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THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

## Every Dollar Counts

**As Optimism  
Reigns and  
Conservative  
Ways Continue**

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# PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE

## Optimistic With a Conservative Approach

**D**espite weak economic activity, many indicators such as employment trends are pointing in the right direction. Moderate job growth is forecasted in the near future, according to a report from the Conference Board — a global, independent business membership and research association working in the public interest. According to Gad Levanon, director of macroeconomic research at the board, “On average, employment has grown almost as fast as (gross domestic product) over the past three years, and that is likely to continue into the third quarter of 2013.”



What's more, IMEX America reports that a majority of those surveyed in March feel optimistic about the future of meetings and events and expect budgets to slightly increase. More than 400 North American respondents composed of 70 percent buyers and 30 percent suppliers shared how they felt about the meetings industry's business prospects over the coming months. Asked to compare their current levels of optimism to the same period (Q1) in 2012, 67 percent of respondents declared themselves “more optimistic” than this time last year. IMEX Group Chairman Ray Bloom, said: “These re-

sults tell an interesting story; one that is borne out by experience and the feedback we hear from the market every day. And that is that business fundamentals in North America are strong, and gradually getting stronger, and that the overall trend is upwards, albeit gently.”

In our cover story on budgeting this month, Christine Gorham, CMP, senior associate at Booz Allen Hamilton in Herndon, VA, relates that in general, budgets are tight with variations from industry to industry.

“But for the most part, I do think a lot of corporate budgets are flat or have even been reduced,” Gorham says. “And that's because a lot of organizations are still cautious about what they're spending. I think more and more companies are optimistic about the economy, but certainly conservative in their approach.”

Gorham adds. “And I'm hearing the same thing from my peers in the industry.” For more information from Gorham and other experts, such as creative solutions for tight budgets and how Strategic Meetings Management affects the budgeting process, please turn to our cover story “Every Dollar Counts as Optimism Reigns and Conservative Ways Continue” on page 14.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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## Technology Is Key Theme at AIBTM Education Day

CHICAGO, IL — AIBTM 2013, the Americas Incentive, Business Travel and Meetings Exhibition, which takes place June 11–13 at McCormick Place in Chicago, will devote 34 education sessions to support the theme “Defining the Future of Meetings...Together.” Education Day on June 11 will kick off with “What’s Your Sway Factor? Learn the Art of International Social Networking for Career Success” by Sima Dahl, founder of Parley Communications. “How to Virtually Extend Your Event,” led by digital event strategist Michael Doyle, executive director of the Virtual Edge Institute, is scheduled to follow. “It’s #mobilesociallocal,” delivered by Jim Spellos, president of Meeting U, will conclude the technology-themed education sessions. Michael Lyons, Reed Travel Exhibitions, AIBTM exhibition director commented, “We are delighted to be welcoming such a high caliber lineup of speakers to the show this year and look forward to engaging with our attendees through education. The high-quality content, presented by experienced industry leaders, will ensure our delegates understand future trends and innovations, allowing them to better plan and execute their meetings and business strategies, and adapt to the fast-paced world in which we live.” [www.aibtm.com](http://www.aibtm.com)



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## Visit Orlando Receives Award

ORLANDO, FL — Visit Orlando received the 2012 Destination Partner of the Year in the U.S. award from HelmsBriscoe, the global leader in meetings procurement, at their Annual Business Conference recently held in Orlando. The presentation was made April 17 by HelmsBriscoe Founder and CEO Roger Helms to Visit Orlando President and CEO George Aguel at the Hard Rock Live Orlando. “I am honored to recognize Visit Orlando as HelmsBriscoe’s 2012 Destination Partner of the Year,” said Helms. “Visit Orlando has been a strong ally for not only our associates, but for our clients as well. The service that Visit Orlando provides is second to none, and I look forward to many more years of a mutually successful partnership.” Visit Orlando began closely partnering with HelmsBriscoe more than three years ago, strengthening the relationship through a number of initiatives, including working with their associates and clients to ensure they were able to leverage all of Orlando’s venues and resources. Aguel said, “HelmsBriscoe has helped increase awareness of our destination and services throughout their worldwide network, resulting in a notable increase in the number of corporate meetings and events in Orlando during the past three years.” [www.orlandomeeting.com](http://www.orlandomeeting.com)



HelmsBriscoe Founder and CEO Roger Helms (l) presents the 2012 Destination Partner of the Year Award to Visit Orlando President and CEO George Aguel as HelmsBriscoe Managing Director Danielle Boyles looks on.

## Disney Magic Relaunches With New Experiences for Attendees



CELEBRATION, FL — The Disney Magic has new spaces, new adventures, reimagined areas and new experiences for meeting and incentive program attendees, according to Disney Cruise Lines. The ship features fun new experiences with Marvel characters — the first time Super Hero icons from the Marvel Universe have been introduced on a Disney Cruise Line ship. After the transformation of the ship this fall in Cadiz, Spain, the Disney Magic will introduce many new and upgraded features including a three-story water slide; an updated Animator’s Palate restaurant with all-new, animation-adorned walls and larger HD flat-screens; a new restaurant named Carioca’s after Donald Duck’s parrot pal; and Cabanas, a new casual dining experience. In 2014, Disney Cruise Line will offer new itineraries, including European cruises highlighting the Greek Isles. Also, Disney Cruise Line will depart for the first time from homeports in Venice, Italy and San Juan, Puerto Rico. From May to August of 2014, the Disney Magic returns to the Mediterranean using Venice, Italy and Barcelona, Spain, as homeports for a variety of itineraries. The Disney Magic also will sail four seven-night cruises to the Southern Caribbean from San Juan to a variety of ports of call, including Grenada, from September to October. [www.disneymeetings.com/disneycruise](http://www.disneymeetings.com/disneycruise)



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1 The Long Beach CVB welcomed more than 35 meeting planners April 18–21 for a familiarization tour of Long Beach’s meeting facilities. 2 ACTE President Suzanne Neufang (l) and Executive Director Greeley Koch (r) sign The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism as Carol Smolenski, executive director, ECPAT-USA, looks on. 3 Robert De Niro and partner Chef Nobu Matsuhisa toast at the grand opening of Nobu Hotel Caesars Palace. 4 (L to r) Amy Jo Hurley, CRP, program director, faculty and staff recognition, The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center; Barbara Ruddy, CRP, owner, STARS; and Rita Maehling, CRP, president, Achieve Consulting at the Recognition Professionals International’s Annual Conference in New Orleans. 5 (L to r) Comedian Jeff Foxworthy, Centennial Gala Host; Nancy Oswald, 2013 Chair of the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau’s (ACVB) Board of Directors; William Pate, ACVB President and CEO gathered with nearly 1,000 hospitality leaders for the ACVB’s 100-year anniversary at the Georgia World Congress Center. 6 At the 32nd IACC-Americas annual conference at Eaglewood Resort & Spa in Itasca, IL, (l to r) IACC-Americas President, TJ Fimmano presented The IACC Award of Excellence to Sean Sands and Sean Anderson.

Photo credits: 1. The Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2. ACTE, 3. Ethan Miller/Getty Images, 4. Recognition Professionals International, 5. Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau, 6. IACC



## MGM Resorts to Develop Las Vegas Outdoor Entertainment District

LAS VEGAS, NV — MGM Resorts International released details about a new entertainment district in Las Vegas that will surround the world-class 20,000-seat arena under development in partnership with the sports, entertainment and facilities organization AEG. Plans include new Strip-side experiences at New York-New York and Monte Carlo resorts, and a public park leading to the new state-of-the-art arena. Construction will begin soon on the outdoor experiences at New York-New York and Monte Carlo, with anticipated completion in early 2014.

Jim Murren, chairman and CEO of MGM Resorts International, said, "All great cities offer vibrant pedestrian experiences, and Las Vegas is certainly no exception as The Strip is one of the world's greatest boulevards. Our vision is to extend the excitement we traditionally create within our world-class



A rendering of the new MGM Resorts International entertainment district to be completed in early 2014.

resorts outside onto The Strip and ultimately in an entertainment district leading to our new arena."

The front facades of New York-New York and Monte Carlo will be transformed into an outdoor plaza experience featuring a series of casual bars, eateries and retail destinations. Between the two properties and lead-

ing back to the new arena will be a park environment featuring dining pavilions and performance spaces complemented by areas for quiet relaxation. [www.mgmresorts.com](http://www.mgmresorts.com), [www.aegworldwide.com](http://www.aegworldwide.com)

## Windstar Cruises Names Its First New Power Yacht

SEATTLE, WA — Windstar Cruises recently announced Star Pride — the new name of the first of its three new power yachts. Star Pride, which will launch May 2014, will spend its first season in Europe offering new voyages, which open for bookings on May 14, 2013. The names of the additional two yachts will be announced in the coming weeks, and they are scheduled to start sailing in May of 2015. Increasing the size of the fleet enables Windstar to cruise a global set of itineraries to new destinations, such as Wind Spirit's much anticipated return to Tahiti and Star Pride's European voyage collection. In the future, Global Windstar will provide opportunities to visit Asia and South America. The identical yachts have a guest capacity of 212 each in 106 suites. As the three yachts enter the fleet, they will undergo a Windstar-branded renovation. [www.windstarcruises.com](http://www.windstarcruises.com)

## The Westin Imagine Orlando Renamed The Westin Orlando Universal Boulevard

ORLANDO, FL — The five-year-old Westin Imagine Orlando recently announced a name change — The Westin Orlando Universal Boulevard — which was introduced to help travelers identify that the property is located close to the Orange County Convention Center as well as key Orlando attractions. The 315-room hotel features luxury one- and two-bedroom suites with balconies and equipped with Westin's signature Heavenly Bed, Heavenly Shower, full kitchens or kitchenettes. To kick off their 5th anniversary, The Westin will feature special hotel packages and culinary offerings throughout the year. [www.westinimagineorlando.com](http://www.westinimagineorlando.com)



The Westin Orlando Universal Boulevard, formerly The Westin Imagine Orlando.

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By Brad Weaber

## Phones Are Rude! Redefining Face-to-Face and the New Rules of Engagement

A couple of years ago I was strolling through an office environment and something struck me as odd — there were no phones ringing. I saw a sea of employees diligently working, most with ear buds in, listening to their favorite tunes as their fingers quickly danced over the keyboards. I could not help but reflect back to a time when a boss had said to me, “Hear those phones, it’s like gold!”

Recently, I attended a sales methodology seminar. The goal of the seminar was for the sales team to not answer their phones. Instead, they had to wait and use the voice mail message that was left by the interested party to mine information and then establish a dedicated appointment time to talk. This way, the salesperson could be more prepared with better information to close the deal. “Hmm,” I thought. With all the talk of the importance of effective communication and the power of face-to-face meetings, I decided to probe a little deeper.

### Phones Are Rude

I started meeting with various employees in different companies, as well as with my own teenage son, to find out how

they best like to connect. After talking with them for a little while, I asked the question “You don’t seem to mention talking on the phone. Why not?” The overwhelming response almost to the person, including my son, was “Phones are rude.” The premise here is that you do not know what the person is doing or where they are when you are calling and it could be disruptive or rude to interrupt them. Texting is considered faster and more polite. (Clearly, they have not seen me attempt to text!)

Over the years, serving on a variety of hotel or convention and visitors bureau advisory boards has been something I have enjoyed immensely. The topics have changed over the years and lately the discussion typically leads to the engagement of the multiple generations in the attendee space and how people want to be communicated with in the marketplace. Ironically, as I sit on these boards I do not see the generations represented much below baby boomers or perhaps Gen X, and yet we attempt to try to answer the questions for all. The best piece of advice I can give on what the diverse generations value most in communication and face-to-face is to simply ask them. Every board, committee, etc., should have a trusted member representing each generation, whether on an ad hoc basis or a more defined seat at the table to give opinion and feedback. This has proved very rewarding and fruitful.

