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2014

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT



Delegates of the National Association of Sports Commissions' Sports Event Symposium enjoy local offerings in the Bricktown district of Oklahoma City.

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Value Destinations

It's About the Experience,
Not Just the Room Rate

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GET DOWN TO BUSINESS. THEN JUST GET DOWN.



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On the Cover: Oklahoma City hosted the National Association of Sports Commission's 22nd annual Sports Event Symposium. The attendees, who are tourism professionals, took full advantage of the city's Bricktown district, with its variety of nightlife, dining, shopping and entertainment options.

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It's All About the Experience



When meeting planners embark on their site selection journey, the first things they may look at are available exhibit space and room blocks. While adequate space and affordable rates are fundamentally necessary, the value proposition offered by a given city isn't just measured in square footage or dollars. The true measure of a destination's value is written in the faces of the attendees as they experience the event and the city it's in. The buzzword is "experiential," meaning an event that creates an emotional connection between attendees and their association based on positive, real-life experiences. "You want them to get out in the city and associate a good experience with your conference," says Leslie DiLeo, CMP, meetings manager for the American Society of Mechanical Engineers in "Walkable Cities" on page 22.

The faces of the attendees on our cover say it all. They are members of the National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC), who were in Oklahoma City for this year's Sports Event Symposium. They're pictured enjoying a local watering hole in Oklahoma City's Bricktown, a redeveloped warehouse district with turn-of-the-century charm and enough shopping, dining, entertainment and local color to leave a lasting impression and great memories. Pictures like that are the best attendance-building marketing there is. Beth Hecquet, CMP, CMM, director of meetings and events for NASC, knows that a great experience begins with the kind of attention and personalized service offered by "Value Destinations" such as Oklahoma City and others featured on page 28. "It was definitely one of those CVBs that went the extra mile not only that my planning experience was good, but that the attendee experience was good," she says. And a good experience is an intangible you can't list in an RFP.

You'll find that the experiential theme also runs through our "Event Technology" story on page 16, which details "innovative meetings-related technologies that are transforming large events into highly personalized experiences." And, this issue's ViewPoint (page 8) expands on the theme with tips on using gamification and audience response systems to maximize attendee engagement — in other words, "to incorporate more innovation into the attendee experience."

Meeting planners experience a leap of faith when they source new and renovated convention hotels. Our story on page 10 reveals the perks and pitfalls of booking properties in transition.

From "New and Renovated Convention Hotels" to "Walkable Cities" to "Value Destinations," this issue offers lots of great options for sourcing your next experience-rich meeting or convention.

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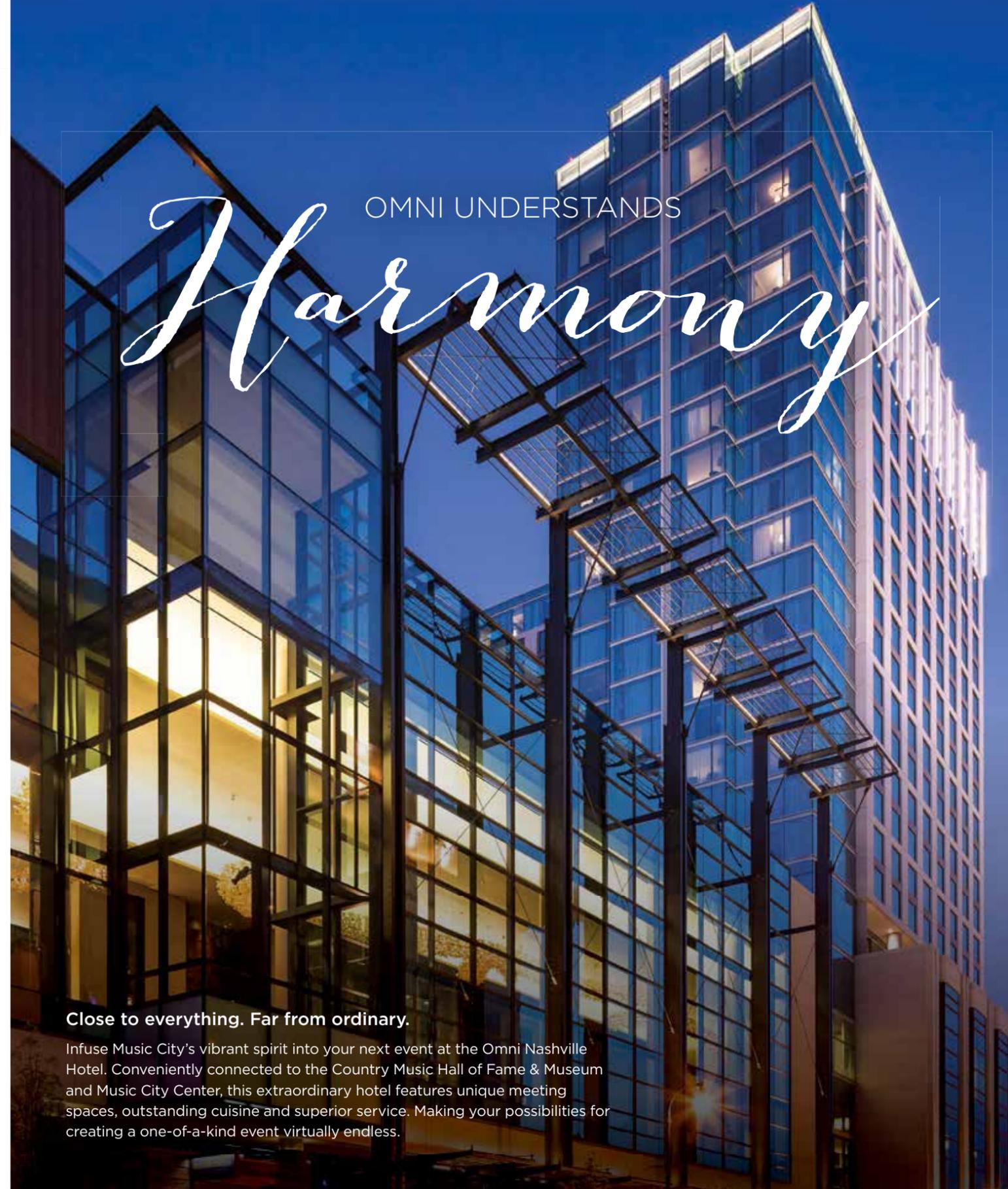
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Los Angeles Convention Center Embarks on Makeover

LOS ANGELES, CA — The Los Angeles Convention Center is embarking on a \$10 million project to provide a new look and feel to the facility located in the heart of downtown Los Angeles. Designed to enhance the customer experience and help attract new shows, the year-long transformation begins soon, with work to occur around shows and events in the building.



The Los Angeles Convention Center.

The enhancements include: installing a new, energy efficient, solar-ready “cool roof” on the South Hall and Concourse Hall; rolling out new carpet throughout; overhauling parking systems; remodeling the 299-seat theater and upgrading AV capabilities; installing the latest in energy-efficient and noise-reducing air-handling units; upgrading air walls, IT infrastructure, lighting systems and numerous operating systems.

Currently, Los Angeles is enjoying a strong convention year in 2014 with 28 citywide conventions booked into the Los Angeles Convention Center, approaching decade-high performance. In 2013, Los Angeles welcomed a record-breaking 42.2 million visitors from around the globe, making it one of the most-visited destinations in the U.S. www.discoverlosangeles.com/meetLA

Orlando's Convention Center Undergoing Facelift

ORLANDO, FL — A \$187 million renovation of Orlando's Orange County Convention Center will span five years, according to a report in the *Orlando Sentinel*. It's the biggest makeover in the 30-year history of the center, which boasts 2.1 million sf of exhibit space. This project targets areas of the center that opened in 1989 and have never had a major facelift, and includes upgrades to everything from signs to roofing to cooling units.



Orlando's Orange County Convention Center.

Kathleen Canning, the Orange County Convention Center's executive director, said officials are responding to the demand from meeting planners for upscale interiors and smaller, executive-style meeting rooms.

The rooms will get major makeovers including new carpeting, wall treatments and ceilings. New meeting rooms will have architectural upgrades and an outdoor, rooftop mezzanine overlooking landscaped ponds in front of the building.

The highest profile part of the job will turn 50,000 sf of exhibition space into a 50,000-sf ballroom. It will feature bamboo accents, a translucent, LED-powered ceiling and new carpeting. www.orlandomeeting.com

Boise's Convention Center Expansion Breaks Ground

BOISE, ID — Leaders of the Greater Boise Auditorium District celebrated the groundbreaking of the Boise Centre expansion on July 1. The convention center expansion is part of the Civic Center Plaza development in downtown Boise and is adjacent to the current facility.

The new construction and planned renovations to the existing building will nearly double the Boise Centre's current 50,000 sf of meeting and event space. Completion is projected for Q3 2016.

A 10-minute ride from the Boise Airport, Boise Centre is located in the heart of Boise's downtown core and is within walking distance to restaurants, retail and nightlife venues. www.boisecentre.com

Julie Coker Graham Named EVP of the Philadelphia CVB

PHILADELPHIA, PA — Julie Coker Graham has been promoted to executive vice president of the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau (PHLCVB).



Graham

“Since Julie joined our team four years ago, she has proven to be an excellent leader, who is trusted and respected in the hospitality industry and in the Philadelphia community in general,” PHLCVB Chairman Nick DeBenedictis said in a statement.

