-dine" theater in Florida.

The Star Tours 3-D attraction, which opened in 2011 at Disney's Hollywood Studios, plays off the legendary movie "Star Wars" and is available for group events.

Kouzzina by Cat Cora, of celebrity chef fame, offers a new private dining room perfect for small events of up to 24 people. Kouzzina is located on Disney's BoardWalk.

Walt Disney World Resort offers six convention resorts with a total of 5,000 guest rooms and 700,000 sf of flexible function space. Planners can take advantage of the professional business programs from the Disney Institute and well as entertainment and production services through Disney Event Group, which can help design family-friendly programs.

California's Disneyland

New private event venues and entertainment options became available when Disneyland Resort in Anaheim, CA, completed its expansion of California Adventure Park in June. Among them are the 12-acre Cars Land from the Disney-Pixar film "Cars" and the "Mad T Party" nighttime event inspired by Tim Burton's "Alice in Wonderland" movie. The Little Mermaid attraction, which debuted in 2011 in the Paradise Pier district, offers private event options as well. In June 2012 the Disneyland Hotel received the AAA Four Diamond award, making it the second property at the



Excited guests enter the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort, which debuted a record number of new attractions in 2012.

iconic Disneyland Resort to receive the honor along with Disney's Grand Californian Hotel & Spa. The Disneyland Hotel completed a two-year renovation and redesign of 969 guest rooms — and the addition of themed suites — recreational facilities and public areas last summer. New to the property are two private event lawns totaling 20,000 sf with permanent stage and special lighting.

Hawaii's Disney Resort

Across the Pacific to the shores of Oahu, HI, the new (2011) Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa, is a 21-acre tribute to Hawaiian-style culture and arts. Aulani offers 840 rooms, suites and villas plus 50,000 sf of indoor-outdoor event space, which includes a 14,000-sf conference center and outdoor event lawns. Exotic landscapes and an Aloha spirit complete the desirability of the resort for groups. Unique to the resort is an Adventures by Disney program, which provides a special host and encourages guests to explore, hike, sail, snorkel and even swim with the dolphins, among other adventures. The resort's Waikolohe Valley water park — Waikolohe is Hawaiian for "mischievous water" — showcases water slides and a lazy river that wind through lava formations, caverns and steam-venting hot springs. There are programs geared to teenagers, and Auntie's Beach House kids' club is designed for kids ages 3–12.

Universal Orlando Resort

Universal Orlando Resort had a landmark year in 2012, introducing more new entertainment experiences than at any other time in its history. For example:

In June Universal Studios debuted Universal's Superstar Parade, a daily affair with extravagant floats and hundreds of street performers; and Universal's Cinematic Spectacular: 100 Years of Movie Memories, which brings to life some of Universal's most iconic films on huge waterfall screens, with visual and audio special effects and pyrotechnics.

Other new additions this past summer: "Despicable Me Minion Mayhem" is a 3-D experience at Universal Studios that incorporates favorite characters from the hit film of the same name. "The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man" at Islands of Adventure

now sports a state-of-the-art 3-D projection system, new music score and Spider-Vision glasses.

Universal CityWalk recently debuted Hollywood Drive-In Golf, two 18-hole miniature golf courses based on classic drive-in era horror and sci-fi movies; and a revamped show from Blue Man Group, which now features a new show environment, musical score and interactive technology.

What really drives attendance, however, is Universal's wildly popular Wizarding World of Harry Potter in the Islands of Adventure. The Themed Entertainment Association reports that Islands of Adventure posted a 29 percent increase in attendance in 2011 over 2010, in large part due to the Harry Potter effect. Groups can book specialized, catered experiences and entertainment at locations such as Hogsmeade, Hogwarts castle and Three Broomsticks tavern.

Planners also can arrange for special events to be held inside any of the other attractions or at a restaurant or club at Universal's CityWalk dining, entertainment and shopping district. Groups also can book the entire CityWalk complex for a massive block party.

Attendees and their families who stay in any of Universal's AAA Four Diamond onsite hotels enjoy early access to Islands of Adventure or Universal Studios one hour before they open; and can skip the regular lines during normal park hours. The three onsite hotels are Loews Portofino Bay Hotel with 750 guest rooms and 42,000 sf of meeting space; Loews Royal Pacific with 1,000 guest rooms and 85,000 sf of meeting space; and Hard Rock Hotel with 650 guest rooms and 6,000 sf of meeting space.

Updates to the meeting space and ballrooms at Loews Royal Pacific and Hard Rock were completed in September; and guest room renovations at Loews Royal Pacific will be completed in stages, with the first half scheduled for a 2014 completion and the rest in 2015. Hard Rock also will update its guest rooms at some future date. Loews Portofino Bay was scheduled to finish renovations to all guest rooms in December 2012. Construction of the new, more moderately priced 1,800-room Cabana Bay Beach Resort will be completed in 2014.

FINAL SAY

Pat Strzalkowski attests that theme parks and themed resorts are a great draw with great value: "At Great Wolf Lodge, with activities that please all people of all ages, the opportunity to stay at the lodge for a discounted rate has served to increase the popularity and attendance of this type of venue with each visit we make. It is a win-win for all."

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The Tables Have Turned

Negotiating the Resurgent Seller's Market

By Stella Johnson

Anyone who knows sports is familiar with Drew Rosenhaus, sports agent extraordinaire to National Football League superstars — and a champion in his own right when it comes to contract negotiations. Representing approximately 150 football heavies, Rosenhaus has negotiated as many as 90 such contracts in one month. And he's built his reputation and client list on securing the best deals in town.

For those who engage in contract negotiations by profession, it



David A. Nershi, CAE
Executive Director
Society for Industrial and
Organizational Psychology
Bowling Green, OH

“The market is indeed shifting in favor of sellers this time, and this very much affects our options at the negotiation table. As a result, we probably will not book as far out as we used to.”

might seem that an association meeting planner's job is a dream by comparison. But, not in today's newly emerging marketplace. That's because the perfect storm of less space, fewer rooms, higher rates and hard-to-get concessions have all come together, as reflected in this industry's stricter contracts and the look of dismay on the faces of too many planners.

“The trend began early in 2012, and I was shocked,” Denise M. Burke of the American Beverage Association, headquartered in Washington, DC, remarks. As vice president of administration and membership, she's experiencing the sudden trend towards a much tighter marketplace for meetings and conventions than in prior years, resulting in more stringently worded contracts with fewer concessions to be had at the negotiation table.