### Multitasking With Multi-Devices

At meetings both internally in an office or at a conference, many times the leader of the meeting will make a comment that everyone should put away their mobile devices, laptops and all other items with an on/off switch. Attendees have an expectation that they will be able to multitask and stay connected to all areas that they want to stay connected to at all times. Wi-Fi at a conference is like air, and more and more people are using multiple devices, which continually adds a strain to what systems are put into place. As we strive to attract more attendees to corporate meetings, it is paramount that we create the environment for multitasking and multi-devices.

Face-to-face means physically being in the same room,

but face-to-face, for some — and this number is increasing — also means Skype, FaceTime, videoconferencing and the list goes on and on. One person I spoke with also added texting to this list. I queried, and the response was, “I can shoot out a text, have it go viral and 100 people will show up in four hours for a party or volleyball game. Can you make that happen with a meeting?” While perhaps not practical in the business sense, the point here is that engagement and value propositions are constantly in play, and therefore, show that while the meaning of face-to-face

is morphing, its importance remains the same. The silver lining with the turbulent economic and generational landscape is that it has forced everyone to look at the “new” versus the “this is how we have always done it.” Companies that have not taken the step to reevaluate their meetings and ask the question, “If this was the first time we ever conducted this meeting, what would it look like?” are taking a big risk in potentially alienating the attendee of today, and certainly the attendee of tomorrow.

### Hybrid Meeting Philosophy

All research and data does point to the absolute importance and value of face-to-face meetings in the physical sense of bringing people together, which I completely agree with. However, the key to a hybrid meeting philosophy — which is a must in today’s day and age — is to find all the strategic pieces to complete the entire puzzle of full attendee engagement. Before launching a hybrid meeting philosophy it is paramount that you understand why you are doing it and what you want the outcome to be. The key to success in hybrid planning is to start small, use it to accelerate the energy of a real-time or face-to-face event, and continue to create and foster a forum after the meeting to keep the online community engaged so they will want to attend your next face-to-face to see what they missed.

The comment “phones are rude” is actually a powerful one and ultimately leads back to the premise of the power of face-to-face. Most interaction on social media and texting ultimately results in physically coming together. The online connection is just a conduit to making face-to-face interactions that much easier. I truly believe that people want a physical connection and to do business with those that they like and trust. The technology we use is an accelerator and not a “replacer.” Now please excuse me, my phone is ringing.

C&amp;IT

“Attendees have an expectation that they will be able to **multitask and stay connected** to all areas that they want to stay connected to at all times.”

### Brad Weaber

is executive vice president of SmithBucklin’s Event Services unit. He is a 26-year meetings industry veteran and oversees all of the company’s convention, trade show and event management service offerings. SmithBucklin, the world’s largest association management and professional services company, provides full-service management and high-impact specialized services to trade associations, professional societies, technology user groups, corporations, government institutes/agencies and other nonprofit organizations. [www.smithbucklin.com](http://www.smithbucklin.com)



By Jeff Hurt

# Is It Time to Reinvent the Meetings Industry and the Meeting Professional?

I think the meetings and conference industry has reached a plateau.

For years the industry has focused on the logistical side of the meeting including registration, food and beverage, contracts, venue space, room sets, schedules, SMMP and more. The industry has matured, and many meeting professionals have become very good at the details.

Yet, the improvements in those details have not taken the meetings industry to the next level. In fact, many conferences are still suffering because the attendee experience has not changed in 30–50 years. It's become stale, predictable and status quo.

It's time for the industry to make an intentional and radical leap to take the meetings professional out of department silos and into a more holistic, strategic and creative planning professional.

## Silos Suck the Life Out of Conferences

Currently, most conferences and meetings are planned by an array of people each within their own silos. The meetings department is focused on the minutia of the meeting. The expo department focuses on trade shows. The sponsorship and development department focuses on sponsors. The marketing department focuses on promotion and marketing of the event. The education department focuses on the programming. And in the nonprofit world, the membership and chapter relations department focuses on volunteer involvement and committees.

We have more silos for our major conferences than the traditional farm. Unfortunately, the conference silos are not used to store nourishment that leads to outstanding education and networking.

Our conference planning silos have created a fractured and broken attendee experience. Without a major conference planning champion, a clear and articulated vision and strategy and a more holistic approach, we have left most conference experiences up to the luck of the draw. Frequently, the odds of the attendee walking away with a transformative experience and high ROI are better at the blackjack table than the conference.

## The Meetings Industry Is Staring Down Disruption

The meetings industry is facing major disruption. People

no longer attend to get the most current information — they can get that online. They don't look to the conference as the primary source for networking as they can do that online too.

Attendees spend more time in the hallways setting up meetings with the people they want and need to see. They don't go to general sessions or breakouts, yet we're spending millions of dollars on production, AV, speakers, room sets and more to create those education sessions. Attendees say that their conference highlights are the parties and offsite experiences often planned by those outside of the conference team.

## Where the Meetings Industry Needs to Go

I believe that if the meetings industry wants to make a major impact on conferences of the future, they need to go in new directions. Here are some of the areas that I believe strategic meeting professionals must embrace and do differently:

- **Programming**

Most organizations will say they have programming and education talent. We have to ask ourselves if it's the right programming talent! Can that education department design a creative, unique, memorable opening general session based on what science tells us works to change attitudes and behaviors or is that department nothing more than a scheduler of speakers?

For meetings to go to the next level, the meeting professional must embrace how to design effective education and networking experiences. They can't let it default to others.

- **Creative**

Do our organizations really have the creative talent we need for the meetings industry to create and foster innovative experiences? It's time to take some lessons from the events industry on creativity and creating experiences. While focusing on the details uses one side of the brain, and focusing on the creative uses another side, we have got to merge the two sides of the brain as well as the two tasks. We need meeting professionals who can easily jump between logistics, strategy and creative.

- **Analytics**

Most meeting professionals are not very good at research and analytics of their events. Sure they can spout inputs and outputs including attendance, expenses and

revenue. Yet few are good at comparing years of data, interpreting trends and identifying the right audience for each experience. Fewer still are willing to watch global trends, analyze them and interpret how they'll impact their conferences. Analysis needs to evolve beyond merely analyzing inputs and outputs into deriving core insights to inform decisions like how to spend meetings dollars.

- **Converged Content and Technology**

Few meeting professionals understand and know how to apply today's pull economies. Most are stuck in push marketing strategies where we bombard potential attendees with interruption marketing. Few can leverage the power of today's technology tools and use content

properly as a conference marketing strategy. We have got to be more nimble at applying earned media strategies, social and mobile. Why? Our attendees have become more tech savvy and content hungry than we are.

I think it's time for a meetings industry revolution. The question is will our current meetings industry organizations lead us there or do we need to leave them behind?

Hat tips to thought leader David Armano whose recent post about changing PR profession helped me solidify my thinking about the meetings industry.

What other areas do today's strategic meeting professional need to embrace? For how long do you think people will pay to attend conferences that are average at best? **C&IT**

“We have **more silos** for our major conferences than the traditional farm.”



**Jeff Hurt**

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## Every Dollar Counts

As Optimism Reigns and  
Conservative Ways Continue

By John Buchanan

**A**lthough the meeting industry is flourishing again, budgets remain tight in most organizations — and virtually every significant expenditure is under unprecedented scrutiny due to the increasing impact of strategic meetings management programs.

“Budgets are running really very tight,” says Peter Duncan, CMP, senior program manager at independent meeting planning company Meetings & Incentives Inc. (M&I), located in Caledonia, WI. “There used to be a little fluff or a little play in budgets. Now, they have to be as accurate and as tight as possible in terms of every dollar.”

Duncan has been with Meetings & Incentives for 11 years. And he has never before seen a sustained period of time when budgets have been examined as aggressively as they have been since the recession.

And that’s not just a result of the steep economic downturn, he says. “For example, for our pharmaceutical clients, the oversight of their industry is a major factor,” Duncan says. “They want to make sure they are in compliance with the guidelines from things like the PhRMA code. For other companies, it’s just a matter of looking to get the most out of their meeting dollars. And they don’t want to waste money on excess meetings that are not really essential to their business.”

Christine Gorham, CMP, senior associate at Booz Allen Hamilton in Herndon, VA, agrees that in general, budgets are tight. But she also



*“Organizations are still cautious. I think more and more companies are optimistic about the economy, but certainly conservative in their approach.”*

**Christine Gorham, CMP**, Senior Associate  
Booz Allen Hamilton, Herndon, VA

makes the point that there are variations from industry to industry.

“But for the most part, I do think a lot of corporate budgets are flat or have even been reduced,” she says. “And that’s because a lot of organizations are still cautious about what they’re spending. I think more and more companies are optimistic about the economy, but certainly conservative in their approach.”

“We’re seeing tighter budgets,” Gorham adds. “And I’m hearing the same thing from my peers in the industry.”

And in a broader sense, the industry has undergone a major change over the last few years. “Gone are the days where you can just keep going back to the same hotel year after year,” Gorham says.

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“Now more than ever, it’s important (and even mandatory in certain situations) to competitively source to ensure you are getting the best value for what you’re spending.”

Competitive bidding also helps mitigate the fact that the proverbial pendulum has swung back to a strong seller’s market for hotels, which are now out to extract every possible dollar of revenue from a particular meeting in order to recoup the losses they suffered during the recession. “And that is why concessions that were assumed three years ago are very hard to come by today,” Duncan says. “In 2009, you could just pick up the phone and say, ‘I have this piece of business and here’s what I want,’ and they would just say, ‘Yes.’ Now they say, ‘We’ll look at it and see if it’s the right fit for us over those dates and then get back to you.’”

The biggest challenge independent planners such as M&I face now, Duncan says, especially in terms of clients they worked with before the recession, “is to bring them up to speed on the new business realities of meetings. They’re not getting as many freebies as they used to get. The objectives, in terms of the things clients want for their meetings, are more expensive. And in order to realize those objectives, you really have to take a partnership approach with hotels and other major vendors. Before the recession, we heard the term ‘partnerships with vendors’ a lot. But it really has become an integral part of the planning process since the recession. And that’s because it’s the only way you can actually maximize your dollars across all of your meetings and vendors.”

## The Role of SMM

Although many planners were skeptical before the recession about claims that strategic meetings management would become a widespread discipline that would impact their roles, today they see that it has spread like wildfire through the Fortune 1000 and beyond. And by definition, the emergence of SMM as a corporate best practice designed to help control meeting costs has put downward pressure on budgets.

“SMM is now having much more of an influence on budgets than it ever did before,” Duncan says. “Every dollar is being

examined. That has become a huge part of meeting planning and the determination of budgets now. It’s incredible.”

As a result of SMM, procurement and finance departments are getting more and more involved in the meeting budget process, which means more scrutiny of every budget. “We tell our clients to put their budgets together like a procurement person is sitting across the desk from them asking a lot of questions,” Duncan says. “That’s the only way today to get budgets done that you

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can get approved without any controversy. You have to be able to justify everything.”

### Rising Costs

At the same time planners are under pressure to hold the line on their budgets, certain costs such as airfares and food and beverage are skyrocketing.

“I can’t believe how much airfares have gone up,” says Lori Kolker, CMP, president of independent planning company Elle k Associates Inc. in Rockville, MD. “They’re just crazy. You can go to Europe now for less than it costs you to go from New York to San Francisco.”

Gorham is also acutely concerned about rising airfares. “I just booked a flight for a meeting I am attending in Washington state and I couldn’t be-

Duncan says. “In those markets, the hotels just say, ‘take it or leave it.’”

Still other hotels are creating new fees, such as resort fees, Duncan says. And in other markets, government fees such as bed taxes are on the rise. And all of those add to the duress of budget-minded meeting planners.

At the same time, F&B costs are going up simply because food costs have been rising sharply over the last year or two. And that is just an underlying reality of supply and demand, Duncan says. “That’s why you really have to work closely with your hotel partners on designing your menus in order to get the most for your money,” he says. “You can’t take anything for granted anymore when it comes to costs. And all costs need to be contained.”