According to a news release, PHLCVB President & CEO Jack Ferguson, who is retiring in 2016, is working closely with Coker Graham to expand her responsibilities, including overseeing all of the organization's departments and operational duties as part of a succession plan. www.visitphilly.com



1 Attendees at the PCMA 2014 Education Conference, which was held in June in Toronto. Next year's event is set for Fort Lauderdale, June 14-17. **2** Members of the Connecticut Convention & Sports Bureau visited downtown Hartford to help market it to meeting groups. **3** Members of the Direct Selling Association at Walt Disney World Resort in June. (L to r) Adolfo Franco, Christie Post, Patti Long, Lori Bush, Mickey Mouse, Joe Mariano, Marjorie Fine and Amy Pfeiffer. **4** Awardees at the 2014 PCMA Dinner Celebrating Professional Achievement, Washington, DC. Next year's event will be held April 8. **5** IAEE President and CEO David DuBois and colleagues at the first Exhibitions Day in Washington, DC, a new and collaborative effort by seven exhibitions and events industry organizations deemed a success by attendees who carried the industry's message to elected officials on Capitol Hill. **6** Winners of ASAE's Gold Circle Awards at the 2014 Marketing, Membership & Communications Conference in June. **7** Staff from IMEX America, Sands Expo, The Venetian and The Palazzo Las Vegas gathered at The Shade Tree shelter in Las Vegas to mark the official count-down to the IMEX Challenge 2014 CSR program in October — marking a call to action for meetings and events industry members to get involved.

Credits: 1. Jacob Sharon Photography, 2. Photo Images Co., 3. Walt Disney World Resort, 4. PCMA, 5. IAEE, 6. ASAE Sabrina A. Kikwai, 7. IMEX America

Winning With Gamification

Lydia Kamicar and Ashley Pencak



...And Other Meeting Technology

New research shows 1.2 billion people worldwide were using mobile apps at the end of 2012. Experts expect that number to reach 4.4 billion by the end of 2017. With mobile technology use rapidly rising, incorporating mobile apps and gamification into an association's event strategy can greatly enhance the attendee experience. Specifically, it can increase opportunities for networking and learning, while at the same time generating revenue for the organization. However, choosing the right technologies that align with an organization's strategic plan can be challenging.

Think of the last conference you managed. Did you monitor Twitter to see what your attendees were talking about? Did a mobile app act simultaneously as your on-site guide, trades show map and breaking news source? With the use of technology becoming more and more prevalent in our daily lives, conference planners not only will be expected to integrate technology into their events, but will rely heavily on these new tools to satisfy their attendees. By looking at two mainstays of meetings technology, gamification and audience response systems, we can begin to incorporate more innovation into the attendee experience.

GAMIFICATION

Gamification is not a new idea. Passport to Prizes on the trade show floor, incentive-based contests and attendee challenges have long been a staple at many meetings. But delivering gaming via technology is a way that many conference planners are finding can increase excitement and engagement. One of our business association client organizations appealed to the growing population of Twitter users among its membership and released a contest onsite that rewarded the most creative tweet to come out of the event. By focusing on the content of the tweet, and not just the number of tweets someone

could hammer out, the thoughtfulness of the messages that attendees put into the Twitter-verse increased, along with the number of new adopters of the tool and followers of the association.

Corporations are using gamification to reward loyal customers. For instance, the Starbucks app features a visual goal of filling up a cup as more visits are made and products are purchased. This takes the "punch card" concept to the next level and gives a clear goal of getting something free

at the end. Conference planners can leverage this concept and give attendees points or badges for the number of sessions they attend, the number of exhibitors they visit or number of connections they make. By featuring a clear reward or goal, attendees will be more inclined to find ways to build up their status. Competition, and thus engagement, also can build if the results and tracking are made public.

Featuring a mobile app at your event is an easy first step to incorporating gamification. Most providers feature engagement options via point-earning, photo uploading contests and more. Although it may be an add-on to your existing platform, be sure to ask what is included in your mobile app package.

AUDIENCE RESPONSE SYSTEMS

Attendees are looking to be involved in the conference experience more than ever before. Instead of having them passively listen to a lecturer at the front of the room, why not let them drive some of the content? Audience Response Systems (ARS) allow participants to interact in real time with speakers, panels and fellow attendees. It creates a collective knowledge environment and can turn a traditional lecture-style session into an interactive learning session. At one of our health care client organization's association event, the event strategy was to create a more interactive and com-

munal learning setting. All of the speakers were attendees of the conference; therefore, the attendees were all experts in the field. By utilizing an ARS, the conference planners created an atmosphere that allowed for robust conversation and debate within the session room, which then carried over into their places of business. It also allowed people to connect and continue the conversation after the event concluded.

Polleverywhere.com is an online system in which attendees use their personal mobile device to text a code or open-end comment to the speaker. The only device requiring an Internet connection is the laptop displaying the poll results in real time. Your mobile app provider also may have an ARS

Your presenters may look to tailor their content to the attendees in their session. By using ARS to poll the attendees on what topics are most important to them, the presenter will understand what areas to focus on and prioritize. In essence, the audience is choosing the direction that the session takes by making their voice heard via the tool.

ARS and gamification programs can come in very different price points. Depending on the association's budget, it's important to first know the goal or the desired outcome. Then you can choose what tool and delivery method will be right for you and your attendees. It is also key to know your demographics. If you have a high percentage

With the use of technology becoming more and more prevalent in our daily lives, conference planners not only will be expected to integrate technology into their events, but will rely heavily on these new tools to satisfy their attendees.

element. Maximizing the usage of your app also will help you increase the number of downloads and the comfort your attendees will have with the tool.

Traditional handheld ARS devices also are still in action. From the simple keypad with limited options to Blackberry-type devices — such as the IML Connector that allows you to type open-ended questions, answer polls and even ask live questions via a microphone feature — these technologies elevate the level of interactive audience engagement to make your meeting even more productive.

ARS and polling tools also should be thought of as marketing devices for the association. Picture this: attendees are asked to type in one word that they associate with your conference. A word cloud grows throughout the event and is displayed in the general session, in the networking area or at the association's booth for attendees to watch grow and discuss. This feedback can be used to show what attendees value most about the conference and how to engage them throughout the year.

of international attendees, ARS systems may not work via a mobile app unless connected to Wi-Fi. Depending on the location, Wi-Fi access can be both pricey and potentially unreliable, making some of your attendees unable to participate and potentially frustrated. The traditional handheld ARS systems or kiosks set up for those without access to the mobile app via their personal device can be a great solution.

So how do you dip your toes in? Begin with your goals in mind and compare them to how your attendees prefer to interact with each other. Start subscribing to meetings technology blogs and sign up for alerts to stay on top of the latest trends. Dedicate resources to ensure the event's success. If you are expecting your attendees to fully engage, they will expect the same from you.

Lydia Kamicar is a senior manager in education & learning services at SmithBucklin, and Ashley Pencak is a manager in event services at SmithBucklin, an association management and services company. www.smithbucklin.com



New and Renovated Convention Hotels

By Karen Brost

The Perks and Pitfalls of Booking Properties in Transition

Booking a convention hotel when it's in a pre-construction, construction or renovation phase can require somewhat of a leap of faith. But in the end, it can all work out to your advantage. Just ask Beth Bentley, CMP, LA, director of conferences for the American Lighting Association (ALA), headquartered in Dallas.

NEW CONSTRUCTION VETERAN

Bentley, who has been in the industry for more than 28 years, has booked a number of hotels while they were in their pre-opening phase. "I find I get much better value for our members," she explains. "I did that with the Wynn and the Encore in Las Vegas, Terranea (Resort) in California and the Grand Hyatt at Baha Mar (opening later this year in The Bahamas). "It's a great way to get much better concessions and room rates because they need meetings on the books to show their investors and their owners. It's kind of a win-win situation."

This September, ALA will host its annual conference at the Omni Nashville Hotel. The 800-room property, which contains more than 80,000 sf of meeting space, serves as the headquarters hotel for Music City Center, Nashville's new downtown convention center. The Omni opened in September 2013, but Bentley



The towering Omni Nashville Hotel, which opened last fall, is across from Music City Center and connected to the Country Music Hall of Fame.

booked it more than a year earlier, in June 2012, for her event that attracts about 575 attendees.

She describes some of the factors that are critical when booking a property pre-opening. "You definitely need to have a good rapport with your salesperson. For me, other than the Omni and the one Hyatt, they were independents, so I couldn't even look at (a similar property in the chain). So they had floor plans and blueprints. As we learned at the Omni, those can change, so that's a downside. You can see mockups of what they're thinking about for rooms. It may not be the exact colors or design, but you can tell what's going to be upscale and what isn't.

"As far as pitfalls," she continues, "I would say you need a very detailed contract. I have an entire page of concessions that I move from year to year. Sometimes I drop things." She gave the example of eliminating the outdated requirement that phones in the guest rooms have free local calling. "There are things that I've added as we've gone on. You just have to cover yourself and say (this is what needs to happen) in the event that the space changes, and we're not happy. This year, at the Omni Nashville, the rooftop was supposed to be large enough for our opening reception and it is not. So we're working with the hotel, and they're being very proactive. They're partnering with us, and we're going to have to come up with an

"I would say you need a very detailed contract. ...You just have to cover yourself and say (this is what needs to happen) in the event that the space changes, and we're not happy."

Beth Bentley, CMP, LA
Director of Conferences, American Lighting Association
Dallas, TX



Rendering of the Grand Hotel Spokane, which will connect via skywalk to the Spokane Convention Center when it opens in June 2015.

alternative that works, and then if we have to have a little bit of décor or something, they'll throw that in because we would have had a beautiful downtown view."

It's important to monitor the hotel's progress as construction moves along, Bentley notes. "I have done many hard hat tours. I have ruined plenty of clothes," she laughs. She recalls one challenging tour in particular. "It was pouring down rain and red clay was streaming down the street around the hotel, and I had on white linen pants. I fully expected the sales manager to say something like 'why don't we just look at a pretty slide show or we'll pull out the diagrams,' but no. He tromped through the red water and I tromped right behind him!"

She's finding it much easier, however, to keep tabs on the progress being made at Baha Mar. "I just liked them on Facebook, and they update photos all the time. I don't even have to call and bother anyone for photos."

Bentley also learned the importance of leaving a large enough cushion of time between the hotel's projected opening date and the date of the meeting. She recounted a situation several years ago when she booked a September meeting at a large property that had opened just a few months earlier. "I would never do that again," she says. "They were not fully staffed. They were still unpacking china." She understood why. "They need to open and start making money, and so they're going full force trying to take care of people that are there, and they don't have time to work out all of the little bugs and nuances. I would say, in hindsight, no less than six months (after the hotel opens) and a year is even better. I like to visit the property in the season that we're going. What's the point of going to look at



a property in Virginia if you're going to meet in the fall, and you go in February when there's snow on the ground?"