“In the past, I would always find facilities and hotels willing to work with me in order to accommodate the needs of our group. But, the tables have turned. Now, it seems, meeting planners pretty much have to settle for the leftovers,” Burke says. “Yes, it is definitely moving to a seller's market and, unless you are booking a very large block of rooms, the meeting planner is at a disadvantage. The competition for sleeping rooms and event space is fierce out there.”

While there is room for debate, most planners tend to agree with Burke, including David Nershi, CAE, executive director of

the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) located in Bowling Green, OH. He says, “The market is indeed shifting in favor of sellers this time, and this very much affects our options at the negotiation table. As a result, we probably will not book as far out as we used to, especially since we don't want to lock in higher rates than what we have enjoyed the past several years. What will happen is that we will consider going to a different rotation of cities because we're not willing to pay

He also reminds planners that they have to read the contract very closely and be ready to cross out and revise freely. “Often the hotel will have no objection if some charges are made or removed altogether. But, of course, they are happy to get the revenue should you overlook it,” he notes.

What about attendees booking through various websites to get the lowest hotel rates and at the last minute? Burke notes that it is fast becoming next to impossible for planners to contract for

rooms and meet the set quota, especially with so many registrants doing this. “This is a huge problem because, in a seller's market, hotels no longer work with planners who operate outside of the contract commitments,” she states.

Peter J. O'Neil, FASAE, CAE, has a quick fix, though. He's the immediate past chairman of the ASAE Foundation and executive director of the American Industrial Hygiene Association in Falls Church, VA. He recommends, “Charge your members more money for registration if they do not stay in one of our contracted hotels. This has worked extremely well for us,” he says.



SPELL IT OUT

When it comes to hidden costs in

a huge premium to go to the top three convention cities they used to in the past.”

INFORMATION IS POWER

As the market for meeting and convention space at hotels, convention centers and other facilities tightens up, rates go up all over in a domino effect. But, Nershi thinks this is perfectly understandable. “Hotel revenue dropped precipitously following the 2008 economic downturn and is just now coming back. Consequently, higher room rates, fewer concessions and less-than-generous attrition terms have resulted,” he believes.

So, what can association meeting planners do to counterbalance the scales?

“If you can book within a short window, there are a lot of deals, although that won't work in the premier locations, and it could hurt your marketing efforts,” Nershi claims, stressing that “information is power” and planners must do their homework. “They should first find out all they can about rates at other hotels in the same city during the meeting time frame and leverage that accordingly,” he says. “This benefits all parties because you really don't want attendees booking outside the block. You have to know the value of your meeting in terms of food and beverage and other revenue-producing activities, too.”

contracts, the best case scenario is that planners should have an addendum in very simple language that emphatically states that the association won't pay for anything that is not outlined in the contract. Ellen Shortill, director of conventions and meetings at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, says, “I have specific language added in all of my contracts that says no additional fees or surcharges beyond government-required taxes or surcharges can be charged that are not explicitly defined in the contract at the time of signing.”

But there is nothing like bringing in your own vendors to overcome higher rates, hidden fees and other charges. In this case, Burke says, “Some hotels will work with you and some won't, but it's worth a try. Also, contact the group that came in before or after you and try to piggyback on the lighting, décor, AV setups, F&B, etc. Each group can save on the setup and tear-down costs if they share.”

More than anything else, get it in writing. Shirley A. Krentz, manager of event management at the American Society for Quality located in Milwaukee, WI, says, “As new items and their corresponding fees surface, we always add a pertinent clause as needed to address the issue,” she says. “For the room rates, we include a clause in the contract that states no additional fees or service charges can be added to the rate.”



Peter J. O'Neil, FSAE, CAE
Executive Director
American Industrial Hygiene
Association
Falls Church, VA

“On the rare occasion there is attrition, we negotiate it away. If we can’t, we question whether we will use that property or chain ever again. No kidding.”

A number of planners have expressed some backwardness about negotiating for food and beverage at events. So, while it might seem a little “hands-off,” Nershi steps up to the plate and asks for a discount of up to 15 percent off the menu price.

“You can also try to negotiate a set menu price, for example, pay 2012 menu prices if the meeting is in 2013 or ‘14,” he suggests. “A good practice is to ask your convention services manager for any tips on savings. They can be very helpful and business-minded. Sometimes, too, planners can go with a chef’s choice selection of appetizers at a lower price than selecting them individually.”

MULTI-YEAR CONTRACTS

The use of multi-year contracts in booking cities, hotels and facilities has historically been a good negotiating tool and great for keeping costs down. But, in a time when the economy has been so uncertain, some planners have found themselves on the losing end.

“Booking multiple-year contracts presents at least some leverage in negotiating,” says Burke. “With room rates inching up every year, I used to book multiple-year contracts, but then the market dropped, and I was suddenly stuck with rates that were higher than the market. Planners should not be deterred by this, however, because now the current atmosphere would be a better time to exercise such multiple-year leverage.”

Nershi agrees and says that multi-year contracts can work to a planner’s advantage because they automatically allow the planner to ask for just about anything — lower room rates, rebates, complimentary receptions and discounts on F&B. “The sky is the limit,” he claims.

WORKING WITH UNIONS

Krentz says RFPs should require hotels to specify the areas that are governed by unions, such as ballroom space, which in some locations may require a four-hour minimum. She adds, “For convention centers, you would need to work with your decorator and know up front what the union charges are. In both instances, it could make the difference in whether you use that city or not.”

But destinations that are union-regulated are a hard nut to crack. “While it’s true that unions play a role in a successful event,”

admits O’Neil, “they’re often bad for city and convention business. In fact, there are several cities we won’t go to or even consider due to the union labor rules that exist there.”

O’Neil points out, however, that Chicago has done a good job educating their unions and making them much easier to work with than in the past. “But, most cities won’t do this, and that is a big, big disconnect,” he states. “But if you are booking outside vendors, make sure they are experienced in working with unions or it could be very costly.”

ATTRITION AND CANCELLATIONS

Most of the planners have their own take on the subject of attrition and cancellation clauses in contracts, but O’Neil takes a strong stand: “We try not to have them in our contracts,” he says. “When we do, we book conservatively. On the rare occasion there is attrition, we negotiate it away. If we can’t, we question whether we will use that property or chain ever again. No kidding.”