Given their myopic focus on tight budgets and rising costs, many meeting hosts simply do not understand how much demand there is for hotel rooms and meeting space now that the economy has largely recovered and the meeting industry has returned to normal.

“Dates are tight,” Duncan says. “Meeting space is tight. And hotels and other major vendors are maximizing the revenue they get from every piece of business.”

That, in turn, means that planners must focus more on truly developing long-term vendor relationships that are based on effectively leveraging their total meeting budgets and not just the budget for a meeting next month. “If you really do think in terms of long-term partnerships with your vendors,” Duncan says, “that kind of attitude really helps make your dollars go a lot further.”

The promise of future business is indeed a critical element in the equation. “A lot of the market today is based on long-term bargaining power,” Duncan says. “But it has to be honest bargaining power and not based on false promises. Once you’ve lost your credibility, it’s very hard to get it back. And credibility is a very important part of the bargaining and budgeting process now. And meeting buyers have to understand that integrity is a very important part of any kind of partnership.”

Many hotels are still smarting from the beatings they took during the depths of the recession, when savvy planners took maximum advantage of their leverage in an unprecedented buyer’s market.

Now, hotels are being equally tough in their negotiations. “In that sense, planners need to understand that times have changed,” Duncan says. “And they also need to understand that open communication with vendors is more im-



*“The all-inclusives are less expensive than anything else you can do. And your attendees are also still getting to live the high life, so it’s a very good solution for a lot of companies.”*

**Lori Kolker, CMP**, President  
Elle k Associates Inc., Rockville, MD

lieve the cost of the fares,” she says. “And I think it’s only going to get worse.”

As a result, Kolker says, she sees a trend toward bifurcation of booking flights from the rest of the meeting planning process, meaning that corporate travel departments or third-party travel management companies are assuming that responsibility based on their unique expertise and experience. “It’s considered a specialized function now,” Kolker says. “And that is really a result of tight budgets and the rising cost of air travel.”

And most companies are not simply absorbing the increased airfares and still spending the same amount on hotel rooms, F&B or offsite venues, Kolker says. “They are cutting back on other things to make sure they stick to their total budget,” she says. “But it’s not just because of the airfares. A lot of companies are still concerned about the state of the economy, and they want to be very careful in terms of what they spend on their meetings.”

Meanwhile, empowered by a robust seller’s market, some hotels — and especially those in high-demand destinations — are raising F&B fees from a traditional 15–18 percent to as high as 22 percent. And pushback is not easy for buyers. “And that’s especially true in the major meeting destinations where there is a lot of demand,”

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portant than ever when it comes to budgets and being able to get the things you need at the price you can afford to pay.”

### Finding Creative Solutions

Facing conflicting realities such as tight budgets and spiking costs, planners must find new ways to achieve their goals. And one way of doing that is thinking creatively.

“Once we have the meeting objectives nailed down and a proposal out that’s based on an honest, realistic budget, we’ve started working with clients on allocating the dollars into different corporate budgets so that the meeting budget doesn’t have to absorb all of the costs,” Duncan says. “For

*“SMM is now having much more of an influence on budgets than it ever did before. Every dollar is being examined. That has become a huge part of meeting planning and the determination of budgets now. It’s incredible.”*

**Peter Duncan, CMP**, Senior Program Manager  
Meetings & Incentives Inc., Caledonia, WI

example, they might have attendees charge their airfare to their corporate credit cards, so that gets charged as a T&E expense and not a meeting expense. That’s one current example of the ways in which some companies are getting a little more creative in the way funding is dispersed.”

Another example is allocating some of the costs for the annual sales meeting or a product launch event to the marketing budget instead of all of it going into the meeting budget. “We’re now seeing more and more clients doing those kinds of things, especially those with small meeting budgets,” Duncan says.

Other companies are looking at new options such as all-inclusive resorts in Jamaica, Mexico or the Dominican Republic for incentive programs, Kolker says. Doing that means being able to deliver a program on a fixed budget without skimping on attendee perks. “The all-inclusives are less expensive than anything else you can do,” Kolker says. “And your attendees are also still getting to live the high life, so it’s a very good solution for a lot of companies.”

Another trend Kolker sees is clients bringing in their own audio-visual equipment and/or personnel. “I’m seeing more and more of that as a way of managing costs,” she says. “And the hotels aren’t really objecting, although sometimes they do charge a fee because you’re doing that. But it’s

still often a good way to save some money, because audio-visual for a big meeting is expensive.”

Yet another practical adjustment is being made in F&B options such as liquor. “Some companies now are switching from top-shelf liquors to just premium,” Kolker says. “And that’s another way they’re saving some money without really compromising on the fact that they want to do a quality event for their attendees. And they’re doing the same thing with hors d’oeuvres. And I find that hotels are willing to work with you on those kinds of things, too.”

But perhaps the smartest approach of all, Gorham says, is to carefully analyze past meeting costs in order to maintain effective cost controls in the future.

Booz Allen has developed a proprietary meeting budget calculator based on industry and historical data. “What that does is help the planner who is putting the meeting together understand what the meeting should cost, based on general pricing or from similar meetings we’ve done in the past,” Gorham says. And that leads to a rough budget estimate that can serve as a framework for discussions between meeting hosts and planners. “Defining your budget before planning is essential but also helps avoid unnecessary work, not only for the planner, but for the hotels.”

### Looking to the Future

At this point, no one can say with certainty whether the current climate is a passing storm or a permanent change. For his part, Duncan does not believe that meeting budgets will ever return to pre-recession levels.

Kolker is just keeping her fingers crossed. “I pray that budgets will get back to pre-recession levels,” she says. “And even though I hear lots of people talking about ‘budget cuts, budget cuts,’ an awful lot of companies are still dancing around that issue and doing the kinds of meetings they want to be doing. And I don’t think that is ever going to change, especially for major meetings and high-end incentive programs.”

Gorham’s hope is that the importance of face-to-face meetings will never be entirely lost to the cause of cost-cutting. “I’ve been in the meeting industry for 17 years,” she says. “And I believe in the importance of face-to-face meetings. It’s great to have hybrid meetings. But I also think there are companies that have reduced the number of face-to-face meetings and are now seeing the effect it’s had on their business. As a result of that, those companies are now trying to figure out the right balance. We’re certainly at a pivotal moment right now.” **C&IT**

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Planners participate in a PCMA education session.

Photo courtesy of PCMA

# Certification AND Education

## Deciphering an Alphabet Soup of Options

By Timothy Herrick

Advancing through the meeting planning and incentive travel program profession now requires deciphering the alphabet soup of certifications. Like many professions, planners serious about their career must constantly prove competency by acquiring certifications, and augmenting job experience by participating in continuing educational programs.

But making sense of the acronyms has gotten trickier. A range of certifications and certificates is now available.

Some certifications are new, others are soon due to be introduced (or reintroduced) in 2013 and even the more established acronyms are undergoing a comprehensive revision. While prerequisites and the amount of course work necessary to complete each one vary, this growing abundance reflects the maturity of this increasingly competitive, and lucrative profession.

"Meeting planner" can be a broadly

defined trade. Their core task — organizing a meeting or event — in actuality represents a large and eclectic skillset. Programming content, attracting attendees, assessing venues for site selection and fully utilizing new technologies are just a few of the basic talents planners require. The career can advance to a strategic management level with responsibility for aligning meetings with corporate objectives, measuring business results and ROI, and developing enterprise-wide strategic meetings

management programs. While some aspects of meeting and event planning are part of various college-level curricula, outside of the industry there is a dearth of specific training for this supremely unique profession.

As planners seek to advance, it's the industry education that matters most, especially for a profession where experience in cutting-edge technology and the ability to rapidly adapt to globalization realities are mandatory.

"Most individuals who make a commitment to a certification understand the importance of possessing the knowledge necessary to remain relevant within their profession and tend to be life-long learners," says Dawn McEvoy, CMP, CAE, director of education at the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA). "The work force is evolving. For meeting professionals, it is becoming increasingly important to distinguish yourself as a knowledgeable professional

committed to staying current on the industry trends necessary to and ensuring your meeting is relevant to your audience."

Karen Kotowski, CAE, CMP, chief executive officer of the Convention Industry Council (CIC), which defines the standards for the Certified Meeting Professional program, says, "Candidates for employment opportunities want their resumé to make it to the top of the heap. Many meeting industry jobs now require or prefer a CMP designation. Employers want to know before investing in a hire that the candidate has the skills and competencies they need, as demonstrated by credible third-party assessment."

### Objective Standards

Certification is an objective validation of the professional standards, acknowl-



*"The work force is evolving. ...It is becoming increasingly important to distinguish yourself as a knowledgeable professional."*

**Dawn McEvoy, CMP, CAE**  
Director of Education  
PCMA  
Chicago, IL

edged by employers and others outside of the profession as credible evidence of expertise. "There are many people that have been putting out shingles and calling themselves meeting planners because they have done their own wedding or a social gathering, but have no training in space ratios, risk, contract management, etc.," says Anita Carlyle, CMP,

## The View From MPI

**Cindy D'Aoust**, COO of Meeting Professionals International, weighed in on the key skills and competencies meeting professionals must acquire to stay

successful in a climate of economic uncertainty, budget cuts, rapidly changing meeting design, demographics and new technologies.

"With the increased scrutiny on meetings related to everything from budget pressures and Return on Objective to new technologies and attendee engagement, it is more important

than ever that meeting professionals in our space operate with integrity, have a strong business acumen and be skilled in all aspects of providing strategic experiential events that drive bottom-line business results.

"Two competencies that will be at a premium for meeting

professionals are their ability to measure and communicate the business value of meetings and their ability to sustain attendee engagement.

"Meetings that deliver value to their respective organizations will continue to receive budget support. Leadership will invest in programs that drive positive results against business objectives. To that end, planning professionals will need to be able to clearly define and articulate the positive impact that meetings have on their respective organization, clients and attendees.

"To help our members better understand this subject, the MPI Foundation, along with its thought leadership investors, developed a robust Business Value of Meetings Toolkit series. It is a very comprehensive package of research, information and worksheets designed to help our members identify and determine the value of their meetings.

"Engagement is a challenge for meeting professionals. With five generations in the workplace, it is vitally important that meeting professionals fully understand their audience and the attributes, motivations and principles of each age group. Access to information is but one laptop, cellphone or tablet away. So for the meeting professional, it is about how to deliver relevant and meaningful content to their particular audience in a way that will truly engage them and create an emotional connection. And part of that is giving them information in the manner they want to consume it."

**C&IT**





CMM, managing partner, Moore Carlyle Consulting. “This makes the entire industry look bad when things go wrong.”

She adds that earning certifications started for her as a part of her “continued personal and professional development,” but now have a recognizable impact beyond her own personal career. “We see clients requesting proof of CMPs or CMMs on RFPs.”

“As an employer, when faced with two equally qualified candidates, I am going to choose the one that has taken the time and investment in themselves to obtain their certification,” says Stephanie Krzywanski, CMM, chief operating officer of JR Global Events, and a planner for more than 15 years. “As a business owner, having my CMM makes our company more attractive to current and potential clients.”

Mazda T. Miles, CMM, president of Perfection Events Inc., says certification is “helpful to me in receiving the esteem I desired as an experienced meeting professional when working with or approaching both clients and vendors. My firm focuses on Strategic Meetings Management (SMM) and strategic event design. CMM focuses on the strategic aspect of meetings and events.”

“The standard for a college education is a minimum of a BA/BS,” says Dena Rose, CMP, CMM, project manager A&M Meetings & Incentives. “(Certification) shows that you have taken the additional steps to become a better planner and are serious about your career as a planner.” She points out that certifications “show that you can be considered a Subject Matter Expert (SME),” adding they have been especially useful in the “area of ROI.”