PLAYING IT SAFE

Amanda Thorne is director of housing for J. Spargo & Associates, a full-service event management company based in Fairfax, Virginia, that works with many associations. "We constantly are scouting out the new hotels coming on the market, and we'll contract with them pre-opening as needed," she explains. "Typically, we try to not contract with them until they have a firm opening date in place. We're contracting right now with hotels that are under construction, but they're far enough along that their projected date is pretty firm. So we stick to the safe side in that respect."

Some of her clients need to book their meetings years out before a hotel's renovation plans are even on the horizon. "We do have a clause in our contract that if they do go under renovation and they are not able to honor the room block, that there would be a contingency plan that it would be the responsibility of the hotel to let us know within a certain time frame and assist us in finding an alternate block in a comparable hotel."

Thorne also likes to maintain a minimum of a several-month gap between the hotel's opening date and the meeting. "We're looking for a cushion in case they hit some sort of snag or delay." Her company also finds that there are some occasions where they



The Hilton Cleveland/Downtown, which broke ground in May, will feature an underground connection to the new Cleveland Convention Center.



The Marriott Marquis Washington, DC, which opened in May, incorporates the original historic Samuel Gompers AFL-CIO headquarters building.

need to work a little more closely with the staff of a new hotel versus one that's established. "We do a lot of citywides, which sometimes are a different beast, so there's a little more handholding on our end to make sure they do everything correctly and how our client wants it."

QUALITY REPUTATION

The Illinois Association of Realtors (IAR) will hold its fall conference and expo at the newly renovated Hyatt Regency McCormick



Kristen Butcher, CMP
Director of Professional Development
Illinois Association of Realtors
Springfield, IL

"It's all about the communication and keeping that time line. As we all know, renovations can have hiccups; there are things that your sales manager may promise you that are going to be done but are out of their control."

Place. The organization booked the Hyatt while the renovation project was just getting underway.

This was no routine "refresh" of a hotel. The \$110 million expansion and renovation project included the construction of a new 460-room tower plus renovation of the lobby and all existing 800 rooms. The hotel's dining outlets also were renovated. The project began in late 2011 and was completed in June 2013.

Kristen Butcher, CMP, IAR's director of professional development, was not with the organization at the time of the booking, but she fully understands the role that the renovation plans played in the decision. "I do believe it was a big reason why they chose the facility. In our profession, we have members that have high expectations of a property, and we always look for the top tier. Hyatt just has such an amazing reputation that I think it was important that we had a good name behind this conference. This is our first time in many years that we've been back downtown in Chicago, so we

needed to have a property that just by the name itself was going to speak to what the quality of the property would be."

She says that communication was key throughout the renovation. "Our event coordinators and sales manager have always kept in communication with us. I come from the hotel world (13 years with the Hilton Springfield), and know what is needed to put that ease and comfort into your planner's mind. It's all about the communication and keeping that time line. As we all know, renovations can have hiccups; there are things that your sales manager may promise you that are going to be done but are out of their control. The Hyatt did a very good job of communication. We went in January and did a complete walkthrough, which is nine months prior to our meeting, and the things that we needed done were done."

IAR's 2½-day conference will include 1,200 attendees and 120 exhibits. "Most of the meetings are at McCormick Place," Butcher notes. "Every year for our annual convention, we do our inaugural ball, which is the inauguration for our incoming president. That ball will be held at the Hyatt in their ballroom. We do have smaller meal functions that we will be holding at the Hyatt, as well."

"I do believe that with the size of the property and with it being connected to McCormick Place, that there was some ease that there was enough alternate space we could have gone to if something wasn't done. That's the benefit of being connected to a large convention center."

"It's also important to have things in writing describing what that completed renovation project is going to be," she continues. "Budgets can change and construction companies can change, as well. It's one thing to just have a mockup or a drawing of it, but it's important to keep communications going with pictures and updates of progress."

CONVENTION HOTEL UPDATES

May 1 marked the much anticipated opening of the **Marriott Marquis Washington, DC**, which is now the largest hotel in



The Hilton Austin, next to the Austin Convention Center, is completing a major guest room renovation. The hotel offers 80,000 sf of meeting space.



The 1,012-room JW Marriott Austin, which will open next spring, has several large conventions on the books through 2020.

the city. The hotel is connected to the Walter E. Washington Convention Center via underground concourse, and has 1,175 rooms, including 49 suites, as well as 105,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space. It also features five dining outlets, a high-tech concierge lounge and a bilevel health club. Designed to be LEED Silver accredited, the building also incorporates a unique feature: the original historic Samuel Gompers AFL-CIO headquarters, known as the "Plumbers Building." The new Marriott Marquis is the 4,000th hotel in the Marriott chain.

In January, the city of Irving, Texas, and Mortenson Development Inc. announced that Westin Hotels & Resorts will be the

official flagship of a new headquarters hotel being built that will be connected to **Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas** via skybridge. The 350-room, full-service hotel is expected to open in late 2015.

The Hilton Austin, located adjacent to the Austin Convention Center in downtown Austin, Texas, has embarked upon a \$22 million floor-by-floor guest room renovation, scheduled for completion in August to coincide with the hotel's 10th anniversary. Attendees can walk to entertainment, shopping and dining at the historic Sixth Street Entertainment District, Warehouse District and Second Street District. Built for large groups, the hotel has 800 guest rooms and 80,000 sf of meeting space — including the largest ballroom in the city at 26,000 sf — to complement the convention center's more than 369,000 sf of exhibit and meeting space.

Construction is well underway on the new **JW Marriott Austin**, which is scheduled to open in March of 2015. The 34-story hotel is the largest JW Marriott hotel in the U.S. It will contain 1,012 guest rooms and 42 meeting rooms with a total of more than 112,000 sf of event space. Several large conventions have already been booked at the new hotel through 2020.

A new \$100 million Hilton hotel located adjacent to the Palm Beach County Convention Center is now under construction. The 403-room **Palm Beach County Convention Center Hilton**

Austin eclectic.
CAPITAL STYLE
\$22 MILLION UPGRADE | RE-IMAGINED FOR 2014

cap-i-tal [kap-i-tl]: of the very best kind
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Celebrating our 10th anniversary with total upgrades to guest rooms and suites.

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Hotel is currently scheduled to open in 2016.

In late April, a groundbreaking ceremony was held to mark the construction of the largest hotel project in downtown Cleveland, a 28-story Hilton hotel that will feature a rooftop bar and an underground connection to the Cleveland Convention Center and the Global Center for Health Innovation. **The Hilton Cleveland/Downtown** will include 600 rooms located above four floors containing the lobby, ballrooms, meeting areas and retail space. Plans call for a 2016 opening.

Other convention hotels opening in 2016 include a 1,200-room Marriott Marquis headquarters hotel located next to **McCormick Place** in Chicago; and a 1,000-room **Marriott Marquis in Houston**. Slated to open in 2016 in time for the 2017 Super Bowl, the new Marriott Marquis Houston will be connected to the George R. Brown Convention Center via pedestrian skybridge. The Marriott will feature 104,000 sf of meeting, banquet and exhibit space, including Houston's largest ballroom. A selling point for attendees bringing the kids will be the lazy river on the rooftop.

The 722-room **Grand Hotel Spokane** will connect by skywalk to the Spokane Convention Center in Washington state when it opens in June 2015. The hotel will offer 60,000 sf of meeting space, including an 18,000-sf ballroom.

The Massachusetts Port Authority and the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority are moving ahead with plans to build a new full-service, 1,000-room headquarters hotel across from the **Boston Convention and Exhibition Center**. The hotel brand has not yet been selected, but companies in the running include Hilton, Hyatt, Marriott, MGM Resorts International, Omni and Starwood.

The city of **Miami Beach** hopes to begin a \$500 million renovation



West Palm Beach will debut its much-needed Palm Beach County Convention Center Hilton Hotel in 2016.

Credit: Hilton Hotels & Resorts

of its convention center by 2016 and officials have proposed three possible sites for an adjacent 800-room hotel. One option is the site of the current City Hall and the others are the convention center parking lot and the 17th Street garage. The city is planning to release a bid

for hotel developers by the spring of 2015.

This spring, the Portland City Council approved a plan to subsidize the construction of a 600-room Hyatt Regency hotel next to the **Oregon Convention Center**.

According to a story by *Hotelmanagement.net*, emerging convention markets are now focused on attracting regional groups. It cites that plans are underway to build a \$200 million convention

“Typically, we try to not contract with them until they have a firm opening date in place. We’re contracting right now with hotels that are under construction, but they’re far enough along that their projected date is pretty firm.”

Amanda Thorne
Director of Housing, J. Spargo & Associates
Fairfax, VA

center, hotel and retail area in **Corona, Queens, New York**. The project, to be built on the site of a former car dealership, calls for 292 five-star hotel rooms to be built above the convention center. The story also reports that plans are moving forward for a proposed 450-room convention hotel near the **Iowa Events Center** in Des Moines; and that in **Oklahoma City**, plans are being made to replace the city's 38-year-old Cox Convention Center with a new \$400 million facility.

WORTH THE WAIT

“As planners, you have to have some faith in your properties, and you have to know their history of going through renovations in the past — if they were able to stay on time,” Butcher advises. “It’s also all about money, too. Are they being funded correctly so that it’s going to get done?”

Finally, she says, planners need to be flexible. “You have to understand that things are going to change. There’s a little bit of a gamble, but it can be a great win-win for you if it all works out because then your group has this amazing property and it’s fresh and new.”

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Opening in 2016, the Marriott Marquis Houston will be connected to the George R. Brown Convention Center via pedestrian skybridge.