Shirley Krentz elaborates on these clauses as follows:

Attrition: “Know your group’s history, considering the location of the property as well, as there may be less expensive hotels in the area for your attendees to consider. Negotiate a 70–75 percent room pickup and begin watching your group pickup beginning at nine weeks out and compare to previous years. Include all the necessary clauses, such as ‘Any rooms booked outside of the group block would be credited to the group regardless of rate’ and ‘Should the hotel achieve a 90 percent overall occupancy for any night during the official event dates, the group will receive full credit for full achievement of the contracted block for that day.’”

Cancellations: “Work with the hotel and create the sliding scale based on room revenue only. Thirty to 45 days prior to the event use a 70 percent room revenue and a 30 percent food and beverage scale. This same sliding scale would be applicable to both parties (hotel and group) in the event of a cancellation. Cancellation by group: Insert a clause into the contract that if the group is able to reschedule a meeting of the same revenue or larger as the original meeting at the hotel, that occurs within 12 months of the cancellation, the hotel will credit 100 percent of the cancellation fees towards the new meeting.”

FINAL ANALYSIS

Planners have a lot of points to make on the subject of win-win contracts, but, Burke claims, “I now feel like we’re being gouged for the years of lost revenue,” and that may be true. But Shortill, on the other hand, believes that the best contracts are those that are true partnerships. “When you can be clear about what matters, and understand what the other side needs, you can both bring things to the table,” she points out. “Both sides need to minimize risk and feel like the contract is fair and balanced. I don’t want to beat down a contract so far that the hotel or property has not benefited and then wonder why I’m not getting the best service.”

Q&A With a Contract Pro

ConferenceDirect takes pride in its contract negotiation skills and, in most cases, has pre-negotiated contracts that secure the most favorable terms in the marketplace. The independent meeting planning company’s recent association clients have included the National Association of Counties, the Association

in many of the major 25 metropolitan areas.

- Room rates are moving back to levels we haven’t seen since 2007.
- Hotel contract terms are becoming tighter, and fewer concessions are being offered.
- Associations, sensing this

trend, are starting to book further out, which means space may be harder to find in major meeting destinations.

AC&F: What can association meeting planners do to save now?

DS: Aside from working with organizations like ConferenceDirect, association planners should take advantage of any hotel packaging they can, especially those which offer multiple-year options where you can get special concessions for booking several meetings at the same time.

AC&F: Since association planners book events years in advance, what is the best avenue for lower rates?

DS: Flexibility is always the best way to get discounts. If they don’t mandate holding their annual meeting the third week in October; or, that they must book a specific city or resort, then, there are always deals out there.

“Hotel companies are quickly moving toward regional sales clusters, which further reduce the chance for a long-term relationship with the customer.”



Dave Scypinski
Senior Vice President
ConferenceDirect
North Potomac, MD

for Career and Technical Education, and the National Rifle Association. For a third-party perspective, AC&F interviewed ConferenceDirect’s Senior Vice President Dave Scypinski, who resides in the Washington, DC, area.

AC&F: Have we moved from a buyer’s market to a seller’s?

DS: Yes, we are definitely advising our clients that there’s a noticeable shifting of markets, and this is how it affects them:

- Less sleeping-room availability

At the end of the day, Nershi’s best advice to other planners is threefold: 1. Let them know that you are considering other cities and other hotels. 2. Provide solid history on room blocks and food and beverage spending. 3. Negotiate down as best as you can but not so low that it no longer is appealing to the property.

O’Neil, however, reiterates that planners should employ everything in their arsenal, from personal relationships to demonstrating prior long-term commitments to a chain or destination. “When it comes to contracts, question everything and times it two,” he stresses. “As such, we must make sure we know what’s in the contract. Shame on us if we don’t.”

He also indicates that convention and visitors bureaus are the real heroes. “CVBs play an important role from an overall value of the meeting perspective. That is, a hotel or convention center might see a small fall meeting and say “oh, it’s small, we don’t care about it.” But, a CVB may well know that the same organization’s spring meeting is huge and that if the fall meeting does well, the city gets looked at for the bigger meeting,” he says. “So, I think CVBs tend to take the larger view, not the smaller, day-to-day, year-to-year view. And that translates into better bargaining chips at the table.”

(See related story on page 8.)

AC&F

AC&F: What about relationship-building?

DS: These days, things are very different than in the good old days pre-existing 2007. Now, in the booking process, owners have a much bigger say. Also, hotel companies are quickly moving toward regional sales clusters, which further reduce the chance for a long-term relationship with the customer. The mantra is fewer salespeople on-property, more in regional sales offices.

AC&F: What are your comments about attrition and cancellation?

DS: The fix for attrition is right under everyone’s nose and has been for many years. How do you buy your airline tickets? You don’t pay half now and half later, do you? No, the airlines get paid at the time the seat is purchased. If attendees, in the same manner, paid for their room at the time of purchase, a major change in behavior would occur. They would become much more responsible.

As far as cancellation, now more than ever, it could go both ways. Mark my words here, hotels will soon be looking for better business to take the place of those groups booked in the downturn — they always do.

AC&F: Final comments?

DS: As technology becomes more sophisticated, the belief in many circles is that it will reduce the need for any staff. In our world of meetings, nothing can ever replace the impact of a face-to-face encounter — period.

— SJ

What's the True Value of Your Meeting?

Measuring ROI Is the Best Way to Find Out

By Derek Reveron

And It's Easy, Too

What does this meeting cost and what financial value do we get in return? That's a question that many planners and associations don't ask.

Everyone wants to stretch meeting and conference budgets, provide more value to members, and increase revenue from membership and services. But only a fraction of planners and associations measure the return on investment (ROI) of meetings and conferences.

Experts cite several reasons why measuring ROI is uncommon: Planners think the process is too difficult and lack the time to learn it. Many planners who try to measure ROI become frustrated and abandon the effort. Some planners calculate ROI superficially or incorrectly, leading to ambiguous or inaccurate results. On the other hand, planners who use ROI can increase value for attendees. The information also can help planners manage budgets and target attendees more effectively with activities

such as education, training, exhibitions and membership drives.