### Knowledge Is Power

Certifications indicate a level of professionalism — an in-depth knowledge of best practices — creating a bulwark against a sometimes-hostile media. “Since 2008, the industry has not made it through a year without global media and public opinion attaching a negative perception to a proven business tool,”

says Allison Summers, CIS, managing director, Site. The obvious examples she cites include “the U.S. media focus on AIG and the use of incentives in the financial services industry; the U.S. government GSA expenses associated with meetings and conferences; and employee recognition programs.”

But just as the meetings and incentive industry is global in scope, so has been the backlash against some programs, Summers says, such as “Australia’s focus on the appropriateness of the ANZ bank incentive cruise program or negative publicity associated with a program run by a German company in Rio de Janeiro.” And, while Summers emphasizes that each of these incidents occurred under “very different circumstances and were sparked by specific economical or political issues in their countries,” in each instance the media coverage completely overlooked “the business results achieved from the programs.”

Austere economic times, higher budget scrutiny and a heightened public sensitivity to even the appearance of excessive spending have increased the pressure on planners to justify their



**Karen Kotowski, CAE, CMP, Chief Executive Officer**  
Convention Industry Council, Alexandria, VA

meeting and incentive programs. Certification makes available training enabling professionals to avoid pitfalls that might spark negative publicity.

“Designed correctly, motivational travel programs are proven to be highly effective in helping companies achieve their business goals,” says Summers. “However, there are ethical and financial guidelines that companies and planners need to consider when they are design-



**“As a business owner, having my CMM makes our company more attractive to current and potential clients.”**

**Stephanie Krzywanski, CMM**  
Chief Operating Officer  
JR Global Events  
Downingtown, PA

ing a program in order to avoid controversy. In addition to the travel reward, a well-designed program includes specific goals and objectives, an engaging communication plan and frequent measurement and reinforcement.”

### Job Market

The job market for meeting, convention and event planners may be relatively healthy compared to other segments of the work force, but it is a very competitive job market, and certifications are increasingly playing a decisive role when disseminating through applicants.

U.S. News & World Report ranked meeting, convention and event planner No. 14 out of 24 occupations listed

**“We expect that our updated manual will have greater emphasis on current meeting industry topics such as return on investment, ethics, sustainable meeting practices and new technologies.”**

among its “Best Business Jobs 2013.” McEvoy adds, “Recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (information) projects this field to grow by 44 percent between 2010 and 2020, opening up 31,300 more meeting, convention, and event planner jobs.” She also cites a “2013 Travel Price Forecast” published by Carlson Wagonlit Travel that showed the exhibition industry grew by 2.4 percent and attendance was up in 2011.

McEvoy believes these numbers indicate an upswing in the job market for the meeting profession. “Obtaining a certification shows a commitment to both one’s career and their profession. This type of commitment is typically viewed positively by an employer,” she notes.

McEvoy emphasizes that certification is now key for advancement, citing a 2012 salary survey conducted by *Convene* (the official publication of PCMA) that showed the average salary for respondents with a CMP was \$76,225, compared to \$65,609 for those without the CMP designation. “The choice to pursue certification is very personal and should be based on an individual’s desire to show a proficiency in the body of knowledge encompassed by the certification,” she says. “There are certifications geared to different career levels and job focus.”

### Adding Acronyms

Planners — especially as they advance in their careers and work in different segments of the profession — pursue different certifications at different stages of their working life. The issue is which one to pursue, and when. “I earned the CMP — after three years, my CMM, about six or seven years into my career,” says Rose. “The CMP makes you stand out, and most companies now want you to have that, but the CMM shows that you are a senior-level planner and are strategic instead of just logistical.”

Why earn more than one certification? “Each certificate has its own focus or specialization,” explains Diana Graling, CMM, CMP, CSEP, manager, global accounts at HelmsBriscoe. Graling, who says she started in event management as a child in the 1980s “working in my family’s restaurant,” says pursuing continuing education supplements on-the-job experience. “(Certification) shows that you have a good understanding of the body of knowledge for the meetings and events and that you understand the theory of meeting and event management, as well as the meaning of various industry terms, definitions and formulas.

“The CSEP specializes in special events — galas, weddings, etc. The CMP focuses more on meetings and conventions, with

concepts like SMMP (Strategic Meetings Management Programs), and the CMM focuses on the strategic business plan and how events can fit into the larger picture of an organization’s operations plan, as well as how to strategically plan a new startup company, create a marketing plan and measure business results that can be reported to various stakeholders and investors.”

### The Standard of Excellence

The first-line standard of excellence for meeting professionals is represented by the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) designation, offered by the Convention Industry Council since 1985 and earned by more than 14,000 planners. The CIC plans to introduce a subspecialty to the CMP for health care meeting professionals by the end of 2013. “To ensure that the CMP remains current, we conduct a job analysis every five years,” says Kotowski. “Our most recent job analysis included international CMP input and an alignment with other

international standards in the marketplace,” she explains. “We are also in the process of updating the CIC Manual (a major study resource for the CMP exam). We ensure that our certification remains relevant by ensuring that it is updated and current with contemporary meeting practices. We expect that our updated manual will have greater emphasis on current meeting industry topics such as return on investment, ethics, sustainable meeting practices and new technologies.”

Meeting Professionals International offers the CMM, the Certificate in Meeting Management. The CMM is a five-day educational program offered to management-level meeting planners. The program focuses on improving strategic decision-making with the goal of delivering exceptional meetings and events that align with business objectives. According to a spokesperson, MPI’s educational program will be completely overhauled and reintroduced later this year.

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***“The CMP makes you stand out, and most companies now want you to have that, but the CMM shows that you are a senior-level planner and are strategic instead of just logistical.”***

**Dena Rose, CMP, CMM**  
Project Manager  
A&M Meetings & Incentives  
Newtown Square, PA



industry worldwide.” Both the new credential and the make-over of the old one, creating two tiers that cater to professionals at different stages of their career, is a response to a new industry reality:

the need for a variety of certifications. “While there are other industry certifications focused on the planning of meetings and events, Site is the only global organization dedicated to providing specialized education on the incentive travel and motivational experiences industry,” says Summers. “The CIS designation provides global practitioners a common understanding of what makes incentive programs meaningful and memorable, and how to deliver measurable business results. The CIS credential is a way for incentive planners and suppliers to distinguish themselves and grow their incentive travel business in a very competitive marketplace.”

Site soon will reintroduce CITE along with the “Site Body of Knowledge,” an educational program, the credits of which will be transferable across meeting industry certification programs. The Site Body of Knowledge is “a suite of standardized courses that will qualify industry practitioners for clock

***“The CIS credential is a way for incentive planners and suppliers to distinguish themselves and grow their incentive travel business in a very competitive marketplace.”***

**Allison Summers, CIS, Managing Director**  
Site, Chicago, IL



a greater understanding of the fundamentals, theory and practice of the creative and effective utilization of motivational travel programs to drive business results,” says Summers. “The goal is to raise the bar on competency and competitiveness by elevating the quantity and quality of professionals in the

hours towards the CITE and other credentials such as CMP,” says Summer. “The curriculum offers three progressive tiers: Core Knowledge, Business Practices and Discipline Practices. Site leaders have mapped out the content for these new programs and will debut some of them at the Site Global

Conference taking place in Orlando, Florida, December 7–10, 2013.”

### **Business Travel Roadmap**

In 2013, the Global Business Travel Association introduced its Global Travel Professional (GTP) Certification, the first certification to exclusively focus on the business travel component of meetings and incentive program management. “Like the travel industry itself, certification programs have evolved to address today’s needs including quickly developing technology and a global economy,” says a spokesperson for GBTA. “These programs change to reflect the latest thinking around new and more effective ways to improve and advance the industry. Recognized certifications show a level of commitment, knowledge and education which makes all the difference in today’s economy.”

### **Diversity Matters**

The CDMP (Certified Diversity Meeting Professional), introduced in 2008, reflects the new social reality confronting meetings and events. The CDMP provides in-depth training on multicultural markets and meeting attendees. According to Margaret Gonzalez, president of the International Association of Hispanic Meeting Professionals (IAHMP), the certification targets “meeting planners and other industry professionals. With a growing awareness of the multicultural markets in the USA — Native Americans, Asian Americans, African/Black Americans and Hispanic/Mexican Americans — and their purchasing power — over \$1 trillion for Hispanic Americans alone — the CDMP

will continue to be relevant in assisting the industry to gain their business. The CDMP is for everyone in the hospitality industry who wants to work with these markets. The demand for certifications is growing, and programs like the CDMP presents information not included in other industry certifications.”

As companies and the meetings and incentive programs they organize become more global, diversity skills

## **Certificates and Certifications**

The current certifications and certificates available span a range of the diverse skills needed in today’s competitive job market. (Certifications require participants to pass standardized exams that measure proficiency. Certificates are given following completion of an education course.) Prerequisites differ in order to be eligible to earn the credential, although all course work is usually a combination of online and in-person classes, which may be available concurrent with many industry associations’ meetings and conventions. For eligibility, required prerequisites, and the actual work and testing needed to earn the credential, check with the organization offering the certification.

**CMP, Certified Meeting Professional**, created in 1985 by the Convention Industry Council (CIC), is the leading certification for meeting professionals and established the growing school of knowledge for the art and science of meeting management. The CIC will introduce a new “subspecialty” of the CMP for meeting planners in the health care industry this year. [www.conventionindustry.org](http://www.conventionindustry.org)

**CMM, Certificate in Meeting Management** program, offered by MPI is designed for management-level meeting and event professionals, and provides “continuing educational enhancements to the strategic decision-making ability of these leaders to manage and deliver exceptional meetings and events that drive organizational success.” [www.mpiweb.org](http://www.mpiweb.org)

**CIS, Certified Incentive Specialist**, available through Site, focuses on incentive travel program fundamentals and is generally suited for new-to-intermediate planner, travel and incentive travel professionals. [www.siteglobal.com](http://www.siteglobal.com)

**CITE, Certified Incentive Travel Executive**, for more senior management executives, has been on hiatus for the past few years, but after a comprehensive overhaul, will be re-introduced in 2013. [www.siteglobal.com](http://www.siteglobal.com)

**DES, Digital Event Strategist** certification, created by the Virtual Edge Institute in 2008, concentrates on

best practices for meetings that utilize digital technology. [www.virtualedgeinstitute.com](http://www.virtualedgeinstitute.com)

**CDMP, Certified Diversity Meeting Professional**, only a few years old and available through the International Association of Hispanic Meeting Planners (IAHMP), concentrates on cultural awareness and diversity in our globalized economy and has been earned by corporate and association meeting professionals as well as destination and hospitality industry executives. [www.iahmp.org](http://www.iahmp.org)

**CEM, Certified in Exhibition Management** designation, created by the International Association of Exhibitions and Events in 1975, provides a professional designation for exhibition industry professionals. The designation was formed to raise professional standards and is recognized throughout the industry as the premier mark of professional achievement. [www.iaee.com](http://www.iaee.com)

**CSEP, Certified Special Events Professional** designation, offered by the International Special Events Society, concentrates on special events industry issues. “The CSEP focuses on an event as a whole — planning an event or meeting from the proposal to post-event evaluation.” [www.ises.com](http://www.ises.com)

**GTP, Global Travel Professional** certification, made available from the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), was introduced in 2012, and “is designed to raise industry standards, enhance work performance and recognize individuals who demonstrate core competencies essential to the business travel management discipline.” [www.gbta.org](http://www.gbta.org)

**The GBTA Academy** offers a Manager Level Education Program certificate of completion, following a week-long university session, two-day boot camp and a work-based project. Curriculum includes risk management; process improvement; finance; strategic sourcing; communication; personal leadership; organizational change. GBTA’s discontinued Strategic Meetings Management Certification is now equivalent to the Manager Level. [www.gbta.org/academy](http://www.gbta.org/academy)

— TH

become indispensable. “I work primarily with international groups so the diversity component was essential for me,” says Vanessa Olmo, CDMP, a 20-year meeting planning veteran and now owner/director of the meeting planning company Business Endeavors, based in Helotes, TX. “Certifications show that you are not just committed to the industry, but that you continually educate yourself within the industry.”