Credit: Marriott Marquis Houston

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Empowering Attendees

Enjoy a Better and More Efficient Meeting Experience

Using The Latest Cool Tools

By John Buchanan

For years now, “technology” has been one of the most commonly used buzzwords in the meeting industry. Initially intended as a way to simplify and streamline the planning process, the much-hyped notion of a better, faster way to do things eventually encompassed just about every conceivable aspect of a meeting planner’s job, from registration and room block management to administration of exhibit space and speakers.

Today, however, some planners are questioning just how much time and effort have actually been saved — or whether, in fact, their lives have really been made easier.

“Our experience as planners hasn’t been helped as much as we hoped because there’s not really been a good evolution of how technology affects the planning process,” says Mary Pat Cornett, CMP, CAE, senior director, education and meetings, at the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (AAOHNS) in Alexandria, Virginia. “But it has allowed us to go to a paperless approach to logistics, by using iPhones and iPads and doing things electronically, which is certainly a plus. But that’s really the only way technology has affected how we work internally.”

Cornett notes that there is still no totally integrated planning platform for meetings, even from industry leaders Cvent and



Mary Pat Cornett, CMP, CAE
Senior Director, Education and Meetings
American Academy of
Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery
Alexandria, VA

“Our experience as planners hasn’t been helped as much as we hoped. ...But it has allowed us to go to a paperless approach to logistics, by using iPhones and iPads and doing things electronically.”

Lanyon. And an important underlying issue, she adds, is that because there are now so many technology vendors and so many specialized niche products, such as meeting-related mobile apps and survey tools, that it does not all fit together into a neat, manageable package. And probably never will.

Therefore, Cornett says, in her experience technology typically does not deliver real time-savings because the “automated” functions are still often very time-consuming.

“To be really honest, I don’t think some of the functions delivered by technology are as much better than the old manual processes than they should be,” she says. “It seems better, because you don’t see big piles of paper on your desk and you’re not spending money on old-fashioned things like postage. But when it comes to making sure these systems actually work as they’re supposed to and that reports actually pull accurate data and things like that, it’s almost like you actually have less control, because you can’t see inside the technology. So very often we find the solutions don’t flow as easily as they ought to.”

Ultimately, Cornett says, that means that one way or another the same amount of work is being done in terms of man hours. “I don’t know why there’s still not technology that makes planning a meeting as easy as TurboTax makes paying my taxes,” she says. “That changed my life overnight. And I don’t see any equivalent technology in the meeting industry.”

However, she points out, for attendees, technology has changed virtually every aspect of a meeting or convention. And the bigger the meeting, the more profound the transformation.

Although there is now an almost endless list of function-specific technology tools — and especially mobile apps — that empower attendees to enjoy a better and more efficient meeting experience, the big three benefits are wayfinding, content management and onsite networking.

For Cornett, the most important are onsite experience and content management.

American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery

provides an itinerary planner on its website as soon as its meeting, which draws about 9,000 attendees including an international delegation, is announced.

“Then, about a month before the meeting, we release a mobile app,” Cornett says.

Either on the association’s website or later on its mobile app, attendees can search the agenda and comment on planned sessions. Local maps of the destination also are provided.

Jennifer Tomb, CMP, CEM, CAE, assistant director, meetings, for the American Geophysical Union in Washington, DC, also is now making more use of mobile technology, especially mobile apps that provide specific capabilities.

One area of interest for Tomb is gamification, a red-hot new way to motivate and steer attendee behavior such as attendance at a general session or participation in an important survey by making it a game that has some kind of tangible reward. (Also see “Winning With Gamification” on page 8.) Although a number of major vendors, including Cvent, offer gamification capabilities, the undisputed innovator and industry leader is QuickMobile.

Tomb doesn’t have a clear idea yet of just how American Geophysical Union will use gamification, but its obvious appeal will be to younger scientists who are more tech-savvy and creative. It’s really just a new and innovative form of attendee engagement,

Tomb says. “We also want to use it to get tracking data.

But gamification makes it fun. And it can also be a great traffic-builder for exhibitors.”

CONTENT MANAGEMENT IS KING

Although as a practical matter, current technology can impact many aspects of a meeting, for most associations, it is content management that is arguably the most important.

That is particularly true for the American Geophysical Union, because its annual meeting, which draws 22,000 attendees, is content-intensive, with almost

22,000 abstracts. For this year’s meeting, Tomb and her team will try out a new mobile app vendor that has not been selected yet.

“What we’re looking for is a mobile app that can actually handle the huge amount of content that we have,” Tomb says. “But we also want some of the user-friendly features like restaurant finders and things like that.”

American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery also is in a content-intensive field. And technology has definitely improved their ability to manage and disseminate content, Cornett says.

“We have not fully moved yet to being paperless,” she says. “But we have moved to providing everything electronically, as well as on paper, in the hope that someday soon our use of paper will end. But



The annual ASAE Technology Conference was updated in 2013 giving attendees the opportunity to choose from five distinct Pathways — CEO, CIO, Content, Mobile or Technical. The Expo Hall featured more than 140 technology products and business services. The 2014 conference is set for December 16–17 at Gaylord National Harbor in Maryland.

it's also now much easier for people to access our content on their laptop or on our website or via a mobile app on any device."

Cornett's annual meeting features 900 speakers and an almost countless list of individual sessions. "And you can search them all electronically now, which is much easier than dealing with paper," she says.

In the future, Cornett plans to move more toward user-driven content that is more based on feedback generated before the meeting as the program is being finalized. "That makes perfect sense, so I

think it's something we'll evolve into," Cornett says, adding that such a capability is particularly relevant to her organization because all of its members are board-certified doctors who are subject experts, which automatically facilitates a very high level of collaboration.

Like a growing number of associations, particularly in the medical field, AAOHNS leaves its content up on its website after the meeting and sells it to interested members, whether they were at the meeting or not. "But even though we charge for it, we really do it as more of a member benefit," Cornett says. "And the reason we

say that is that our annual meeting has so many sessions that people get frustrated that they can't attend everything they want to or they find that a particular session is full. So that gives us a way to give them access to all of the content and allow them to choose what they want, even if that is after the meeting."

Because of the overwhelming amount of content disseminated at its annual meeting, the American Geophysical Union uses a scientific program management software that makes content management as efficient as humanly possible.

READING MINDS

A related aspect of content management that is being profoundly influenced by technology are post-meeting surveys that allow planners and association executives to constantly refine their events based on clear attendee feedback.

Sheena Kennedy, communications and membership manager for the Association of Boards of Certification (ABC) in Ankeny, Iowa, uses surveys to ask attendees "what was their top takeaway from the meeting. We ask them what presentations they liked

How Cool is That?

These days, the proclamation "There's an app for that" is an understatement when it comes to the innovative meeting-related technologies that are transforming large events into highly personalized experiences. Here are a few examples.

Tint, whose current clients include the American Heart Association, is a social engagement tool that helps brands aggregate, curate and display live social feeds just about anywhere. Whether deployed via a website to a jumbotron, Tint helps create a more powerful link between the event and its attendees. It features the ability to connect any page, handle, hashtag, playlist and/or tagged location from any social network and personalize it with elegant, responsive

templates that create excitement.

Postano is another new platform that is revolutionizing engagement by showcasing tweets, Instagrams and other social content from attendees on live social media displays during the event. For example,

planners can promote a dedicated hashtag on a social media display and see which speakers or individual events are attracting the most attention. Planners also can curate content so that every post displayed enhances the engagement and experience of attendees.

DropThought allows attendees to give real-time feedback about the event to planners in real time, including reac-



Postano helps attendees "join the conversation" by showcasing social content from attendees.



Tint sets up social media displays at meetings and conferences.



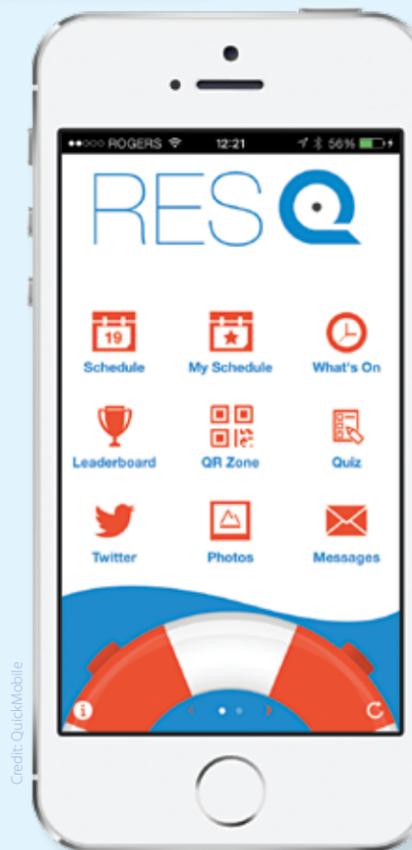
Certain Mobile makes it easy to mobile-enable every event including venue maps as shown here.

tions to speakers, room setup or temperature, and the quality of the food and beverage. DropThought can be deployed via an association's own website, a mobile app, or onsite kiosks.

GobbleBox provides yet another innovative social media platform, with a special focus on large events and the ability to promote a meeting before the fact and onsite. It's a location-based social media app that allows users to send a message to a specific location, such as the convention center. All attendees are on the same page, literally, and are able to read and respond to everyone else's messages.

Pathable has added its lead retrieval tools for exhibitors to its native iPhone and Android apps.

Exhibit staff simply install a custom app from the app store and start scanning, using their own phone's built-in camera. The Pathable platform includes a real-time leads dashboard, where



Credit: QuickMobile

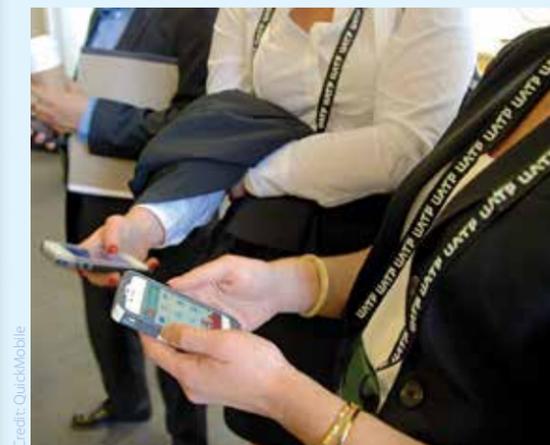
exhibitors can track and message their leads, then download the list to their own CRM system.