In addition, planners can use ROI to help cope with growing competition for traditional association services. Many professionals no longer feel they must attend association meetings to get information, specialized learning and make contacts, says Jeff Hurt, executive vice president, education and management at Dallas-based Velvet Chainsaw Consulting, which services associations and companies with their meetings, conferences, events and education. "Associations were the main keepers of professional networks and information. Now people can build their own professional networks and get information online, no matter how exclusive associations think their information is. Many associations are struggling with this. If the goal of conferences is to make money and provide value, I think associations will eventually be forced to use ROI," says Hurt.

Eric Olson, general manager of Active Network, a leading event management software firm based in San Diego, agrees. "If

associations don't take the time to understand exactly what value they get for different activities and what value they provide members, then some associations may not be around in the future. Or their memberships will shrink and there will be a threat to what they count on for revenue," says Olson.

GOAL-SETTING TO REACH TARGETS

There are some efforts to gauge the ROI of meetings and conferences. Last year, IMEX Frankfurt and IMEX America launched an online platform that enables attendees to set individual conference goals and measure the results. The online platform, called Online Performance Center (OPC), allows attendees to use the system several weeks before an IMEX exhibition to set five main goals and a maximum of four objectives under each goal, says Jon Bradshaw, CEO of Meetings Mindset, a London-based firm offering online, onsite and face-to-face solutions to improve the effectiveness of international meetings, conferences and exhibitions.

For example, attendees can use the OPC to set goals such as developing knowledge and skills. Under that goal, attendees can list objectives such as learning a specific skill, meeting and developing a relationship with a certain person, or finding a solution to a specific business problem, says Bradshaw. Attendees also can write personal notes in the system to further detail their goals. The system then provides a tailored list of education seminars and sessions to each user based on the goals entered.

When a conference ends, users can rate on a percentage basis of 1 percent to 100 percent how they fared in meeting their individual goals and objectives. IMEX uses the aggregate results of the OPC to improve its education programs. "We believe that ROI comes from (attendee) performance at meetings, which can teach the meetings industry a lot about how to improve meetings. People can build that into their own ROI methodologies as they wish. We feed back to IMEX some business intelligence, especially from education activities, to show how many people wanted certain topics. They can use the information

to increase attendance and impact the bottom line in terms of registration," says Bradshaw.

Four years ago, a large national association launched a "continuous improvement program" that set objectives to increase the number of executives attending the annual conference by 25 percent. The objective was crucial to the organization because executive members lead to other categories of membership and represent a knowledge resource for the organization, says the association's consultant, Bill Voegeli, president of Smyrna, GA-based Association Insights.

The association reached its 25 percent goal last year and then set about gauging the ROI of its annual conference and five yearly regional meetings. At the annual conference, 10 Association Insights staffers used iPads to conduct interviews choosing from a list of more than 50 questions. Attendees were interviewed after nearly every conference activity, including training sessions, meetings and educational seminars to determine precisely what learned information they would use. Interviewers also questioned exhibitors and attendees on the trade show floor to determine whether they were meeting the right customers and buyers. General questions about satisfaction level were not included.



The goal was to measure the quality of attendee experiences and their impact on attendance and trade show revenue. Based on the information, the association will improve, cut back or discontinue some activities. Analysis of the data is time consuming but promises to be informative, says Voegeli. "We discovered the impact of allowing 10 minutes between session start times and the sessions being up to 15 minutes apart in terms of walking. Participation was diminished along with their propensity to return the following year. We also discovered there was a 15 percent decline in attendance for those who feel they didn't have enough time to network between sessions," says Voegeli.

MOBILE APPS GET INTO THE ACT, TOO

The Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) uses online technology to justify growing mobile offerings, use staff resources effectively and measure session popularity. PCMA also uses the system to improve meetings, learn more about members and enhance convention activities and services.

PCMA's technology partner and event sponsor Active Network Inc., a leading provider of fully scalable and customizable event technology for events of all sizes, first implemented the system in January at the PCMA 2012 Convening Leaders annual meeting in San Diego. The free Convening Leaders mobile app helped attendees connect with one another through attendee search and messaging tools and provided complete mobile conference guides to help attendees navigate 385 sessions and 241 speakers. About



Jon Bradshaw
CEO
Meetings Mindset
Hattonwool, London

"We believe that ROI comes from (attendee) performance at meetings, which can teach the meetings industry a lot about how to improve meetings. People can build that into their own ROI methodologies as they wish."

48 percent of attendees downloaded the app, and 31 percent of surveys were completed on the software.

Active Network's other technological solutions for PCMA include end-to-end services for registration, attendee management and session access control, says Olson. "All of that is integrated with their membership database. We put all the information in one place about what attendees do at all of their events worldwide. PCMA knows what sessions and events they attend and can get feedback through surveys on all events. They had been collect-

ing much of the information, but it was in different systems and places. It's only helpful if you can get it one place and examine it and determine its value," Olson says.

Kelly Peacy, CAE, CMP, senior vice president, meetings and events at PCMA, agrees. "We need to have information ready at our fingertips at all times when it comes to our attendance and who is at our meetings. We are very busy. We don't have time to search different places for the information and reporting that we need. We need it quickly," Peacy says in an online video on the Active Network website.

In an email, Jason Paganessi, CAE, vice president, business innovation of PCMA, describes several benefits to the association's bottom line. "First, we are able to see the growth of the amount of our attendee base that is using mobile devices, which in turn helps us justify growing our mobile offerings in the future. Secondly as mentioned, by scanning at each session we are able to measure session popularity as well as collect that attendance behavior to issue CEU (continuing education units granted upon completing PCMA professional development programs) credits without the intensive staff resources normally associated with CEU recording and reporting," says Paganessi.

Paganessi also cites advantages for PCMA's technology development teams. "By looking at the most popular devices and platforms within our audiences, we can spend more focus on the popular devices to enhance them for the majority of the attendees. While we can't ignore the other platforms out in the space, it at least helps our teams know which ones need to be addressed first to have the greatest impact," Paganessi says.

TOUGH DECISIONS PAY OFF

Earlier this year, a large association with new top management launched efforts to improve the ROI of its four annual international conferences. Hurt met with the association's officers in February after they examined the organization's finances. "They realized that the sponsorship, exhibitors and attendance were down for all four events. They realized they needed to make tough decisions because the conference experience wasn't attracting the right market anymore. They weren't targeting the right buyers and decision-makers who could make decisions about purchasing from exhibitors and memberships," says Hurt.