According to diversity speaker-trainer-consultant Carole Copeland Thomas, MBA, CDMP, owner of C. Thomas &

Associates in Lakeville, MA, the certification “demonstrates that you are on the cutting edge of trends in the meetings industry. It also proves that you are connected to others in the industry who value diversity, inclusion and multiculturalism, and improves your knowledge about the important aspects of African American/African/Caribbean, Hispanic, South Asian, and the Asian-American meeting marketplace.”

“I truly believe that the certifications set me apart from other professionals with an added-value to my

clients,” says Carlos Conejo, CDMP, 17-year meeting planning veteran and president and senior consultant for Multicultural Associates Workforce Development Consultants. Earning his CDMP, “shows my commitment to continuous learning and offers my clients more depth of knowledge. It goes beyond what I know and shares best practices that can really positively impact my client’s bottom line.”

He adds, “My business has just about doubled since I obtained my certifications.” **C&IT**



Brooke Sommers, CMP, CMM, participated in photographer Robert X. Fogarty's "Dear World" messages of hope project.

Photo by Robert X. Fogarty

# Sending the Right Message

By Stella Johnson

## The Causes and Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate giving is a given, whether it takes the form of community involvement or environmental responsibility. The impetus for doing good may come from an embedded corporate mission and culture, a public relations move to offset negative optics, a mandate from shareholders, or more purely and simply, from societal expectations. But in this age of brand engagement, nothing connects as powerfully with customers and employees — especially Gen Yers who want meaning in their work — as a company with heart. And meetings play a critical role in that win-win process.

A growing number of meeting planners report that they almost always incorporate some type of CSR into the agenda, whether it's engaging attendees in a local community service teambuilding project during a multiday meeting or incentive, participating in a charity golf

tournament or contracting only with "green" vendors and suppliers, including convention centers, hotels, restaurants and other venues.

MPI recently completed a two-year study on corporate social responsibility, says CSR champion Andrew Walker, manager of events at MPI. One of the key findings from the study's report "The Value of CSR in the Meeting Industry" is that "86 percent (of survey respondents) believe that the meeting industry will become more involved in CSR in the future because society expects it, and that the industry needs to respond to broader changes in the business environment."

Walker says that based on the two-year study's findings, MPI will introduce "six modules that take meeting professionals along the path of CSR. The modules include case studies, white papers, videos, presentations, articles and booklets in the areas of defining CSR,

integrating, communicating, exceeding expectations, identifying best practices, and certifying and measuring."

Finally, according to Walker, MPI's 2012 Annual Business Barometer states that, overall, 25 percent of meeting professionals say their organizations are "very active in CSR," and an additional 59 percent say their organizations are "somewhat active in CSR." Also, "European and Canadian meeting professionals claim a higher level of current CSR activity, as well as higher predictions for the future, than their U.S. colleagues, with the Europeans projecting the highest levels of future involvement."

One can only wonder if CSR certification for planners is just around the corner — maybe a CSRPF? "There has been some talk within the industry about this type of certification, so we may explore further," comments Walker.

### Pay It Forward

A CSRPF would be a natural fit for meeting planner Brooke Sommers who already has a CMP and CMM, and who adamantly believes there is always room for CSR.



Students at the Kingdom Academy in Puerto Rico were the happy recipients of 150 new books collected and donated by attendees of a channel sales incentive.

"I think what should be stressed here is that CSR at meetings can be simple and cost-effective," explains Sommers, owner of Strategic Conferences & Events LLC, a soup-to-nuts meetings and events planning company located in Westminster, CO, that works mostly with computer, software and technology companies. "Sometimes business unit leaders feel they don't have the money or the time for it in the program, and that's just not true. Even on the smallest scale, it is better to incorporate some type of CSR than choose to do nothing at all."

Regardless, it's Sommers' observation that CSR is growing in leaps and bounds. "With all the emailing, texting and tweeting that goes on today, we don't have a chance to get to know each other as individuals, and CSR activities, in addition to the altruistic benefits to local communities, help to do just that."

When time is a consideration, Sommers recommends simple, adjunct activities during registration, lunch or

a reception. She suggests planners have tables set up around the perimeter of the space for people to stuff packets or envelopes for a charity. "It's a real ice-breaker and lets people choose when to get involved and how much time to put into it without feeling any pressure to do so," Sommers states.

At an event she orchestrated in New Orleans last May, Sommers enlisted photographer Robert X. Fogarty and his Dear World portrait project. "Dear World" began as "Dear New Orleans," when, following Katrina, Fogarty asked residents to write messages of hope and "Love Notes to New Orleans" on their hands, arms, chest and fingers, and photographed the results. People who were photographed donated money to aid the city. He now uses his distinct message-on-skin-style to tell compelling stories of subjects regardless of religion, race or language — an art project/social experiment that connects people emotionally and hope-

fully inspires the notion that working together can lead to good.

Corporations can invite Fogarty to their events to take pictures that engage their attendees to connect with each other on a more personal level. In addition, his interactive keynote event,

**"Even on the smallest scale, it is better to incorporate some type of CSR than choose to do nothing at all."**

**BROOKE SOMMERS, CMP, CMM, Owner**  
Strategic Conferences & Events, Westminster, CO

Dear World Live, explores the subtle and powerful connections of colleagues, strangers, friends and family at annual conventions, leadership retreats and on college campuses throughout the country and the world.

At Sommers' New Orleans event, Fogarty asked attendees to write on their arms what their message to the world would be. "It's an amazing experience,"

Sommers recalls. "Everyone checks out each other's arms to find out what their message is and why it was chosen. It's a great conversation starter at a welcome reception, followed by a video montage for the final night of the photographs, and people really get into it and get to know each other while getting a message off to the world."

What was Sommers' message? "Live your passion." Other ideas run the gamut from sourcing event entertainment from an organization that benefits children, like a children's chorale — "rather than spending tons of money for a top performer," she notes — to donating an attrition of rooms to a local shelter, which she claims some hotels will do.

Sommers highlights two other CSR events she has organized:

A channel sales incentive, hosted by a Fortune 500 company and their partners at Gran Melia Resort Puerto Rico, featured a book drive for The Kingdom Academy, a new school dedicated to providing affordable, quality education for the local children. Sommers relates: "As part of a pre-mailing, we sent a children's book to the attendees and asked them to bring it with them, plus another new or gently used children's book, and they did. Some brought bags of books for the kids. Then, we brought in children from a local school to the resort where we were meeting, provided them with a boxed

lunch, smoothies and face-painting activities. The children then got to pick books for their classrooms. Attendees didn't have to stay for the duration of this CSR event but they were so engaged with it that they all did. The children had to participate in a reading challenge at school, and the top readers from each class won the opportunity to go to the hotel to collect the books."

During a meeting of 800 technical sales and partner attendees, Sommers' client hosted a Texas Hold 'em Poker Tournament, with proceeds benefiting two local Dallas charities: Attitudes & Attire, which promotes personal growth and self-sufficiency for single mothers, and the Children's Craniofacial



Association, which helps “empower and give hope to individuals and families affected by facial differences.”

Sommers says, “This was a very cost-effective option. Poker tables and dealers are a minimal expense, and in this case, the client was able to obtain a grant to fund the charitable donation.”

The attendees were able to sign up as players or have a night on their own. As players dropped out, they could donate their chips to one or both charities, and the charity with the most amount of chips at the end of the night got the majority of the financial donation. At the closing general session, someone from each charity was able to get up and talk about their charity and the impact it makes on the local community. In this instance, the corporation offered a matching program that allowed individuals to go online and make a personal donation that was then matched by the company.”

### Cause Before Profit

Paying it forward is the primary mission of two young social entrepreneurs,

**“When our sales staff meets planned quotas, they are rewarded with a unique experience by way of an incentive travel trip to a foreign country as well as an extraordinary experience — one that helps build a well or other water-related project — and they are ecstatic to have an opportunity like that, too.”**

**GUY FUTI**, Head Water Boy, Maji Water, Montreal, Quebec

as they are called in this new age of CSR, Guy Futi and Anthony Chamy, both doing good things in the world through their individual companies while operating out of Montreal, Canada.

Guy Futi founded Maji Water and whimsically refers to himself as Head Water Boy. “I find that members of the new work generation, of which I am one, not only want careers that promise high incomes, but they also want those jobs that provide meaning to their lives,” he states. “At Maji Water, we strive to achieve both, and we do it through driving sales, incentive programs and other initiatives that provide the revenue to achieve the company’s social goals,” he says. “And, we’re always keeping an

eye on the triple bottom line: the three Ps of People, Planet and Profits.”

But to do so he put the cart before the horse — that is, his CSR goals informed his business: He incorporated a mission to provide clean water to crisis-affected regions of the world into a new business venture — Maji Water Inc.

Established in 2010, the company is now fast approaching the \$1.4 million mark (US\$). In the beginning, the basic idea was that one purchased bottle of Maji would result in three bottles of purified water in needed areas of the world, although the company has expanded its altruistic goals, as well as its base of operation from small community stores to larger retailers, including hotels and restaurants.

“Our strategy is to work closely with our sales force and retailers,” Futi explains. “We’ve developed a unique model. Retailers, by selecting Maji, have the opportunity to build their own ‘well’ to save an impoverished village throughout the world. We allocate 15 percent of all the gross profit to the Maji Foundation, which operates admin-free. Let’s say we generate \$1 million (US\$) in revenue from one retailer of our product — \$65,000–\$125,000 of that goes to the Maji Foundation, which then re-allocates this to building a well in that company’s name somewhere around the world.”

To accomplish that end, the sales staff gets all the perks — commissions, bonuses and, most importantly, incentive travel.

“When our sales staff meets planned quotas, they are rewarded with a unique experience by way of an incentive travel trip to a foreign country as well as an extraordinary experience — one that helps build a well or other water-related project — and they are ecstatic to have an opportunity like that, too,” states Futi. “For instance if a sales associate was the lead in closing down a big account, not only does he get his bonus, but he gets to

decide if he wants to personally partake on a well-building mission.”

Maji Water hosts an annual event at a local hotel or unique venue for clients, friends, associates and prospective customers. Last year, the festivity was at Galerie MX in Montreal.

“This was a big networking reception,” Futi explains. “We served appetizers and wine, as well as Maji water, and the gallery was decked out with photographic canvases of all past water relief missions.” In addition, Maji introduced its new glass bottled water line.

“The goal is always to get people to drink our bottled water because the more of it they drink, the more we can contribute to those areas of the world that are in need of safe drinking water. One purchased bottle here, produces three bottles there, and more,” adds Futi.

What does the future hold? Maji has set forth even greater goals that include sanitation and irrigation in impoverished areas of the world.

### Ethical Incentive Travel

For Anthony Chamy, CSR equates to ethics. He believes that the meetings and hospitality industry in particular should adopt a universal code of ethics pertaining to corporate social responsibility when traveling.

With that in mind Chamy’s ecotourism company Kepri Expeditions was born. From the start, concepts such as ecotourism, social and environmental awareness, carbon footprint and cultural respect were the inspiration; global leadership in the sustainable travel industry formed its mission.

Now in its 10th year of taking adventurous, individual travelers and corporate incentive groups on fantastic journeys off the beaten path, Kepri’s goal is to create trips that enable cultural exchange and promote a responsible way of travel.

As Chamy describes it, “We take corporate groups to exotic destinations which help reward and rejuvenate incentive qualifiers. Custom-designed to each particular group’s needs, our leaders know the places and people in their native countries, making it possible to

create a cultural bridge between the travelers and the local communities. Each journey includes cultural activities and outdoor recreation, as well as workshops and networking opportunities within the most amazing surroundings.”