Certain's HTML5 app uses mobile device Web browsers to give event attendees the personalized detail and on-the-go functionality as well as more advanced features such as offline functionality, push notifications or 1-to-1 meetings. Meeting planners also can configure native apps directly from the Certain Platform, quickly and easily.

QuickMobile is the pioneer of mobile event apps for meetings, conferences, and exhibitions. Attendees can network, schedule activities, engage with content and access information across all platforms that are highly secure.

The company's event apps connect attendees, distribute and manage multi-lingual content, promote brands, integrate with all social platforms, and gather real-time audience and participation data.

— JB



Attendees stay on track and in the loop using QuickMobile's event apps.



Sheena Kennedy
Communications and
Membership Manager
Association of Boards of Certification
Ankeny, IA

“Surveys help us develop content that people feel will really be beneficial for them. And that helps them understand why the meeting is important, which helps with attendance.”

best and why. We also ask them what they'd like to see more of at the next year's meeting. And by doing that, we really hope to make the conference something that people are thinking about 365 days a year.”

Based on survey results, ABC also now selects some of the most highly rated or most valued sessions and turns them into

more detailed articles in their association publication as a way of responding directly to feedback with an additional layer of educational service.

Kennedy also now does surveys before the meeting, as well, to ensure that the content to be presented is deemed relevant by attendees.

“Surveys help us develop content that people feel will really be beneficial

for them,” she says. “And that helps them understand why the meeting is important, which helps with attendance.”

Kennedy is a current member of ASAE's Meeting & Exposition Council and in March, ASAE tested the idea of surveying attendees throughout the lifecycle of one of its meetings, including things such as the check-in and overall experience at their hotel, as well as at the meeting.

“By doing that, you're able to find out right away what's going on with your attendees,” Kennedy says. “And that way, you can correct something that has gone wrong, instead of getting that feedback after the conference, when it's too late to do anything about the problem. Then you have to wait a whole year before you can make that attendee happy again.”

Based on the ASAE experiment, Tomb says she also is interested in moving toward real-time surveys during her annual meeting. “But that means you have to have a dedicated staff person that can analyze the survey results as they're coming on,” she says. “And I

think you have to be careful how much surveying you do at the meeting. You don't want people feeling like they're constantly having to respond to surveys. And I think even ASAE learned that by the third day, responses kind of dropped off from their peak because people were getting tired of answering questions.”

After her annual meeting, Kennedy uses careful analysis of the insights gleaned from attendee surveys to be able to do a better job of planning the meeting for the following year. “We ask people exactly what kinds of sessions and content they want at the next meeting,” she says.

THE FUTURE

As new technology tools continue to improve the onsite experiences of attendees, and more sophisticated survey capabilities allow planners to know before, during and after a meeting what attendees are thinking, the ability to plan more successful events will continue to evolve.

But one new frontier of the meeting industry that is only now becoming a serious subject of discussion is virtual meetings.

And that is an important topic simply because as budgets for attendance at some association meetings continue to be flat, virtual technology means planners can give members the benefits of being at a meeting without them actually being there.

“Our industry has really been impacted by government seques-

“Virtual content is where most of our technology efforts are focused at the moment. And I think virtual meetings are going to grow by leaps and bounds.”

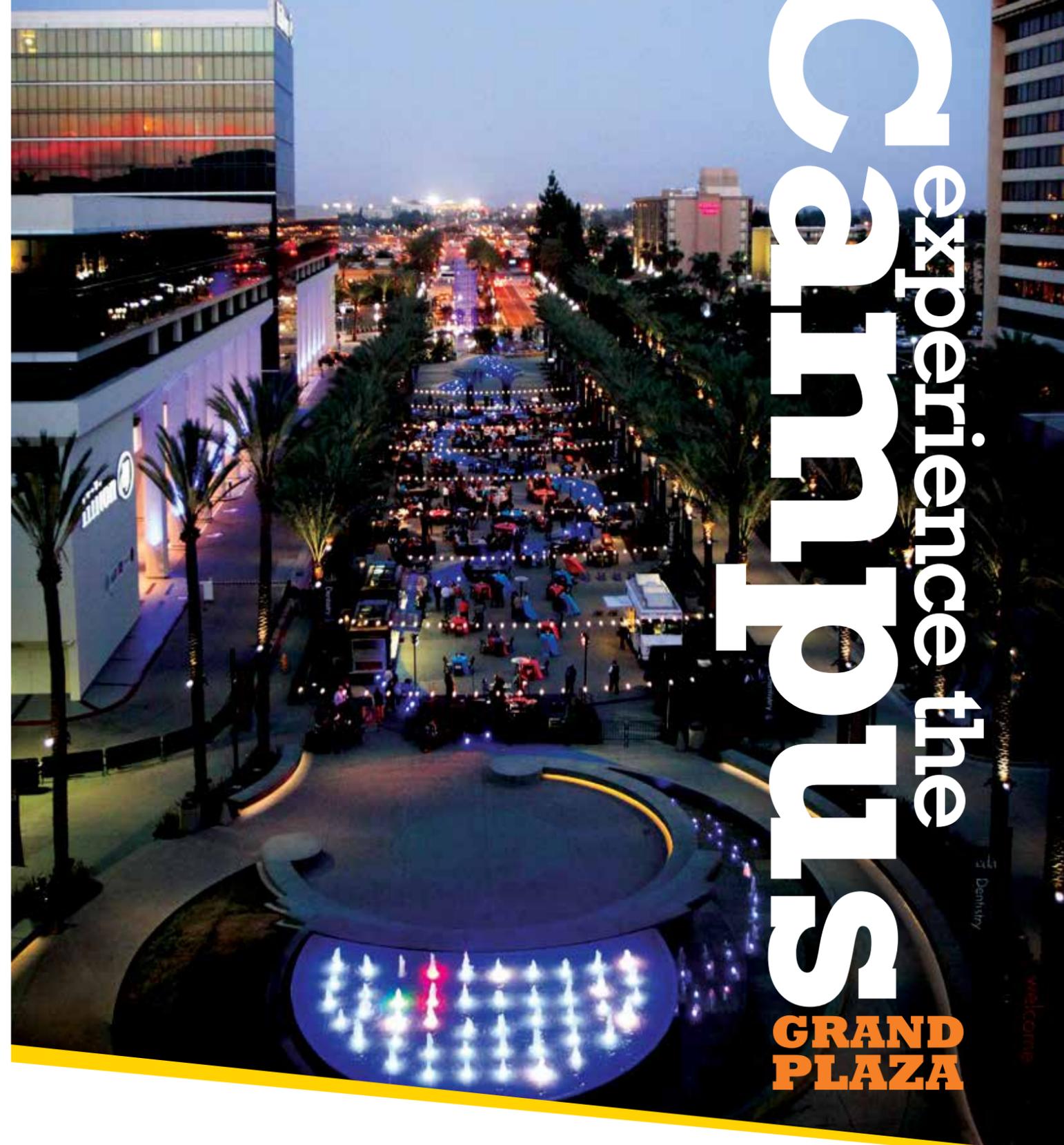
Jennifer Tomb, CMP, CEM, CAE
Assistant Director, Meetings
American Geophysical Union
Washington, DC

tration and budget cuts so we're at the mercy of travel restrictions,” Tomb says. “So last year we worked with some major agencies like NASA and NOAA to set up some remote viewing meeting sites in one of their conference rooms.”

So far, the American Geophysical Union has perceived virtual meetings as a member service. But they are now pondering doing virtual events as a fee-based service that becomes a new revenue stream. “Virtual content is where most of our technology efforts are focused at the moment,” Tomb says. “And I think virtual meetings are going to grow by leaps and bounds.”

As a result, the American Geophysical Union expects to be able to build virtual meetings into a significant business model and revenue stream, especially for their large and growing international audience.

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Walkable Cities

The Sure-fire Way to Make Attendees Happy & Healthy

And Keep Costs Under Control

By Derek Reveron

No association meeting planner welcomes post-meeting feedback such as this complaint: The hotel was too far from the convention center, restaurants and other venues hosting meetings, events and workshops.

That's why choosing a walkable city is an increasingly important consideration for both planners and attendees. Compact downtowns greatly reduce or eliminate local transportation costs and wasted travel time to and from the hotel, convention center and off-site meetings and events — with the added sustainability bonus of reducing the meeting's carbon footprint. Walkable cities also offer myriad opportunities for cultural and educational activities, not to mention proximity to fine dining, shops and entertainment. That's important because board members, executives and exhibitors often host dinners and events at offsite restaurants. Attendees also can network by conveniently scheduling dinners among themselves.

Moreover, walking is good for attendees, especially these days as leading a healthy lifestyle is top of mind.

Zorianna Smith, CMP, DMCP, director of marketing and product development for San Francisco-based AlliedPRA Northern California and Hawaii, notes that although finding adequate meeting and exhibit space is a planner's primary concern, "Walkability goes toward the desirability of a destination. Associations want destinations that people want to come to because they need to attract attendees. So the more walkable a city is, the more interested people are in visiting it because there is more of it they can see, so attendance goes up."

HAPPY ATTENDEES

Many planners find it important to include walkable destinations in meeting rotations whenever possible. The American Wind Energy Association (AWEA), for example, met in Las Vegas



AWEA's Stefanie Brown says Anaheim, with hotels in walking distance of the convention center, makes it easy for attendees and keeps them happy.

this year, after gathering in Chicago in 2014, in Atlanta in 2012 and Anaheim in 2011. The AWEA will return to Anaheim in 2017 after meeting in Orlando in 2015, according to Stefanie Brown, vice president, education and conferences, for the Washington, DC-based AWEA. Brown says she would like to meet in more walkable cities but some don't have enough exhibit space or open dates. "We have a fairly large exhibit component so we are limited in the cities we can choose," she says. "There is especially one very walkable city we would love to go to. They have the facilities we need and the added benefit of being walkable, but they don't have available space in the time frame that we need."