Based on advice from Hurt, the association made immediate changes to increase ROI. Starting with 2012, the group combined its two yearly North American conferences into one to cut expenses and increase financial return. The association also reinvented its 2012 trade show, says Hurt. "They moved education experiences to the show floor. They created an app arcade on the show floor with presentations on using mobile apps. They created community centers on the show floor where people could network. The trade show went from having little traffic to being the buzz center of the entire conference," Hurt says.

Financial returns were immediate. The association increased the number of exhibitors seeking spaces at the group's three yearly conferences. "They showed improvement because they were able to turn on a dime to make changes. Most associations can't or aren't willing to take such risks," Hurt says.

Associations and planners should be willing to examine every aspect of meetings and trade shows to determine if they are good investments. However, many significant expenses go unquestioned although there's little evidence that they provide financial return, says Voegeli.

He cites the following example. "An association has a special lounge at a meeting for senior members. They should ask, 'Why do we have the lounge and what is its expected outcome in terms of meeting objectives?' Instead, they say, 'Wouldn't it be great to have a special lounge for senior members because it will make them happy.' Nobody asks whether happiness matters or how to determine its impact," Voegeli says.

THE THREE BASIC STEPS OF MEASURING ROI

Measuring ROI includes three basic steps: define objectives, measure results and analyze data. Here is advice from experts on how to handle each step.

1. Define Objectives

It's impossible to accurately gauge meeting ROI without clearly defining meeting objectives. Precisely stated objectives include numerical goals and specify desired changes in attendee behavior such as increased memberships and exhibitors. Examples of objectives include having sponsorship demand exceed supply by 15 percent in five years or increasing membership by 25 percent over 10 years.

But many planners don't accurately define ROI objectives. It's one of the most difficult things that planners and associations face, says Voegeli. "If you ask the board of 10 associations what are the objectives needed to measure ROI for a meeting, you would probably get different answers from every board member with all 10 associations. When I ask association stakeholders to meet and not leave the room until they agree on defined objectives, I usually get blank stares because they think they already know the objectives. But they usually change their minds after meeting for six hours without success," says Voegeli.

2. Measure Results

Surveys are the most common methods of measuring meeting ROI. But attendee satisfaction surveys widely used by many planners don't measure ROI. General questions such as, "Were you satisfied with the convention experience?" or "Did you benefit from educational sessions?" don't help estimate the financial return on meeting spending.

Surveys should ask specific questions that measure changes in attendee behavior related to meeting objectives, says Voegeli. He cites an example: If there is an education component, then mea-

"Now people can build their own professional networks and get information online. ...If the goal of conferences is to make money and provide value, I think associations will eventually be forced to use ROI."



Jeff Hurt
Executive V.P., Education and Management
Velvet Chainsaw Consulting
Dallas, TX

sure specifically what was learned, how attendees will use the new knowledge, and how their professional behavior will change as a result. This sometimes requires surveying attendees several weeks or months after the sessions to ask how they use what they learned, says Voegeli.

Many associations and planners already have information they can use to help measure meeting ROI but don't know it. Such information includes registration and attendance data at annual and regional conferences, attendee demographics, membership statistics and figures on sales of association services and products, says Voegeli. "More often than not, associations have a bunch of disparate data on their members collected through active and passive measures. They have it on several different computer systems or filing systems. But they don't know how to effectively pull all the data together or they never thought about doing it," Voegeli says.

Olson offers this advice on measuring ROI: "Have a basic membership management tool that's integrated well with an event and attendee management tool. If you don't have that, it's hard to understand and measure the value of what you are providing to members," he says.

3. Data Analysis

The third step involves analyzing information and data to determine the impact of the meeting on the bottom line. For example, planners can measure the financial impact of sales training and educational sessions by following up to obtain data in areas such as job performance and sales. The results can be compared to the cost of the meeting to evaluate ROI.

Measuring ROI is no longer limited to corporations evaluating the financial impact of business strategies, deals, mergers and investments. Experts predict that, sooner or later, more associations will adopt some form of ROI measurement, especially for their largest meetings. "Associations need to be smarter about how they do business and smarter about knowing the value of what they provide to members if they want to survive," says Olson.

AC&F

Mexico

The Advantages of Meeting South of the Border Keep Growing

By Derek Reveron

Mexico boasts a rich history, top resort destinations, vibrant cities and a growing stable of convention facilities designed to attract large groups from the United States and other countries.

The number of convention centers in Mexico has more than doubled over the last decade from 27 to 57, according to the Mexico Tourism Board (MTB). Currently, Mexico offers more than 68 major convention and exposition centers, and more than 500,000 hotel rooms in more than 3,000 luxury hotels.

According to Washington, DC-based Eduardo Chaillo, CMP, CMM, executive director of meetings for the Mexico Tourism Board, Mexico had incredible opportunities to showcase their meetings infrastructure and capabilities to the world during 2012, hosting diverse global events such as the T20 Meeting of Tourism Ministers in Merida, the G20 Summit in Los Cabos, the 6th World Council of Civil Engineers and 7th World Chambers Congress in Mexico City, and the 32nd Congress of the International Society of Blood Transfusion in Cancun.

Chaillo expects “to continue this momentum in 2013” and attract an even wider global audience. “Looking to attract more international congresses with testimonials of such successes in

Mexico, we decided to open an office in Brussels (city in which more than 800 global organizations are located).”

The MTB recently launched a new website <http://visitmexico.com/meetings>, which Chaillo says features “useful downloads for meeting planners, making it easier than ever to host an event in Mexico.”

Chaillo says the Mexico Tourism Board is “looking forward to the further development of the meetings and conventions industry in Mexico over the coming years.” He adds, “In fact, we have already secured congresses taking place through 2018. We are proud of the ever-growing capabilities of our meetings industry and look forward to hosting visitors from around the globe.”

Mexican tourism officials also expect that its growing meetings infrastructure will eventually make the destination as popular among U.S.-based associations as it is among other international associations. Enrique Martin Del Campo, CMP, president of the Mexico chapter of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA), says, “If you’re talking international associations outside of the U.S., Mexico is doing very well. We still have a challenge with U.S.-based associations partly because of meeting space and the perception of Mexico not being a very secure place.”