A corporate group participates in The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel's VolunTeaming program to clean up and restore the Dana Point Headlands natural area. Attendees learn about the environment while contributing to the local community.

While the travel group promises to build strong bonds among colleagues by creating memories for a lifetime — such as crossing a river in Colombia’s jungle; trekking in the Peruvian Cordillera Blanca; or celebrating with the Baja tribes in Egypt — its travel philosophy and methodology aims to foster a maximum ROI as a motivational tool, a CSR commitment, personal development and employee engagement.

“Everything we do is always with the utmost values in mind,” Chamy notes. “We are an ecotourism company that is politically and socially correct, always trying to adjust the tourism industry to make it more responsible with respect to the local economy, environment and culture.”

In doing so, the CSR issues Chamy has witnessed while on the road are from a different perspective. “One of them is when our corporate event travelers sometimes do not want to mix with the

local population and even offer to pay extra to have their own plane, bus or boat as way to show their employees or clients that they are offering them more privileges, whereas we always feel that there is more value in getting our trav-

elers to actually live cultural exchanges with the populations they visit, even if that means traversing the desert on a camel,” Chamy adds.

### Here to Stay

Weighing in on CSR is veteran planner Maureen Santoro, CMP, manager of group operations for Atlas Travel Meetings & Incentives in Milford, MA. Santoro has 20 years of experience planning meetings for companies of all sizes and works out of the Boston office. According to a recent guest post on *theprofessionalassistant.net*, Santoro confirms that CSR is an emerging segment of corporate meetings that is likely here to stay.

Admitting that there is a good deal of debate among corporate managers over whether companies should engage in CSR, Santoro also adds, “There is a cost associated with performing a CSR volunteer activity both in terms of money



Anthony Chamy, co-founder of ecotourism company Kepri Expeditions (walking) enables cultural exchanges with local populations in off-the-beaten-path destinations.



and risk management. Besides being one more line item in the meeting budget, there are risks of possible injuries that might be sustained during some of the volunteer activities. Still, the sense of pride and accomplishment experienced by the volunteers, as well as the good press generated, means that CSR is quite worthwhile to most meetings."

When queried further about the "good press" aspect of giving back especially at meetings, Santoro explains that "volunteering in the destination where the meeting is being held brings goodwill to the community and casts your company in a better light than the days of old when the corporate meeting was perceived as just an excuse for a huge party. With the economy as it is, local charities and organizations not only benefit from the participation of companies and the publicity it brings, but they also rely on it. Local charities always need volunteers just to keep them running, so they appreciate the temporary, complementary work force. In short, it is a win-win for everyone."

Sommers' professional CSR advice to novice planners is, basically, don't go it alone.



In conjunction with Fairmont Hotels & Resorts' Meetings That Matter program, attendees engage in a bread-baking activity for a local shelter at The Fairmont Copley Plaza, Boston.

their causes. Both should know what is needed but often they do not."

There are some hospitality brands that would beg to differ, notably Ritz-Carlton and its VolunTeaming program and Fairmont Hotels & Resorts' "Meetings That Matter" program, both of which help planners coordinate local volunteer proj-

"Some hotel chains are making CSR part of their overall list of activities for companies looking to book rooms with them," says Santoro. She describes two programs that The Fairmont Banff Springs offers: "One of them involves volunteering at a local church where volunteers can pitch in to help provide a free hot meal to deserving Banff residents. Another activity, done primarily during the summer months, organizes volunteers to help clear debris and trash from the trails of Banff National Park."

She adds, "Fairmont is a good example of a group that takes CSR seriously. In addition to those examples, they have a written corporate policy that emphasizes CSR and promotes green initiatives. They work closely with local community organizations to bring about responsible corporate tourism."

More than anything else, while companies have made CSR part of daily corporate life at the office, Santoro firmly believes in the company meeting as a vehicle for doing good.

"It is the company meeting that is a good place to start down the road of CSR," she says.

And when asked what "Dear World" message Sommers would write on her arm today, she replied, "CSR = Pay It Forward."

C&IT



**"Volunteering in the destination where the meeting is being held brings goodwill to the community and casts your company in a better light than the days of old when the corporate meeting was perceived as just an excuse for a huge party."**

**MAUREEN SANTORO, CMP**  
Manager Group Operations  
Atlas Travel Meetings & Incentives, Milford, MA

"CVBs of the targeted destination are very helpful, but not so much with the DMCs (destination management companies) and hotels. In fact, I think DMCs and hotels have to educate themselves on the subject and identify those organizations or situations in their communities that could use a little CSR applied to

ects for groups. And through Marriott International's "Spirit to Serve" program, planners can arrange voluntourism activities that also directly benefit the local community — for example, at the Aruba Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino, groups can work on building or upgrading orphanages, schools and parks.

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## DESTINATION



A rendering of the Las Vegas Global Business District.

# Las Vegas

## The Ultimate Meetings Magnet

Don't ever think that a corporate meeting group has seen or experienced everything that Las Vegas offers 24/7. Every visit to the Entertainment Capital of the World is guaranteed to elicit "wows" from not only first-time attendees but veterans as well. That's because Las Vegas is constantly reinventing itself, adding and enhancing hotels and resorts, meeting and event venues, dining and entertainment experiences and much more.

More than \$5 billion in new investment projects will pour into the destination over the next several years, according to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA). "This is an exciting time as the confidence in the Las Vegas

By Derek Reveron

brand continues to build with new projects and ongoing re-investment," said Rossi Ralenkotter, president/CEO of the LVCVA in a news release. "The billions of dollars being invested in Las Vegas for unique experiences and world-class facilities and amenities show why Las Vegas continues to be the premier leisure and business destination."

Several projects, such as the visionary Las Vegas Global Business District project, are underway. Announced in February, with a \$2.5 billion price tag, the international business destination will be completed in phases and include major renovations of the Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC). Plans for the center include more exhibit and general session space; additional meeting rooms; upgraded technology; more food and beverage outlets; a grand concourse connector with additional lobby space; and outdoor public gathering spaces.

Designated in 2011 as an official World Trade Center site through an agreement with the Consumer Electronics Association, the global business district will attract national and international conventions and meetings and enhance Las Vegas' global popularity. "It will launch Las Vegas ahead of all of our competition and solidify our standing as an international business center," says Amy Riley, senior director, convention sales for the LVCVA. "We will be able to leverage our brand as a World Trade Center, and we are the only convention center in North America with that designation."

***"It will launch Las Vegas ahead of all of our competition and solidify our standing as an international business center. We will be able to leverage our brand as a World Trade Center."***

Amy Riley, Senior Director of Convention Sales  
Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority  
Las Vegas, NV



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*“In locations that don’t have so many things to do and ways to get around, you have to plan a lot more activities. There is so much to do on your own that you don’t have to plan as much as in destinations that are more spread out.”*

**Monica Thein**, Senior Account Manager, Travel Operations  
USMotivation, Atlanta, GA

Meanwhile, Las Vegas continues to set new records. In 2012, Las Vegas hosted a record 39.7 million visitors, up 2.1 percent over 2011. The total number of conventions and meetings increased 13.6 percent.

The improved results stem partly from continuing efforts to market Las Vegas. Between September and December 2012, the LVCVA conducted a “100 Day Challenge,” says Riley. “The point was to challenge our new and existing partners to meet us at over 60 events throughout the U.S. and help them fill in what they needed for 2013 and moving into 2014. We met at

is always room for the small group,” says Hugh Hunt, president of Hunt Conference Group Inc., a Grapevine, TX-based meetings, conferences and special events company. “I do board meetings for corporations that love Las Vegas for that purpose. Many properties have divisions catering to groups of fewer than 100 people.”

Las Vegas was the ideal destination for one of Hunt’s larger clients, an oil and gas company, which last January hosted a five-day meeting of approximately 300 salespeople at the 390-room M Resort Spa Casino. Located just south of The Strip, the M Resort features more than 92,000 sf of meeting spaces including the new M Pavilion with a capacity of 2,300 people, a 7,200-sf special event space called LUX, and the 100,000-sf Villaggio Del Sole outdoor events plaza.

The M Resort’s customer service was exceptional. “The group has been a client for more than 15 years so we pretty much knew the M Resort was the place to take them to get the service and attention they wanted,” says Hunt. “We were the only group in the hotel so we had all the attention. Even though we were just 300 people, we were a full house to the hotel. That’s rare for Vegas properties.”

Hunt chose the M Resort for several other reasons: The group wanted to stay off The Strip but remain close to it. Also, Hunt enjoys a good working relationship with the M Resort’s sales staff, some of whom previously worked at other area properties. Furthermore, he was

able to negotiate reasonable room rates for his group.

Hunt also was impressed with the layout of the hotel. “A lot of times when you come into a hotel in Vegas, you come into a lobby that is a casino,” says Hunt. “With the M Resort, the casino is off to the right a good distance, and you don’t see what’s going on in there. You come into a beautiful lobby and check-in area that makes it look like the hotel only does meetings. And the meeting space, ballrooms and breakouts are all in one area.”

The oil and gas group is one among the thousands of Las Vegas’ loyal repeat customers. According to Hunt, this group has met in the city at least eight times, including twice at the M Resort since it opened in 2009. “Any group I have, if they are a fit for the M Resort, it would be on the top of my list,” adds Hunt.



Photo by Tomasz Ressa

Le Rêve - The Dream at Wynn Las Vegas served as one of the highlights for Mark Prine’s group who described their Las Vegas incentive program as “fantastic.”

everything from a baseball game to an event at a zoo to receptions in different cities. It was very successful.”

No U.S. destination beats Las Vegas when it comes to meeting space. A combined total of more than 5 million sf of meeting, exhibit and convention space is available at the three largest exhibition facilities in Southern Nevada — the Las Vegas Convention Center, Sands Expo & Convention Center and Mandalay Bay Convention Center.

### Magnetism Draws Groups Back

Las Vegas is like a magnet. Groups keep coming back year after year. Las Vegas lures groups of all sizes, too. The city has shed its reputation among some planners for making small groups a low priority. “It’s like any other tier-one city; there

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Caesars Entertainment, in collaboration with Gansevoort Hotel Group and nightlife promoter Victor Drai, will open Gansevoort Las Vegas in early 2014.

### Huge Attendance Booster

First-timers find out very quickly that meeting in Las Vegas is a huge attendance-builder. According to Dennise Cowart, director of events for Irvine, CA-headquartered Sage Software Inc., her company eagerly anticipates meeting in Las Vegas for the first time next year. The annual Sage Summit, a six-day conference for Sage's customers, resellers, salespeople and executives, will be held at the 3,309-room Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino, which boasts 1.6 million sf of meeting space. More than 3,000 attendees are expected.

Sage has been interested in holding its summit in Las Vegas for years. In 2011, the company surveyed attendees about meeting in Las Vegas, and the response was positive, says Cowart, who is based in Austin, TX. Still, the company was concerned that gaming might detract from the summit's focus on new product training and networking.

The Mandalay Bay staff allayed the company's concerns during Cowart's visit. "The hotel provided data, case studies and referrals showing that groups meeting in Las Vegas increase attendance. It was also appealing that upon entering the convention side, the fact that you are in Vegas is almost non-existent. There is no gaming over there," says Cowart.

The large amount of space, attractive facilities and connected access to the Mandalay Bay Convention Center also factored in their decision. "To get maximum value from the networking experience, it's better if everyone is under one roof in terms of the meeting space and hotel," says Cowart. "We are also very breakout-intensive with about 600 learning sessions. Every

room has a standard AV setup and a dozen rooms are dedicated to hands-on learning labs. We bring in computers and set them up so customers can train on our software."

Negotiating a good deal also was an incentive. "One attraction was having good, competitive room and food and beverage rates," Cowart observes. "We are very heavy on food and beverage. We provide breakfast, lunch and snacks every day, and a reception almost every evening. The hotel was very willing to negotiate, based on our spending history."