Anaheim's walkability is one of the reasons for the AWEA's return in 2017 after the 2011 meeting in the city attracted 15,000

people. "We don't necessarily build specific meetings around walkability, but it's a big factor with Anaheim," says Brown. "In some cities, we need 20 to 40 hotels. That involves several bus rides and lots of coordination to get people around. Anaheim, with its hotels near the convention center plus a number of other properties within walking distance, makes it easier for attendees. They come and go as they please and aren't restricted to bus schedules. It seems to make attendees happier overall if they don't have to deal with buses and waiting."

The AWEA has another important reason for choosing walkable cities. "In addition to the cost savings for not having to use as many shuttle buses, the green aspect is important to us," says Brown. "After all, we are the American Wind Energy Association

Top 10 Walkable Cities

According to www.WalkScore.com



1

NEW YORK CITY

Credit: Julianne Schaefer



2

SAN FRANCISCO

Credit: San Francisco Travel



3

BOSTON

Credit: Greater Boston CVB



4

PHILADELPHIA

Credit: Kait Phinera, courtesy of Philadelphia CVB



Stefanie Brown
V.P. Education and Conferences
American Wind Energy
Association
Washington, DC

“You want to make sure attendees can walk safely and have a good experience. We work with the cities to make sure they place safety personnel in highly trafficked areas and along routes our folks will be walking.”

coming in, and an exhibitor wants to put together an event or reception within walking distance of the Moscone Center. We want to capture people as they leave Moscone and make it easy for them to attend.”

Because the Moscone Center is located downtown and there are dozens of restaurants within walking distance, attendees don't have to worry about coordinating transportation or going to a restaurant in a different area. That allows attendees to network easily with colleagues, clients and others.

Smith also cites the Moscone Center's proximity to convention hotels as another good example of walkability in San Francisco. “You don't have to worry about what times shuttles run because you can walk over to Moscone and go to your session,” she says. “If you forget something in your hotel room, you have time to walk back and still get to your meeting. It makes it a more enjoyable conference and trade show experience because they can come and go as they please.”

Walkability is so important to some associations that their guidelines specify that hotel rooms be located within a specific distance from the convention center. According to planners, walkability also is important for the following reasons: Attendees don't usually have access to cars, so convenience is king. Also, in some cases, they are visiting a destination for the first time or returning after a long absence, so after sitting in meetings all day, they are ready to explore the city, walk and get some fresh air.

DiLeo agrees. “One of the reasons we consider walkability and nearby attractions when booking meetings is because, unless there are reasons to keep people sequestered in a meeting, you want them to get out in the city and associate a good experience with your conference. That's why walkability is so important.”

DiLeo says ASME sought a walkable city for a three-day meeting earlier this year. “We had about 200 engineers coming to this meeting, and they would sit all day together in different technical

sessions,” says DiLeo. “We wanted them to step away from the meeting, walk out the door, recharge, network with their friends and fellow committee members, and come back to the conference refreshed the next day. We specifically needed a city where people could do stuff at night so we didn't have to plan receptions.”

ASME selected the newly renovated Tropicana Las Vegas, a DoubleTree by Hilton, on The Strip. “Besides the Tropicana, we were within walking distance to other hotels packed with entertainment, restaurants and activities,” says DiLeo. “New York-New York Hotel & Casino is right across the street. The MGM Grand Hotel & Casino is nearby and Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino isn't far away.”

EDUCATION THAT'S FUN AND RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER

Walkable cities also provide the opportunity for fun educational activities. For example, DiLeo has set up walking tours for this year's IMECE conference in Montreal in November. Entitled “Flavorful Montreal,” attendees will start the five-hour guided walk near the hotel and will stop at a variety of restaurants and other venues such as a vintage grocery store to sample local foods. The guide also will provide a little history and local color about Old Montreal.

Such walking tours enhance the whole meeting experience in a meaningful way. “Part of the experience is educational,” says DiLeo. “Besides meeting their needs with hotel packages and price points, we as planners have to be always looking out for what their experience will be in other ways.”

In San Francisco, groups also take advantage of historical and culinary walking tours. “We do what we call wake-up walks in the morning,” says Smith. “They are shorter tours, maybe an hour to 90 minutes, which focus on different aspects of San Francisco history. We do a Barbary Coast tour and a 1906 earthquake walk

“Walkability usually cuts costs. If you don't have to spend what can be up to \$65,000 or \$70,000 shuttling people back and forth, you are saving a lot of money in the conference budget.”



Leslie DiLeo, CMP
Meetings Manager
American Society of Mechanical
Engineers
New York, New York

with a guide who shows them what things looked like before and after the earthquake. You can also leave your hotel and walk to Chinatown where you can tour places such as a tea shop, a temple and a fortune cookie factory.”

Walking tours and similar activities are popular with associations because they are cost-efficient activities. “Associations are looking to provide things that will be financially palatable because attendees have already paid for their own airfare, hotel and registration fees,” says Smith. “So associations are looking for affordable, fun activities for guests when they aren't in sessions. Some associations provide maybe five or six different walkable tours to choose from because they are a lot less expensive than those that require transportation.”

Planners suggest that every type of group, regardless of its demographics, enjoys walkable cities. Younger groups enjoy nearby nightlife. Science, medical, environmental and health groups lean toward walking because they tend to be more health-conscious and concerned about sustainability. Groups composed of older attendees prefer more compact, walkable cities.

Groups from other countries, particularly Europe, tend to embrace walkable cities. “It is a bigger factor for international



5

MIAMI



6

CHICAGO

Credit: Chris McGuire, courtesy of City of Chicago



7

WASHINGTON DC



8

SEATTLE

Credit: Seattle Marriott Waterfront

groups,” says Smith. “Walkability is more important because it’s part of their culture. They are more used to living in walkable cities than American groups, which tend to have a shorter range of walkability.”

While groups don’t often ask specifically about walkable cities in post-meeting surveys, attendees often comment on walkability. “We get positive responses to the fact that people like being able to walk from their hotel to the convention center and other places,” says Brown. “There are years when that’s not the case because the city isn’t walkable, and we hear about that, too; that people wish things weren’t so spread out so they didn’t have to take buses or taxis everywhere.”

SAFETY AND SECURITY

It’s also important for planners to assess safety when choosing a walkable city. “You want to make sure attendees can walk safely and have a good experience,” says Brown. “We work with the cities to make sure they place safety personnel in highly trafficked areas and along routes our folks will be walking. A lot of cities have ambassador programs or something similar in place where they put people on the street to provide information, but also for safety and security. We also make sure they know our meeting schedule.”

Safety is one of many factors that planners should consider when assessing a city’s walkability. Planners who want to get objective walkability assessments can turn to online tools. For example, every year www.walkscore.com ranks the nation’s most walkable cities. Walkscore assesses various neighborhoods in each city and assigns a “walk score” rating of 1 to 100. New York City tops the 2014 most walkable cities list with a walkscore of 88, followed by San Francisco; Boston; Philadelphia; Miami; Chicago; Washington, DC.; Seattle; Oakland and Baltimore.

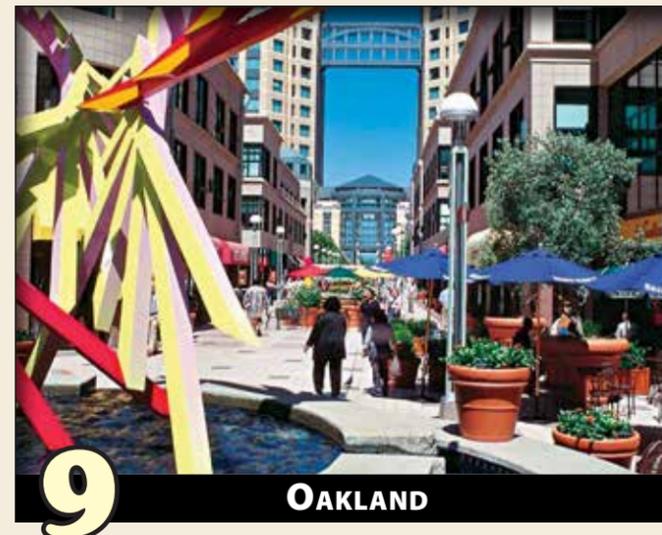
Walkable Communities provides a dozen answers to the

question “What makes a community walkable?” in the FAQ section of their website: www.walkable.org. Here are a few points to ponder:

- **The town is designed for people.**
The town makes design decisions based primarily on people, not motor vehicles. There are walkways, plazas and parks. Mixed-use properties are on the rise.
- **In walkable cities, there are many people walking.**
People young and old are walking. Some cities look walkable but there aren’t many people walking. Reasons may include the possibility of crime, no place to walk to, even though the streets and walkways are pleasant or perhaps the downtown stores are not open during convenient hours.
- **Public spaces.**
There are many places for people to assemble, play and associate with others within their neighborhood. These spaces are easily accessed by all people.
- **Intact town centers.**
The town center is located on a quiet and pleasant main street with many stores that are open at least eight hours a day. The center includes good restaurants, clothing and variety stores, and a grocery.

IN BRIEF

Every walkable city isn’t right for every group. Planners must match a city’s walkability with the needs of each group and the objectives of the conference or event. However, one thing is certain: Walkability allows attendees to safely experience a memorable connection with a city while at the same time they are contributing to the greening of the event and improving their own personal health. Most important, as Leslie DiLeo noted, attendees will associate a positive experience in the city with the conference and their association. AC&F



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Value Destinations\$

By Patrick Simms

It's About the Experience, Not Just the Room Rate

Many cities offer “value” to association meeting groups on paper: Reasonable rates for meeting space, lodging, F&B and other vendor services combine with unique attractions, quality dining and entertainment, and cultural activities. But much of the value only becomes evident when the planner begins working with the city, and the group begins its visit. How negotiable are the hotels, and what concessions will they offer? What kinds of free services does the CVB offer? What are their turnaround times? How “walkable” is the downtown (*see Most Walkable Cities on page 22*)? How efficient and resourceful is the convention center’s culinary staff? Are special event spaces and guest room views “as advertised”?