As officials of the MTB and Mexican convention and visitors bureaus promote the advantages of meeting in Mexico, they also address concerns about security. During the last few years, Chaillo and his team in the MTB’s Washington, DC, office have met periodically with groups of planners in various U.S. cities. According to Del Campo, the overarching message of the meetings is: “We have some issues in north Mexico close to the U.S. border, but there are many cities with good convention facilities and hotels that are very far away from those areas. Sometimes it’s hard for people to identify where we have challenges. If I drive from Cancun to the Mexican–U.S. border, it takes more than three days — about the same as San Diego to Washington, DC. But nobody decides not to meet in San Diego because something happened in Washington, DC,” says Del Campo.

He cites the advantages of meeting in Mexico. “It’s close to the U.S., there aren’t many visa restrictions, there’s good Internet connectivity, good service and great value. When you compare

the prices of meeting in some U.S. cities with those of some Mexican cities, you see a big difference. There is no tax on conventions, which is a big savings,” he says. Del Campo, who is based in Quintana Roo, also is corporate director of sales, RCD Resorts/All-Inclusive Collection, which owns and operates resorts in the Caribbean and Mexico including Hard Rock Hotel Cancun, Hard Rock Hotel Vallarta and Aventura Spa Palace, which will be rebranded as Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Maya in 2013.

MEETING IN MEXICO

Some associations, including PCMA, meet frequently in Mexico. The PCMA partners with the MTB to hold the annual North American Advisory Summit (NAAS), an educational and networking event for Mexican and North American meeting industry professionals. According to Michelle Crowley, manager, global development and programs for Chicago-based PCMA, “The meetings are designed to help Mexican suppliers attract more meetings, including associations, from North America. We want to make sure that their convention centers, hotels and resorts have the meeting facilities that planners need for larger meetings, exhibits and conventions.”

The two-day NAAS alternates every year among Mexican destinations. The meeting was held in Mexico City in 2008, Puerto Vallarta in 2009, Merida in 2010, Guadalajara in 2011 and Mazatlan in November 2012. The 2013 meeting is set for Puebla.

The 140 attendees at the Mazatlan event included meeting planners from the U.S. and Canada, and Mexican suppliers — officials with Mexican CVBs, hotels and convention centers. The planners functioned as advisors for the suppliers during meetings at the Mazatlan International Center, which features 95,400 sf of meeting space, says Crowley.

The meetings included sessions in several formats. During an open forum, a panel of planners answered questions from Mexican suppliers on topics ranging from the impact of the U.S. economy on meeting decisions to the future of meetings in Mexico. Roundtable discussions focused on attendee growth. Three breakout sessions — one each for officials of CVBs, convention centers and hotels — addressed topics specific to each area. Three additional breakouts focused on resort, cultural and major city destinations. During a general session, attendees shared ideas from meetings and breakouts.

Between meetings, attendees held a networking reception overlooking Mazatlan Beach at the all-inclusive Pueblo Bonito Emerald Bay Resort & Spa on the Pacific Coast. The group also had a reception in Old Town Mazatlan at the former home of a famous Mazatlan resident that has been converted into an event venue.

Such meetings help Mexican convention centers, CVBs and hotels develop meeting facilities and amenities to attract larger

“Mexico is close to the U.S., there aren’t many visa restrictions, there’s good Internet connectivity, good service and great value. When you compare the prices of...U.S. cities with...Mexican cities, you see a big difference. There is no tax on conventions, which is a big savings.”



Enrique Martin Del Campo, CMP
President
Mexico Chapter of the
Professional Convention
Management Association
Quintana Roo, Mexico

groups. Still, Mexico’s meeting facilities vary widely, says Crowley. “There are a lot of destinations in the last few years that have really advanced and built fabulous convention centers and are taking note of these things to attract more business. And there are some that are newer to the market. So there is a wide variety in Mexico as far as the strategic level in attracting business, but the desire to get more business from the U.S. is there,” Crowley says.

Cancun

Sparkling Cancun remains the country’s top meeting and incentive destination. The Caribbean gem was built in 1974 specifically as a tourist destination and offers everything groups could want in a resort city — beautiful beaches, luxury resorts, tropical splendor, golf, ocean activities and meeting accommodations.

Cancun’s major hotels offer more than 538,000 sf of meeting space. The destination’s prime convention facility Cancun Center has 151,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space, including 13 flexible meeting rooms. The facility also features translation booths, Internet access and T1 voice and data transmission lines.

Cancun hotels boast more than 29,000 guest rooms, many of which are located along the 18-mile hotel and resort strip. Room supply is expanding. Earlier this year, the 12-story Hard Rock Hotel Cancun opened with 601 guest rooms and a 16,408-sf convention center. There also are five restaurants, five bars and a spa.

Other top meeting options include Palace Resorts’ four Cancun properties: the 287-room Beach Palace Resort with 8,000 sf of meeting space; Sun Palace (252 rooms, 3,300 sf); Cancun Palace (601 room, 16,000 sf); and Moon Palace Golf & Spa Resort (2,457 rooms, 170,000 sf).

Starwood Hotels & Resorts offers two oceanfront properties: The Westin Lagunamar Ocean Resort Villas & Spa has more than 24,000 sf of meeting space and 580 guest rooms; and The Westin Resort & Spa Cancun offers more than 9,688 sf of meeting space and 379 guest rooms. Also in Cancun, the luxurious, all-inclusive Club Med Cancun Yucatan offers 376 guest rooms and three meeting rooms.



An aerial view of the Fiesta Americana Grand Coral Beach Cancun Resort & Spa, which is nestled along Cancun’s finest stretch of private beach.



Eduardo Chaillo, CMP, CMM
Executive Director of Meetings
Mexico Tourism Board
Washington, DC

“We have already secured congresses taking place through 2018. We are proud of the ever-growing capabilities of our meetings industry and look forward to hosting visitors from around the globe.”

Cancun activities reflect a modern destination with a storied past. Mayan ruins include the walled city of Chichen Itza and Tulum, with its remains of ancient towers and temples. Attractions at Xcaret, a large archaeological park, features rivers, natural pools, beaches, interactive shark exhibits and dolphin swims. Xcaret offers 18 event spaces. At night, Cancun comes alive with dance clubs, bars and lounges.

Los Cabos

Located at the southern tip of Mexico's Baja Peninsula, Los Cabos features two popular destinations — Cabo San Lucas, a fishing village, and San Jose del Cabo, a colonial town.