The Mandalay Bay also helped with a small but important food and beverage detail for the summit's trade show component of about 200 software developers and vendors. "One of the challenges we always face is that we like to host a reception with the trade show. Trying to come up with really good food that people can walk around with is always a challenge. The chef was very creative in providing great food for that," says Cowart.

The summit's attendees also will enjoy entertainment and attractions. Cowart is considering including an offsite activity at The Linq, Caesars Entertainment's 200,000-sf retail, dining, entertainment and hospitality district that is scheduled to open later this year. She also is considering a welcome reception and concert at Mandalay Bay Beach, an expansive aquatic area with a 1.6-million-gallon wave pool, 2,700 tons of genuine beach sand and about 100 cabanas, bungalows, day beds and villas.

### Entertainment Is the Icing on the Cake

While groups meeting in Las Vegas vary in size and have different meeting needs, they all appreciate the boundless supply of recreational activities and exciting, unique entertainment available on The Strip and beyond. USMotivation, a full-service incentive company based in Atlanta, plans

several meetings a year in Las Vegas, such as the product introduction meeting held in January for a technology company's 1,000 dealers, executives and service managers from the U.S., Mexico and South America.

The three-day meeting was held at The Venetian/The Palazzo. The long list of things to do in Las Vegas was a big draw for the group, according to Monica Thein, senior account manager, travel operations, USMotivation. "In locations that don't have so many things to do and ways to get around, you have to plan a lot more activities," she says. "There is so much



Blue Man Group's highly anticipated new show debuted at the Monte Carlo Resort and Casino last year.

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*“Being sustainable and going paperless are important to businesses today. The Event+ mobile app can replace or supplement printed collateral, which many times is out of date the second it is printed.”*

**Mark A. Prine**, Divisional Vice President, Major Accounts  
USMotivation, Atlanta, GA

to do on your own that you don't have to plan as much as in destinations that are larger or smaller and more spread out, making transportation a big component. In Las Vegas, you really don't need transportation so you save in that way.”

The plentiful meeting space and entertainment options at the The Venetian/The Palazzo also were a plus. Attendees were wowed by a 10-minute performance of The Blue Man Group during the opening session, and many chose to attend the complete electrifying performance during their own time. The group held a welcome reception at the property's Lagasse Stadium, a 24,000-sf restaurant and sports bar featuring Chef Emeril Lagasse's cuisine, more than 100 HD TVs, plush stadium-style seats and luxury boxes. Also, attendees saw comedian Larry the Cable Guy at Haze Nightclub, Aria Resort & Casino's flagship nightlife venue.

### Las Vegas Motivates

Mark A. Prine, divisional vice president, major accounts, for USMotivation, planned a sales incentive program for 2,000 participants in April. Prine agrees that the good airlift and reasonable airfare, as well as the abundant space options make choosing Las Vegas an easy decision. Prine chose the 3,993-room Bellagio for an annual recognition event for top sellers and managers, which is known for the distinctive Fountains of Bellagio — a mesmerizing show of water, music and light.

An incentive program in Las Vegas is a top motivator, and Prine uses that carrot to help incentivize his client's employees. Prine explains the process: “We have a year-long communications campaign and web-site dedicated to this program, with twice-monthly updates on the web-



USMotivation's incentive group experienced all that Las Vegas has to offer including hiking and biking in the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area.

Photo courtesy of USMotivation

site that show who is in the running to earn the trip. We do mailers, emails, texts throughout the year to keep the program objectives front of mind,” Prine says. Prine also does “a full ROI analysis from both a cost analysis as well as in-depth survey analysis measuring participant experience and satisfaction.”

The attendees loved Las Vegas and found the overall experience “fantastic” and were “very excited about the venue,” adds Prine.

One key reason he says is the variety of available shows and activities, and the amount and type of space. These are two key factors that differentiate Las Vegas from other destinations.

Along those lines, Prine singled out Hyde Bellagio and the Conservatory as two unique venues at Bellagio. The very popular Hyde Bellagio, designed by Philippe Starck, is a new indoor-outdoor space with floor-to-ceiling windows — which showcase the Fountains of Bellagio — small plates and intimate places for networking. Later in the evening, the space morphs into one of Las Vegas' hottest nightlife venues. Prine says Bank at Bellagio also provided great nightlife experiences for attendees. For a change of pace, the Victorian Gazebo in the South Garden of Bellagio's Conservatory & Botanical Gardens features daily,



Two of the many highlights of meeting at Bellagio include a tasty teambuilding event at their unique Tuscany Kitchen and the amazing show of water, music and light — The Fountains of Bellagio.

Photos courtesy of MGM Resorts International



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live musical performances. Attendees participated in many activities including an event at Bellagio's Tuscan Kitchen, the first exhibition kitchen of its kind in Las Vegas and designed specifically for meeting and convention groups. Also, performances by David Copperfield, Bon Jovi, Elton John and Blue Man Group were on the agenda, as were Zarkana Cirque du Soleil at Aria and Le Rêve – The Dream at Wynn Las Vegas.



Rendering courtesy of Caesars Entertainment

Opening late 2013, Caesars Entertainment's new project is The Linq, a retail, dining and entertainment district on The Strip.

On the activity side, Prine says Adrenaline Rush, Red Rocks Biking, Hiking and Hummer Tours, Richard Petty Ride Along and River Float were the top winners.

But the fun and excitement did not stop there. Prine's group also was treated to a dine-around, leadership dinners, a business session with winner recognition and awards; and a unique shopping experience where each winner and guest selects their prize in a boutique-like shopping experience.

Green meetings and connecting at meetings are easier to accomplish now thanks to Event+, his company's new mobile app. "Being sustainable and going paperless are important to businesses today," says Prine. "The Event+ mobile app can replace or supplement printed collateral, which many times is out of date the second it is printed. Everyone carries a smart phone with them these days. Maps, agenda, activity times, and most importantly, real time changes are all reflected in the app.

"Social networking and messaging within the app is also very popular to connect with other attendees, particularly when you are in such large venues," Prine adds.

### New and Noteworthy

Caesars Entertainment is collaborating with Gansevoort Hotel Group and nightlife promoter Victor Draï to build the Gansevoort Las Vegas on the former site of Bill's Gamblin' Hall & Saloon. The boutique resort and casino will include the 65,000-sf Draï's Beach Club and Nightclub. The resort is scheduled to debut in early 2014.

The Linq, which Caesars Entertainment plans to open late this year on The Strip, will feature more than 30 retail, din-

*"One attraction was having good, competitive room and food and beverage rates. We are very heavy on food and beverage. The hotel was very willing to negotiate, based on our spending history."*

**Dennise Cowart**, Director of Events  
Sage Software Inc.  
Austin, TX

ing and entertainment options. The 550-foot Las Vegas High Roller observation wheel has 28 enclosed and transparent cabins, each of which accommodates 40 people.

MGM Resorts International unveiled details about its new entertainment district surrounding the world-class 20,000-seat arena under development in partnership with AEG. These new experiences will be located Stripside at New York-New York and Monte Carlo resorts and include a public park leading to the new state-of-the-art arena.

The company expects to create an experience that encourages social interaction and people-watching. Construction will be completed in early 2014.

In a statement, Jim Murren, chairman and CEO of MGM Resorts International, said, "All great cities offer vibrant pedestrian experiences, and Las Vegas is certainly no exception, as



Rendering courtesy of MGM Resorts International

MGM Resorts International's new entertainment district, to be completed in early 2014, will feature Stripside experiences and a park.

The Strip is one of the world's greatest boulevards. Our vision is to extend the excitement we traditionally create within our world-class resorts outside onto The Strip, and ultimately in an entertainment district leading to our new arena."

### More of Everything

Planners and groups will continue to rediscover Las Vegas during each visit due to the city's determination to offer more of everything to meetings, conventions and trade shows. The constant reinvention of Las Vegas will ensure that it becomes an even more popular destination for groups around the globe for years to come.

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Easy access, walkability and new waterfront development make Boston a very “hot” city nowadays say meeting planners.



Photo courtesy of Greater Boston CVB

# New England

## From Boston Strong to the Shores of Cape Cod and Beyond

By Mike Bassett



Photo courtesy of Greater Boston CVB

**B**oston Strong. Two powerful words that tell the story of the courageous people of Boston and their supporters who responded to the tragic events triggered by the bombings at the Boston Marathon on Patriot's Day, April 15, 2013. Boston Strong and The One Fund Boston are shining examples of how the American people pull together to defeat terrorism and overcome adversity. As of this writing, contributions to The One Fund Boston ([www.onefundboston.org](http://www.onefundboston.org)) are nearing \$30 million.

Tricia Endicott, CMP, an independent meeting planner who lives and works in the Boston area, describes what Boston Strong means to her: “Pulling together a conference takes skill, creativity and detail as well as having great vendors to partner with to create a successful event. In Boston, the industry just pulls together for an event whether you are a hotel, caterer, planner, décor, or audio-visual person where occasionally roles even cross over a little. That doesn't bother us; the goal is the same — to have a successful event and make the client shine. Boston venues and vendors have an amazing sense of ‘knitting together.’ It's the people that make the difference here. For many of us, it's not just a job; it's our passion. You can see a glimpse of that from the tragic events from the Boston Marathon. In Boston, we pull together. We do what it takes. We care.”

Beth Stehley, vice president sales and convention services for the Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau, is happy to report that Boston was back in business very quickly. “Since the tragic events on Marathon Monday, the Boston hospitality community has experienced an outpouring of support from around the world,” says Stehley. “Many

cities have reached out to us with both financial and emotional support for the victims and families, and for that we are eternally grateful.

“Over 30 international destinations sent a letter to our mayor pledging support to promote travel to Boston. This complements the offer of various third-party distribution channels to assist in promoting Boston as the place to hold their next meeting or conference,” added Stehley.

Stehley says, “We are so proud and thankful for the resiliency of the companies that had meetings scheduled and did not cancel or postpone them.” For example, Watertown, MA-headquartered athenahealth, a provider of cloud-based Best in KLAS electronic health record, practice management and care coordination services, held its annual conference as planned. A spokesperson for the company, Amanda Guisbond, on April 25 related by email: “We're hosting our annual's User Conference today and tomorrow at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston, MA, aka Back Bay and the Boston Marathon finish line. The area just opened up yesterday and is definitely ‘back in business.’ We have more than 1,300 users — mostly physicians — at our conference from all over the country. Naturally, our clients and our employees wanted to do something to give back to those affected by last Monday's tragedy. As such, we are encouraging all of our attendees to donate to The One Fund Boston, and athenaGives (our corporate charitable contributions initiative) is matching up to \$10,000.”

### Boston

For meetings and conventions, Boston Strong means a city

determined to get back to “business as usual” as quickly as possible to heal and regain a sense of normalcy. That's what Boston's CVB, its hospitality partners and the business community have done and continue to do. Boston is a preferred destination for many business niches that have a strong presence in the city, such as health care and insurance. It's also a college town (in 2010 there were 152,000 students at Boston's institutions of higher learning), which means the country is filled with people who went to school there and at one point or another, will return.

Boston may be a city that values history and tradition, but it's gone through some revolutionary changes over the last 15 years or so, much of them propelled by the Central Artery/Tunnel Project, better known as the “Big Dig.”

While the Big Dig had a reputation of being a huge financial black hole (there are estimates its price tag will eventually reach \$22 billion), its completion has had a huge aesthetic impact on Boston and spurred development in parts of the city, such as the Seaport District, that have opened up a host of new meetings- and convention-related venues.

The new I-93 and I-90 (Massachusetts Turnpike) interchange means that visitors can easily reach areas along the Boston waterfront such as the Seaport District. And when the old, ugly elevated Central Artery was finally torn down in 2004, it was replaced by the Rose Kennedy Greenway, a mile-long linear urban park filled with landscaped gardens, promenades, plazas, fountains and art, which has reconnected Boston's downtown with sections of the city such as the Italian North End and the waterfront.