Myriad factors such as these go into a destination’s value proposition, but they are only revealed on a site inspection visit, if not the group’s actual visit. Thus, no estimation of value based on Internet research and a conversation with the CVB is complete without an experience of the city and its group service.

Minneapolis

That experience turned out quite well in the case of WilliamSPORT, Pennsylvania-based Little League International’s latest Congress, which brought more than 1,200 delegates in April to the Minneapolis Convention Center and the 821-room Hilton Minneapolis. Connected by skywalk to the convention center, the Hilton offers 77,000 sf of meeting space. While the affordability of these venues was “definitely a factor” in the site choice, Dr. Jerry Sandler, Minnesota District 1 Administrator and planner for the event, highlights several virtues of these facilities that became apparent only during the onsite experience. For example, “the audiovisual opportunities in the (convention center’s) auditorium were first rate and allowed us to do a great job of presenting visuals and videos,” he notes. “And the Hilton staff went the extra mile to help in every way possible. They set up an area in the main lobby and served fresh-made popcorn and offered microbrew tasting. We



Credit: Little League International

Little League International held its 2014 Congress at the Minneapolis Convention Center and Hilton Minneapolis.

had an information table in the lobby with a lot of informational materials supplied by Meet Minneapolis; we had a lot of trash and the hotel kept our area clean. Because I was in the lobby every day helping with the information table, the staff all learned my name quickly and offered assistance repeatedly. The bellmen were all very friendly and helpful. One even helped me clean the snow off of a van that had a foot of snow on it.”

Meet Minneapolis’ assistance went well beyond supplying informational materials at no charge. “They got us discount cards to Macy’s. They helped with the tour company (for the Twin Cities Highlights Tour). They offered assistance with just about everything: restaurant listings in the vicinity, church offerings, entertainment, etc. There was no charge for any of their services,” Sandler explains. Plus, the city’s extensive entertainment



Credit: WonderWorks Studios

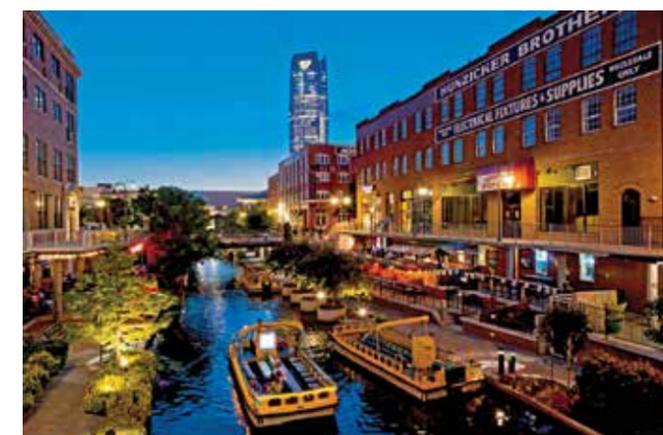
and cultural offerings surprised some delegates, he adds. “We got great feedback on the Twin Cities. People loved all of the restaurants and bars so close to the Hilton, they loved the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, they loved the Mall of America, they loved the Nicollet Mall. Most people were impressed with the beauty and cleanliness of the city.”

The 1.6-million-sf Minneapolis Convention Center, which is the largest indoor, contiguous, convention center in the Upper Midwest, recently announced a two-year, \$14.5 million improvement project. Among the improvements: a mezzanine level is being added that will add flexible space, which can be used to hold events, and includes seating and a lounge area for additional networking and meeting space; and The Visitor Information Center located in the main lobby is being completely renovated. The center currently offers nearly 480,000 sf of trade show space.

Oklahoma City

The development of an entertainment district typically adds value for incoming convention groups and sometimes brings with it new lodging options. The 1990s saw Oklahoma City turning a neglected warehouse zone into an entertainment and nightlife hub known as Bricktown, now home to diverse attractions such as Bass Pro Shops, Chickasaw Bricktown Ballpark, Bricktown Canal and Harkins Theatre. Bricktown’s trendiness was not lost on Starwood, which recently debuted the 134-room Aloft Oklahoma City Bricktown, housing 8,000 sf of meeting space.

Most attendees of the National Association of Sports Commissions’ 22nd annual Sports Event Symposium vis-



Credit: Oklahoma City CVB

Attendees of this year’s NASC Sports Event Symposium in Oklahoma City enjoy a visit to TapWerks (top) in the Bricktown entertainment district.

ited Bricktown during their free time, remarks Beth Hecquet, CMP, CMM, director of meetings and events for Cincinnati, Ohio-based NASC.

“The first night we put together drink specials and fun contests. We picked five restaurants that were able to offer attendees discounts, and if an attendee went to all of them and turned in a contest card (he or she was) entered to win prizes,” Hecquet relates. “And then we had two evening lounges, in two different bars in Bricktown. (The area) is huge for our group, who are tourism professionals and want to get out and explore. Oklahoma City has invested a lot of time and money into making sure that their city is walkable and that you can feel safe promoting attendees going there.”



Credit: Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront

The River Terrace event space at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront overlooks the St. Johns River and the Jacksonville skyline.

In fact, the Sports Event Symposium had its highest attendance ever (813, up from 772 in 2013) in Oklahoma City, which was partnering with NASC for the first time. Following the successful bid, the Oklahoma City CVB “helped us negotiate all of our hotel contracts and the rental fee at the Boathouse District, where our reception was held,” says Hecquet. “When I asked them to put me in touch with the right person (NASC needed a transportation company, DMC and local speakers), they told them who I was and who my group was, and that I was really important to the



Dr. Jerry Sandler
Minnesota District 1
Administrator
Little League International
Minneapolis, MN

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city. So it wasn't a cold call.” In sum, “it was definitely one of those CVBs that went the extra mile and did more than they needed to in order to ensure not only that my planning experience was good, but that the attendee experience was good.” Once again, value is revealed in the experience, not just in the city's initial proposal.

Jacksonville Area

A major part of the attendee experience is the hotel product, and the Jacksonville, Florida, area has seen multiple improvements on this front. A property-wide enhancement of the 510-room Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra Beach has refurbished the resort's 56,000 sf of function space and opened two new restaurants. And last year, the Omni Amelia Island Plantation reopened after an \$85 million renovation that added

155 oceanfront rooms, bringing the total to 404, and a new state-of-the-art conference center offering 80,000 sf of meeting space. More recently, the reflagged 72-suite Four Points by Sheraton Jacksonville Beachfront completed a \$2 million renovation.

Jacksonville's main convention facility, the Prime F. Osborn III Convention Center, adds historical value to events held within this former railroad station, the largest in the South when it opened in 1919. The center offers 78,000 sf of exhibit space and 22 meeting rooms. The Grand Lobby will surely impress delegates with its 75-foot ceilings and marble walls. A lesser-known venue in the meetings industry is the Schultz Center for Teaching and Leadership. Located near Downtown Jacksonville, the center offers 50,000 sf of training and banquet space, 16 meeting rooms and advanced AV and Wi-Fi. In addition, many convention groups choose to meet exclusively at the 963-room Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront, billed as Northeast Florida's largest convention hotel with 110,000 sf of meeting space, including a 27,894-sf ballroom.

For a taste of the cultural side of Jacksonville, planners can consider renting the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, whose largest space, the Terry Gallery, accommodates up to 300 attendees. Old Florida is well represented in the city with the Mandarin Museum and Historical Society, with its restored homestead on the the St. Johns River, and the recently renovated Theatre Jacksonville, the oldest continuously operating community theater in the country.

San Jose

On the opposite coast lies a city that has dramatically augmented its convention facilities. Last October, the capital of Silicon Valley debuted the San Jose McEnery Convention Center's \$130 million renovation and expansion. The convention center now offers 169,957 sf of new, flexible convention space, including 27,834 sf of new meeting space and a new 35,194-sf Grand Ballroom. This summer, the center began offering free Wi-Fi throughout the facility and a new technology package for all sizes of groups. Housing 550,000 sf of usable space, the convention center is just the beginning of the meeting spaces San Jose offers aside



Credit: The Club Auto Sport

The Club Auto Sport in San Jose recently debuted a 10,000-sf event space.

from its hotels. Parkside Hall, City National Civic and the Center for the Performing Arts all can accommodate roughly 3,000 delegates. The California Theatre seats 1,122, while the Montgomery Theater (across from the convention center) seats 475. The Club Auto Sport recently debuted a new 10,000-sf venue, with floor-to-ceiling windows, that features a display of rare collectible cars.

Along with its meeting venues and balmy West Coast weather, San Jose's added value comes from Team San Jose, which manages the convention center and other major meeting venues while partnering with the CVB. Among Team San Jose's many distinctive



Credit: San Jose McEnery Convention Center

The San Jose McEnery Convention Center completed a major renovation and expansion last fall.

services include SJCCnet, a high-performance communications network that spans the convention center and neighboring facilities, and catering that showcases fresh ingredients grown in the Bay Area. Indeed, Team San Jose delivers two things California-bound groups would expect: healthful food and high-tech.

Virginia Beach

A shining example of East Coast eco-consciousness, Virginia Beach is home to the nation's first convention center to earn LEED Gold Certification for Existing Buildings. The VBCC's more than 516,000 gross sf includes 150,000 sf of column-free exhibit space, nearly 29,000 sf of meeting space and a more than 31,000-sf ballroom, complemented by 2,209 free parking spaces. Planners will note state-of-the-art lighting and HVAC systems, a top-notch recycling program, and numerous hotels and restaurants around town that bear the Virginia Green certification.

The 34-foot beachfront statue of King Neptune signals to delegates that they are arriving in a locale that is proud of its nautical culture. One of its major offsite venues, the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center, welcomes up to 2,500 attendees for a reception. Other memorable options

The “winged” Milwaukee Art Museum on Lake Michigan features magnificent event spaces.