Los Cabos increased its meeting space this year with the opening of the Los Cabos Convention Center (LCCC) — a 56,000-sf meeting venue. The LCCC accommodates up to 5,000 people for meetings and expositions, and as many as 3,000 attendees for banquets. The LCCC is located five minutes from more than 10 hotels.

Los Cabos offers more than a dozen top meeting hotels and more than 6,000 guest rooms at four-star properties. More hotels are coming: The Ritz-Carlton Reserve property is scheduled to open in San Jose del Cabo in 2014. The property will feature 124 rooms, each with views of the Sea of Cortez. In Cabo San Lucas, a 300-room JW Marriott Hotel is scheduled to open in 2015 with more than 13,000 sf of meeting space, including a flexible main ballroom and breakout rooms. The property will feature tennis courts as well as an 18-hole golf course designed by Jack Nicklaus and Greg Norman.

Other top properties include Barcelo Los Cabos Palace Deluxe, an all-suite resort with 619 suites, 235,000 sf of meeting space, six themed restaurants and banquet space for up to 1,200 people. Another all-suite resort, Dreams Los Cabos Suites Golf Resort & Spa, has more than 8,000 sf of meeting and function space, including the 5,156-sf Delphin Ballroom. Luxury awaits groups at the 249-room four-diamond Fiesta Americana Grand Los Cabos Golf & Spa Resort with nine flexible banquet halls. Groups seeking a property with an old Mexico feel can consider

the recently refreshed 270-room Sheraton Hacienda del Mar Golf & Spa Resort Los Cabos with more than 18,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and function space, and eight meeting rooms. It is the only resort in Los Cabos to offer two American Academy of Hospitality Sciences Five Star Diamond restaurants — Pitahayas and D Cortez Grill & Restaurant.

MEETING UNIQUE NEEDS

Los Cabos was the site of the May 2012 conference of the Tobacconists Association of America (TAA), based in Conyers, GA, for the second consecutive year and third time overall. The four-day meeting at The Sheraton Hacienda del Mar Golf & Spa Resort attracted 200 U.S.-based high-end tobacco product retailers and suppliers.

It was the first time the TAA met at the Sheraton Hacienda. The group chose the resort partly for a unique reason, according to Stephanie Guadagno, TAA executive director. “The hotel exercised its discretion to allow the group to smoke cigars on property. It's difficult for us to find properties that allow us to do that,” she says.

Due to its unique need, the TAA typically holds its meetings in Mexico and the Caribbean. Hotels in the regions are more likely to grant the group smoking leeway, and the TAA has a lot to offer properties in return for the privilege, says Guadagno. “If you look at the amount of food and beverage we do on property, we bring a lot to the table. We do almost every food function on property plus a lot of high-end entertaining in terms of open bar receptions with high-end drinks, and hotel restaurants and receptions. That's hard for some hotels to turn down,” Guadagno adds.

The TAA conference included a general session, two speakers and a group auction in which cigar retailers purchased products from manufacturers. In addition, one meeting included an interactive online survey to provide information to help cigar manufacturers produce products that meet cigar retailers' needs. Attendees completed the survey using their own iPads or those supplied by the firm conducting the survey.

The group's on-property activities included dinners at the Sheraton Hacienda's outdoor restaurant, which were followed by a “cigar lounge” in a venue overlooking the ocean. Attendees also played a golf tournament at the Sheraton Hacienda's golf course, enjoyed water activities such as sailing catamarans and shopped in the center of Los Cabos.

Guadagno was very impressed with the Sheraton Hacienda's staff, which went out of its way to respond when tragedy struck. One of the attendees passed away during the meeting. “They helped the family plan a memorial Mass off-property the next day. They helped the family figure out how to get him home to the U.S. And they helped us change around a reception to honor him. The hotel was absolutely wonderful,” says Guadagno.

Puerto Vallarta

The Pacific beachfront city of Puerto Vallarta, a longtime favorite of international groups, is as popular as ever. The city's hotel occupancy rate increased to 71.7 percent during the summer of 2012, up from 62.1 percent from the same time period in 2011, according to SECTUR, Mexico's Secretariat of Tourism.

More than 96,000 sf of meeting and exhibit space is available at the Puerto Vallarta International Convention Center (PVICC). The facility includes 17 meeting rooms and the Salon Vallarta, which accommodates up to 5,000 people. The PVICC is located only 10 minutes from the Puerto Vallarta Gustavo Diaz Ordaz International Airport.

Planners can choose from among more than 50 hotels and resorts with at least a four-star rating. These include the recently opened Hilton Puerto Vallarta Resort, which offers 259 rooms and 10,410 sf of meeting space. The property is Hilton's first all-inclusive resort in Mexico. Another new property the Hard Rock Hotel Vallarta opened this year with 348 rooms and 6,300 sf of meeting space.

RETURNING AGAIN AND AGAIN

The Alliance of Area Business Publications (AABP), based in El Segundo, CA, held its 2012 meeting at the CasaMagna Marriott Puerto Vallarta Resort & Spa, which is located near the Puerto Vallarta Marina. More than 55 executives attended the three-day meeting, which has convened in Puerto Vallarta two out of every three years since 1994 while meeting in the U.S. every third year, according to James Dowden, executive director.

The AABP has met at the CasaMagna three times, including 2011 and 2012. AABP cites several reasons for returning to the resort. “The hotel's care and feeding of meeting delegates is way beyond what you might think it would be in a tourist destination. We don't encounter a situation or request that they don't take care of immediately. As far as location, we have everything we need very close by — the beach, shopping, restaurants, bars and golf. And it is 10 minutes from the airport. And we don't have a sense of being part of a hotel row,” says Dowden.

Value is another reason why the AABP meets at the CasaMagna. The AABP receives good value partly because it is a repeat customer and has a good relationship with resort staff, says Dowden. “We find them to be very attractive prices, and what they provide us in our contract makes it very appealing. We know them, and they know us. It's a good relationship. We don't get into a lot of dickering. We go straight to the bottom line, and they always treat us fairly,” says Dowden.

AABP attendees also love the variety and familiarity of Puerto Vallarta. This year, the group dined at Daiquiri Dick's, an iconic Puerto Vallarta restaurant, as it has during every visit since 1994. Some group members played golf at Marina Vallarta Beach Club, a short walk from the CasaMagna hotel.

Several attendees shopped at the many stores in the marina district. “The district is just a few blocks from the hotel. The stores are located near Daiquiri Dick's so people tend to leave early for the restaurant so they will have time to shop. People in our group have over the years accumulated their favorite stores to visit. There are a fair number of repeat shoppers in our group,” says Dowden.