Now, the Seaport District has become a prime destina-

tion for planners bringing their meetings to Boston. Filled with acres of empty space 15 years ago, the area saw the construction of the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center (the BCEC was completed in 2004), and the opening of three major hotels: the Seaport Hotel & World Trade Center, The Westin Boston Waterfront and Renaissance Boston Waterfront.

And the development of the area is nowhere close to being completed. Last year, the state legislature authorized the construction of seven new hotels — including a 1,200-room convention headquarters hotel — around the convention center, all of which could add as many as 2,700 rooms to the city's hotel inventory. Two of those hotels, a 330-room Aloft hotel and 180-room Element hotel, will begin construction later this year. It's all part of a \$2 billion expansion plan also designed to double the size of the BCEC.

One aspect of the waterfront's development, particularly in South Boston, that had been somewhat problematic was the scarcity of dining spots compared to the numbers staying at the area hotels and attending meetings and conventions at the BCEC. But, the development of Liberty Wharf in 2011 has added a number of high-end restaurants to the area, including Jerry Remy's Sports Bar & Grill, Temazcal Tequila Cantina, Del Frisco's of Boston and a huge Legal Harborside with three floors including casual and fine-dining restaurants and a roof-top bar.

The Seaport Boston Hotel & Seaport World Trade Center, which was renovated a few years ago, offers convenient access to the Financial District, Freedom Trail, Faneuil Hall, Fan Pier and the North End. Meetings and events are a cinch as planners have a choice of more than 40 event venues, many



with dramatic harbor and skyline views of Boston. Seaport boasts 180,000 sf of space — more than any other Boston hotel — situated in both the Seaport Boston Hotel and the Seaport World Trade Center, a historic Boston landmark connected to the hotel.

All of this new development, as well as a recovering economy, means the city “is hot right now,” says Colleen Kenney, CMP, associate director, events, meetings and conventions for Millennium Pharmaceuticals in Cambridge, MA. “The waterfront is so popular right now. There are great properties there, good restaurants for an offsite dinner, and everything is within walking distance.”

***“It’s a walking city, which people just love. Boston gives you a chance to see part of the city. If you have 30 minutes of free time you can see something. And that’s a great feeling.”***



**Tricia Endicott, CMP**, Independent Event Consultant  
Tricia Endicott Events, Dunstable, MA

In fact, most meeting professionals will tell you that one of the reasons Boston is such a good place to bring a meeting is that it is such a walkable city. According to the group America Walks, Boston is the nation’s third most walkable city, trailing only New York and San Francisco.

“It’s a walking city, which people just love,” says Endicott, who owns Tricia Endicott Events, Dunstable, MA. “We know that during meetings people just pack their conference schedules. They get up, have breakfast, are in meetings all day, and have a cocktail reception or dinner afterwards. How many conferences do people go to where they come back home and people ask ‘How was the city?’ and the attendee will answer ‘I don’t know, I only saw the airport and the hotel.’”

But that’s not the case with Boston. “Boston gives you a chance to see part of the city,” she points out. “If you have 30 minutes of free time you can see something. If you have an hour you can see something else. And that’s a great feeling for someone who wants to be able to walk to a hotel and do something in the limited time available to them.”

While Boston may be one of the nation’s most walkable cities, it’s also one of the most accessible by air, “which is a major selling point,” says Stehley. “Boston’s Logan International Airport is in East Boston, just across the harbor from the North End and the financial district, and, as Stehley points out, “most airports aren’t three miles from the center of the city. And it’s just 20 minutes from the Back Bay.”

Julie S. Nack Locke, CMP, associate regional vice president for HelmsBriscoe, agrees that the city’s easy access to the airport makes Boston attractive to meeting planners and groups, as does “its great shopping, dining, history, sports and other

activities.” The city boasts some of the nation’s most revered historical sites such as Faneuil Hall and the Old North Church, world-class museums such as the Museum of Fine Arts and the Isabel Gardner Museum, and a sporting mecca in the form of Fenway Park — home of the beloved Boston Red Sox.

All of which makes Boston an increasingly appealing destination for incentives as well as corporate meetings. Like many other destinations, Boston was hit hard by the crash of 2008, but more incentive groups are returning to Boston.

If there is a downside to trying to hold a meeting in Boston, it’s the fact that the city is too “hot,” say a number of planners. “It’s gangbusters in Boston,” says Locke. “The rates are super high, as is demand, so you’re seeing less negotiation.”

Kenney is responsible for planning about 500 events a year for Millennium Pharmaceuticals, 25 to 30 percent of which are in Boston. “The No. 1 issue for me is finding quality function space to accommodate the goals and objectives of my meetings,” she says. “If it’s a teambuilding or educational meeting the function space needs to match what we’re trying to do — and that’s not simple, especially in Boston. We book many of our meetings short term, but Boston is such a busy city we may source 20 hotels and get only about four or five proposals that really give us what we need.

“It’s not the hotels’ fault, it’s on us because of the short lead time,” she adds. “But it also tells you about demand for space, since the city is so hot right now.”

Along with the area along the waterfront, the city has seen the development of some new hotels around the city center. The 356-room Revere Hotel opened last spring in Boston’s theater district in the space that once held a Radisson hotel and the Stuart Street Playhouse, and offers more than 35,000 sf of meeting space.

#### **Cape Cod, Maine and New Hampshire**

While Boston is certainly the heart of New England’s meeting and convention business, there are plenty of options available to planners ranging from New Hampshire and Maine to the north, and Cape Cod, Rhode Island and Connecticut to the south.

When Kenney wants to take a group out of the city for a teambuilding event, or any other kind of meeting in which a change of scenery will do the attendees some good, she’ll look at Cape Cod, Newport, RI, and Portsmouth, NH. “They’re great destinations with great properties like the Ocean Edge Resort (in Brewster on Cape Cod), and they’re all just an hour or an hour and 15 minutes away. It just changes things up a bit when we want to get people out of their comfort zone.”

Areas such as Cape Cod and Newport, as well as areas to the north in Maine and New Hampshire make good incentive destinations as well.

“A lot of people want warm-weather destinations like the Caribbean,” says Endicott, “but there are so many groups that want to go to the Cape in the summer, or up to the ski destinations in the winter. All with Boston as an entry point.”



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Cape Cod hits all the right buttons for groups, says Locke, adding that groups that want a resort that caters to golfers can go to the Ocean Edge Resort & Golf Club, which is in the process of completing a five-year \$40 million renovation. More than \$8 million of that went into renovating the golf course, clubhouse and restaurant. It's been upgraded to a Jack Nicklaus design, the first on Cape Cod.

To the north Locke points to several resorts, such as the Omni Mount Washington, that attract incentive business.

In Bretton Woods, NH, the grand old Mount Washington Hotel, rebranded as the Omni Mount Washington, has just completed a \$60 million renovation of guest rooms and suites, a new 25,000-sf spa, a conference center, the renovation of the main dining room, and the restoration of the Donald Ross-designed golf course.

Farther to the east, The Samoset Resort in Rockport, ME, recently completed a \$2 million renovation that includes brand new Italian eatery La Bella Vita Ristorante, Enoteca Lounge

*The city's easy access to the airport makes Boston attractive to meeting planners and groups, as does "its great shopping, dining, history, sports and other activities."*



**Beth Stehley**, V.P. Sales and Convention Services  
Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau

and a seaside spa along with three new high-end guest cottages adjacent to Penobscot Bay and the Rockland Breakwater.

To the west, Vermont actually works as a year-round group destination, says Maureen Morgan, director of sales at the Vermont Convention Bureau. Groups and individual tourists flock to the state in the fall to see the foliage, continue to visit the state during the winter for some of the best skiing in the Eastern U.S., and still find plenty to do in the warmer months, weather it's golfing, hiking, fishing or other outdoor activities.

Morgan says the variety of activities available to visitors makes Vermont appealing to corporate groups. "If you have a group that wants to do some teambuilding activities, there's going to be a lot to do, whether it's onsite at the property or close by," she says. And while Vermont is several hours away from both New York City and Boston, it's still close enough, she says, to be an attractive destination for companies in those cities that are looking for a place "where they can really get their people away from distractions."

## Connecticut

In southern New England, Mystic, CT, is situated on I-95 midway between Boston and New York City. It's home to Mystic Seaport: the Museum of America and the Sea, a living history museum celebrating the area's — and the country's

— relationship with the sea. Mystic also is close to two of the country's most popular casinos, Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods.

Foxwoods is a complex of six casinos, more than 2,000 hotel rooms, more than three dozen dining venues, theaters, two championship golf courses, and 150,000 sf of meeting space. In terms of actual gaming floor space, it is the largest in the U.S.

Julie Bertolino, executive assistant to the vice president of world wide sales for Rapid7, a vulnerability management and penetration testing company headquartered in Boston, planned this year's kickoff meeting for her company's sales and security solutions team, and "wanted to do something a little different this year."

Bertolino wanted a venue that was self-contained, and would give her plenty of options in one area, while negating the need to move her attendees around. So she chose Foxwoods.

The meeting, which took place in February, was attended by about 130 people, most from the Boston office, but also included attendees from Asia, Amsterdam and the U.S. West Coast. Most of the attendees were driven to Foxwoods by luxury coach from Boston the morning of the event.

"Initially some people were kind of bummed out that they had to get up early to get on a bus," Bertolino says. "But, on the whole, people would rather have a service take them somewhere than have to drive on their own, and the feedback from the attendees was that there were no issues with the bus ride. They're young people, and they know how to make their own fun."

The theme of the event was "Play to Win," which was appropriate, considering the venue, says Bertolino. Several speakers, for example, used chips as prizes that attendees could use at the tables that night after the daylong meeting and reception. The second day of the two-day event was cut short by an approaching snowstorm (such are the hazards of planning events in New England during the winter), which forced Bertolino to bus everyone back to Boston before the storm hit.

"The staff (at Foxwoods) were really great about staying in constant contact with us, and accommodating us in getting everyone out of there on time and without incident," Bertolino says. As for feedback from attendees, Bertolino says most were "very happy in the sense it was a great place to keep that high energy up. We're a fairly young company, so the work-hard, play-hard mantra works here. And with salespeople you really want to keep people interested, and they were really impressed with the whole event."

## Final Thoughts

Steeped in history, the New England states are mainly made up of quaint, small towns surrounded by lush landscapes, fishing villages and bustling, sophisticated cities such as Boston. New Englanders, known to be private, resilient, hardworking people, are often praised and admired for going out of their way to lend a helping hand to strangers without expecting something in return. It's hard to imagine a meeting attendee who would not want to very soon experience a good dose of "Boston Strong" at their next corporate meeting or event. **C&IT**

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The Meritage Resort and Spa, Napa, CA, has named **Mary Jo “MJ” Baird** as group sales manager, responsible for the corporate and incentive markets in San Jose, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Arizona, Nevada and New Mexico. She was catering sales manager for River Terrace Inn Napa.

**Mary Jobb** was named director of sales for the Waldorf Astoria Orlando and Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek, Orlando, FL. She was V.P. sales with LXR, Luxury Resorts & Hotels.

The Peabody Memphis, Memphis, TN, has named **Donna Pope** and **Marshall Thompson** as national sales managers. Pope was general manager at the Fairfield Inn & Suites and the Comfort Suites, Olive Branch, MS. Thompson was director of sales and marketing at the International Palms Resort & Conference Center, Orlando, FL.

**Gail Wargo** was named director of sales and marketing at The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa, Hilton Head Island, SC. She recently re-

tired from Marriott International, after 30 years in sales leadership.

Conrad New York has named **Paul Holden** as director of sales and marketing. Most recently, he was with the Hilton Short Hills, New Jersey.

Caesars Entertainment has named **Shelley Williams** as director of sales for the Eastern region. She most recently served as director of resort and hotel sales for Caesars Windsor in Ontario, Canada. *C&IT*

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