Credit: Visit Milwaukee

include the resplendent Sandler Center for the Performing Arts (up to 1,300), the Military Aviation Museum (about 1,000), and 18th century plantation houses such as Francis Land House (125 for a reception). And Virginia Beach delivers a tremendous value for ac-

tive delegates, with venues such as the 94,000-sf Virginia Beach Tennis & Country Club, one of the largest in the country and a past winner of the prestigious Tennis Club of the Year Award. Its sister property is the 295-suite Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center, situated on the scenic Chesapeake Bay and offering 16,000 sf of meeting space.

Milwaukee

Most value destinations are second- or third-tier, and that can raise concerns about accessibility for a widespread convention audience. Not so in the case of Milwaukee, whose downtown is a mere 10 minutes from General Mitchell International Airport, which services 55 markets nonstop. The 300,000-sf Wisconsin Center has 3,300 hotel rooms within walking distance, and booking those hotels is now easier with Visit Milwaukee's new Citywide Hotel Contract, available for conventions of at least 800 rooms peak night that utilize the Wisconsin Center and at least two hotels.

Milwaukee boasts numerous performing arts venues, such as the Repertory, Northern Lights and Sky Opera theaters. But there's no denying its blue-collar cultural charm, represented by the world's only Harley-Davidson Museum (with rentable spaces accommodating up to 1,000 for a reception) and a life-size “bronze FonZ” statue of the iconic Happy Days character.

Features like these have made Milwaukee very popular for conventions. Visit Milwaukee hosted 288 conventions in 2013, an increase of 9.9 percent over the 262 conventions in 2012. These conventions brought in more than 582,701 attendees, an

8.6 percent increase over last year's 420,618. More than \$121 million in estimated economic impact resulted.

Cleveland

Like Milwaukee, Cleveland combines affordability, accessibility and Americana — all attributes that contributed to the Republican National



Credit: Virginia Beach CVB

The Virginia Beach boardwalk, which stretches for three miles, offers four oceanfront stages, restaurants and shops.

Committee's decision to host the 2016 Republican National Convention here. Cleveland's \$2.7 billion investment in meetings infrastructure didn't hurt, either. The new Cleveland Convention Center offers 225,000 sf of exhibit space, a 32,000-sf ballroom and 35 meeting rooms. The 484-room Westin Cleveland Downtown is being renovated this year, and the 600-room Hilton Cleveland Downtown convention center hotel will open in 2016 with 55,000 sf of meeting space. The hotel will feature a rooftop bar as well as underground connections to the Cleveland Convention Center and the Global Center for Health Innovation.

Positively Cleveland, the city's convention and visitors bureau, is working on complementing this new meetings product with



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Beth Hecquet, CMP, CMM
Director of Meetings and Events
National Association of
Sports Commissions
Cincinnati, OH

improved wayfinding and connectivity. Plans are being developed to augment digital signage and street lighting, and beautify the pathways that allow visitors and delegates to explore this value-added all-American city.

Among unique venues is The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, which offers numerous rental packages and accommodates up to 2,500 attendees for a reception. The music theme also can be played up by renting the House of Blues' concert hall (accommodating up to 1,000) or Severance Hall's 2,000-seat theater, home to the Cleveland Orchestra.

New Orleans

The Crescent City has long been considered to deliver a great ROI for association groups due to the combination of the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (whose 60,000-sf Great Hall debuted in January 2013) the inimitable delights of the French Quarter and bayou culture. Getting to New Orleans is now even easier thanks to Southwest Airlines' new service between Louis Armstrong New Orleans International



The Cleveland Convention Center officially opened on June 14, 2013.

Airport and both Washington, DC, and San Diego. Planners who have not visited the city recently will note guest room renovations at The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans and the Courtyard New Orleans Downtown/Convention Center.

The Louisiana legislature recently approved plans for a new large-scale development for The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center Corridor from Poydras Street to the Market Street power plant along the city's riverfront. The project will include a new headquarters hotel on the upriver side of the convention center; a linear park, outdoor entertainment, arts and cultural venues, and new retail and housing options.

Last August, more than 1,000 delegates of the Union City, Georgia-based National Funeral Directors & Morticians Association arrived in New Orleans for the NFDMA's 76th Annual Convention, and found the experience truly reflected the moniker "The Big Easy." With the 1,193-room Hyatt Regency New Orleans' 200,000 sf of function space, the group avoided the bus transfer to the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, Ella Young, NFDMA meetings and convention planner, points out. "Everything was right there at everyone's fingertips, and the hotel wasn't too far from shopping." Areas such as Magazine Street, the

French Market and the Shops at Canal Place are among the many options. "We did have a minor issue as far as getting into the registration area, but the Hyatt staff made it happen," she adds.

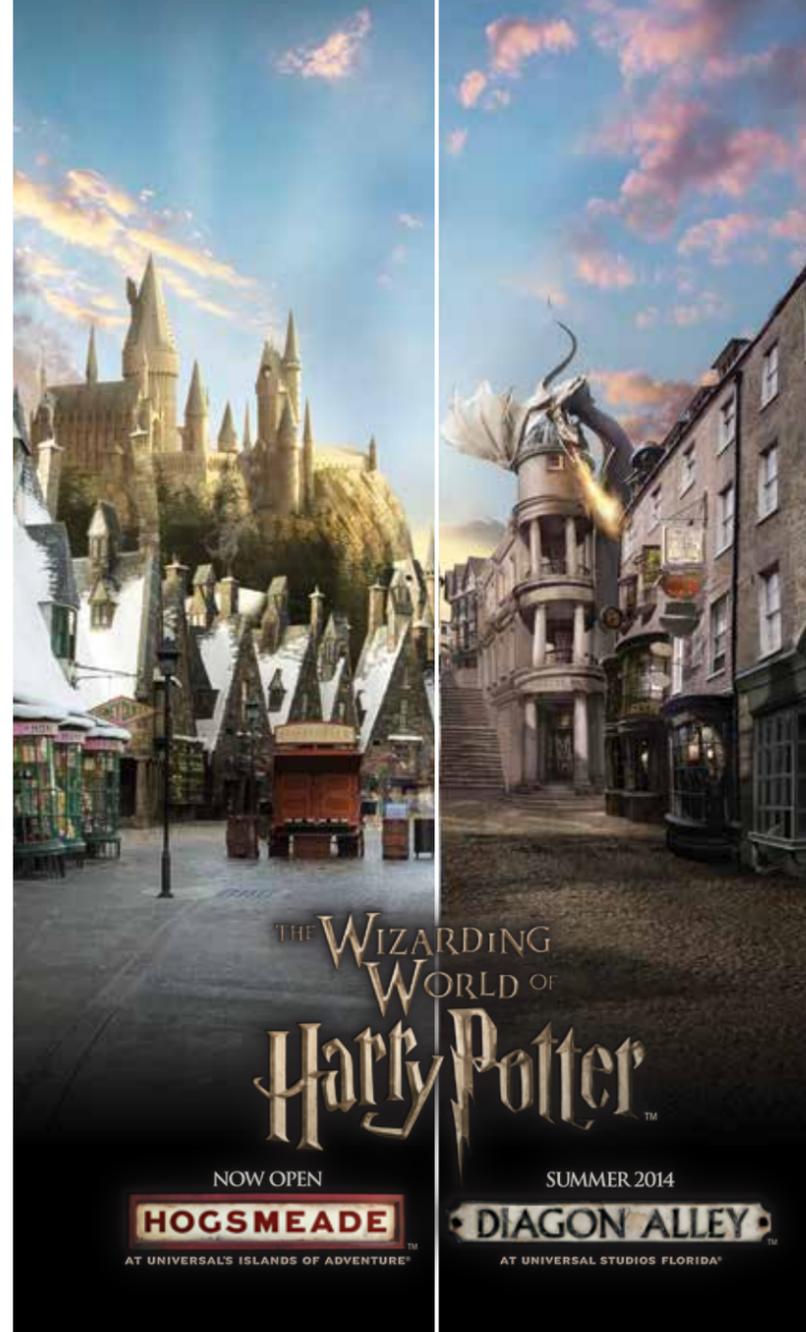
Special events during the program included a 150-motorcycle and 50-hearse rally against gun violence, held in tandem with the Louisiana Funeral Directors & Morticians Association, and the Undertaker's

Ball at the Hyatt, which featured live entertainment and demonstrations of how funeral directors perform their services.

Both of these fairly complex events went smoothly, Young relates. It's another case of a second-tier city complementing its affordability with a well-managed meeting experience whose value goes far beyond reasonable room rates.



A rendering of the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center Corridor's planned riverfront development.



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FOX-KONZ



LAMMERT



SMITH



SPRENGER



NAEGELE

The St. Louis Convention & Visitors Commission has named **Trina Fox-Konz** as national convention sales manager. She was the St. Louis and Missouri association area sales manager for Chateau on the Lake Resort, Spa and Convention Center in Branson, Missouri. **Holly Lammert** was named executive meeting sales manager. She was the regional sales manager for Lodging Hospitality Management in St. Louis.



MARASCO



POLLACK

MGM Resorts International has named **Tina Smith** and **Robyn Sprenger** as directors of global sales for the company. They will manage the Northeast region for all MGM Resorts destinations in Las Vegas, Biloxi and Tunica, Mississippi, and Detroit. Smith was executive director of national

accounts for the Loews Hotels national sales office in New York. Sprenger was director of group sales, Americas, for Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces.

Visit Orlando has named **Stephanie Naegele** as vice president of convention sales

operations. She formerly served as Marriott International's area sales leader for the Central and North Florida sales teams.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel, Lake Buena Vista, Florida, has named **Gino Marasco** as director of sales. He formerly led the sales teams at properties including The Hilton Orlando, The Loews Atlanta, The Ritz-Carlton Lodge, Reynolds Plantation and The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island.

The Daytona Beach Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, Daytona Beach, Florida, has named **Sam Pollack** as sales manager. He previously was sales manager at The Westin Lake Mary, Lake Mary, Florida. AC&F

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