The AABP will continue to return to Mexico and enjoy it amid awareness of security issues. Such issues aren't apparent to attendees in the heart of Mexican resort destinations, but it's best to exercise common sense precautions, says Dowden. “When I first started coming here, I was inclined to rent a car and explore. We are careful not to go places where we might encounter the kinds of people with some of the problems we know about. I've never had a bad situation nor have any of the delegates in all of the years we have come here,” Dowden says.

Acapulco

The title of Elvis Presley's 1963 movie “Fun in Acapulco” had it right. Acapulco, one of the Western Hemisphere's most popular beach resorts, is pure fun. The city also offers modern meeting facilities, spearheaded by the Acapulco International Convention Center with 425,000 sf of meeting and event space spread over four exhibition areas and 11 convention rooms. Additionally, the Acapulco Historical Museum, formerly the San Diego Fort, hosts groups of up to 3,500 guests.

Acapulco's hotels and resorts offer more than 13,000 guest rooms. Top properties include the famed 1,107-room Fairmont Acapulco Princess, a 15-story Aztec pyramid-shaped resort located on 480 acres along Revolcadero Beach. The Fairmont completed a \$30 million renovation three years ago that included the new 30,000-sf Diamante Exhibit Center and remodeled space in the hotel's 27 meeting rooms. The resort also offers five swimming pools, lush gardens with more than 750 plant species, a golf course and a luxury spa. North of Acapulco, Club Med Ixtapa Pacific offers 298 rooms and 6,500 sf of meeting space.

Acapulco's famed beaches feature a variety of activities. Visitors can ride in glass-bottom boats, stroll along restaurant-lined shores or watch cliff divers at world-famous La Quebrada dive from 130 feet into a cove. Unique venues include the Juarez Theater, a modern facility that accommodates 366 people and offers private space for group functions.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As Mexico continues to pave the way for groups to feel more secure in the country's major resort cities, and enhances and expands its meetings infrastructure, more and more association groups will be heading south of the border to take advantage of the sun, the convenient access and the tremendous value. AC&F



NEWTON

Brooke Newton was named convention sales manager in the convention development department of the Louisville (KY) Convention & Visitors Bureau, responsible for small group meetings and conventions. She most recently served as a program coordinator in the Housing and Residence Life Office at the University of Louisville.

Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek, Lake Buena Vista, FL, has named **John Branciforte** as director of sales and marketing. With more than 25 years of hospitality sales and marketing experience, Branciforte most recently served as director of sales and marketing of Cheyenne Mountain Resort, Colorado Springs, CO.

Hayat Pronovost, CMP, was named senior national sales executive within the convention services and sales department



BRANCIFORTE

at Visit Orlando, Orlando, FL. Based in Chicago, IL, he is responsible for the Midwest markets. Pronovost was most recently director, national accounts, at Gaylord Hotels in Chicago.

Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa, Destin, FL, has appointed **J. Brian Lee** as regional sales manager for the Midwest region. He most recently served as regional director of sales for Guoman & Thistle Hotels, UK.

The Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau, Anaheim, CA, has named **Dan Ketelsen** as convention sales director. He most recently served as director of sales and marketing for the Hyatt Regency Orange County, Garden Grove, CA.

The San Francisco Travel Association has named **Debbie Jordan** as senior manager,



KETELSEN



O'SULLIVAN

convention sales, Eastern region; and **Susanna C. Flores** as senior manager, convention sales, Northeast region. Jordan most recently served with the Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau, Anaheim, CA. Flores was most recently Choose Chicago's national sales manager for the Northeast market based in New York City.

Diarmaid B. O'Sullivan was named vice president of sales and marketing at the Millennium Broadway Hotel New York in New York City. He formerly served as first vice president of tourism development at NYC & Company.

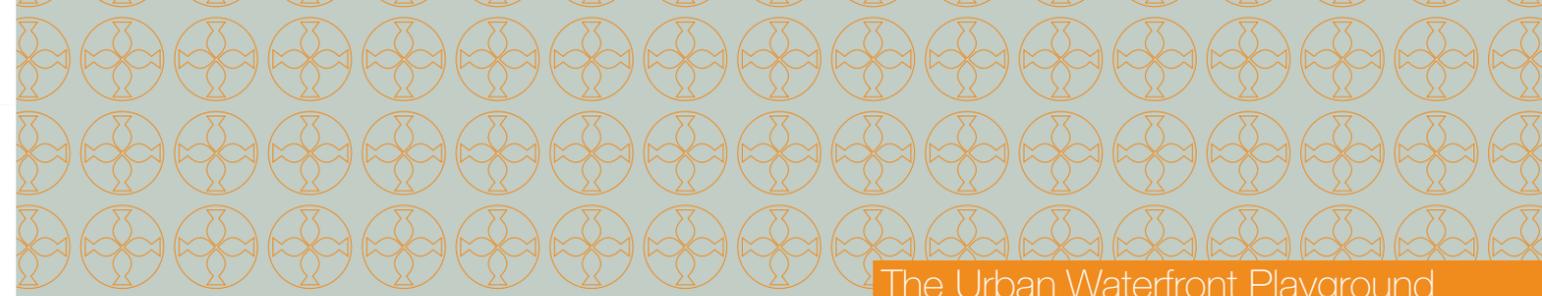
The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, Miami, FL, has promoted **Sonia Fong** to associate vice president of convention sales. She previously served as convention sales manager for the GMCVB. AC&F



FONG

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5	Green Valley Ranch Resort, Spa & Casino	888-319-4661	www.sclv.com/meetings	Veronica Kistner	veronica.kistner@stationcasinos.com
21	Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino	800-545-6040	www.innofthemountaingods.com	Jo Kazhe	jokazhe@innofthemountaingods.com
35	Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau	800-452-7829	www.visitlongbeach.com	Iris Himert	irish@longbeachcvb.org
13	Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau	405-297-8906	www.visitokc.com	Robin O'Connor	roconnor@visitokc.com
15	Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort	800-597-8125	www.omniunderstands.com/amelia	Andrew Lott	aiprst.lead@omnihotels.com
5	Red Rock Casino, Resort & Spa	888-319-4661	www.sclv.com/meetings	Veronica Kistner	veronica.kistner@stationcasinos.com
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