

WWW.TheMeetingMagazines.com

# A ASSOCIATION

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2014

# CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT



# The Race to 2016

When Cities Vie for Top Political Conventions, Planners Win

PAGE 12

Colonial period reenactors welcome the Democratic National Convention site selection team to Philadelphia.



**CLICK HERE TO  
DOWNLOAD/VIEW  
TABLET VERSION**

## Faith-based Meetings

A Down-to-Earth Strategy for Success

PAGE 20

Credit: PHILCVB/www.meetPHL.com

# WE HELP YOU KEEP EVERYTHING *straight.*

We know great meetings and events never happen by chance. It takes endless preparation, and even then, you can't control everything. But you can control who helps you along the way. Work with Hyatt and you'll get the exclusive tools and expert team that help keep everything in order.

A MILLION DETAILS. ONE UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE.

Start planning at [hyattmeetings.com](http://hyattmeetings.com)

## HYATT®

Hyatt, Park Hyatt, Andaz, Grand Hyatt, Hyatt Regency, Hyatt Place, Hyatt House, Hyatt Zilara, Hyatt Ziva and related marks are trademarks of Hyatt Corporation. ©2014 Hyatt Corporation. All rights reserved.



ISSN 21628831 USPS 003500  
 A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION  
 www.TheMeetingMagazines.com  
**ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES**  
 THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT  
 October / November 2014 Volume 7 • Number 5



Credit: Religious Conference Management Association



Credit: German Convention Bureau and IMEX, America



Credit: Las Vegas Convention Center

## Departments

- 5 Publisher's Page
- 6 News & Notes
- 7 Snapshots
- 50 Career Track
- 50 Reader Services

## ViewPoint

- 8 Taking the Leap From Hotel to Convention Center  
Use the CVB Safety Net to Make a Fearless Transition  
By Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP
- 10 Beyond the Show Floor  
How to Engage Your Members Year-round  
By Julie Ferry and Sara Haukap

## Destination

- 42 We're No. 1  
Why Las Vegas Continues to Win Top Billing  
By Derek Reveron

## Features

- 12 The Race to 2016  
When Cities Vie for the Nation's Top Political Conventions, Planners Win  
By Patrick Simms
- 20 Faith-based Conferences and Events  
Attract Loyal Delegates with Affordable, Family-Friendly Destinations  
By John Buchanan
- 26 Win-Win Negotiations  
Strike a Deal That Gives All Parties a Fair Shake  
By John Buchanan
- 32 Drive-in Meetings  
When Planners Put the Brakes on Costs, Attendance Accelerates  
By Gabi Logan
- 38 New Age Sponsorships to the Rescue  
Creative, Innovative Approaches to Generating Event Income  
By Gabi Logan

www.TheMeetingMagazines.com  
**ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES**  
 THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT  
 A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

**PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
**Harvey Grotsky**  
 harvey.grotsky@themeetingmagazines.com

**CREATIVE DIRECTOR**  
**Mitch D. Miller**  
 mitch.miller@themeetingmagazines.com

**MANAGING EDITORS**  
**Susan W. Fell**  
 susan.fell@themeetingmagazines.com

**Susan S. Gregg**  
 sue.gregg@themeetingmagazines.com

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS**  
**Karen Brost**  
**John Buchanan**  
**Gabi Logan**  
**Christine Loomis**  
**Derek Reveron**  
**Patrick Simms**

**PRESIDENT & CEO**  
**Harvey Grotsky**

**VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS**  
**David A. Middlebrook**  
 david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

**ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES**  
 2700 N. Military Trail, Suite 120  
 Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394  
 561-989-0600 Fax: 561-989-9509  
 advertising@themeetingmagazines.com

**CT, DC, DE, MA, MD, ME**  
**NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VA, VT**  
**David Middlebrook**  
 561-989-0600, ext. 109 • Fax: 561-989-9509  
 david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

**FLORIDA/CARIBBEAN/BAHAMAS**  
**David Middlebrook**  
 561-989-0600, ext. 109 • Fax: 561-989-9509  
 david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

**AL, GA, MS, NC, OK, SC**  
**David Middlebrook**  
 561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509  
 david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

**AR, IA, IL, IN, KS, KY, MI, MN, MO**  
**ND, NE, OH, SD, WI, WV**  
**Cheryl Solomon**  
 847-749-4875 • Fax: 847-241-0125  
 cheryl.solomon@themeetingmagazines.com

**CO, LA, TN, TX**  
**Cheryl Soloman**  
 847-749-4875 • Fax: 847-241-0125  
 cheryl.solomon@themeetingmagazines.com

**AZ, CA, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY**  
**Marshall Rubin**  
 818-888-2407 • Fax: 818-888-4907  
 marshall.rubin@themeetingmagazines.com

**ALASKA/CANADA/MEXICO/INTERNATIONAL**  
**David Middlebrook**  
 561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509  
 david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com



## Which City Would Win Your Vote?

Election season is really heating up, coming off the hotly contested mid-terms in November and catching fire with the presidential nominating conventions in the summer of 2016. Right now, there are five key "battleground states" — or more precisely, cities — still competing for their own political prize: hosting the Democratic National Convention. On the short list are Philadelphia, New York, Birmingham, Columbus and Phoenix. The battle for the Republican National Convention has already been won by Cleveland.

Why should planners care? All that competition begets a strengthened convention infrastructure that will benefit meetings and conventions for years to come. David Gilbert, CEO of Destination Cleveland declares, "Right now, Cleveland is enjoying a renaissance along with the benefits of billions of dollars in new public and private development and improvements."

Then there are the intangibles of service expertise and support. "Hosting big events teaches cities certain things. ...I know that for cities like New York and Philadelphia that have hosted many large conventions before, they have taken lessons from those events and incorporated them into their bid," says the Democratic National Committee's Lily Adams in our feature on page 12, "The Race to 2016."

Reading our story, planners will identify with the site selection process for this high-profile event, but few have experienced the level of fanfare that surrounded the members of the DNC's Technical Advisory Group, who conducted the site visits. For example, when the group arrived for a two-day tour of Philadelphia in August, hundreds of city boosters and colonial reenactors (on our cover), mummies, city officials and even the sports-crazed city's Philly Phanatic staged an enthusiastic welcome. That part of the FAM trip was not just window dressing — as planners know, learning what defines a city's personality will ultimately define the all-important delegate experience. Beyond all the obligatory logistics and statistics, the cities were eager to showcase their iconic sights.

The spotlight will shine brightly on the chosen city, and it will be fascinating for planners to watch it all with a practiced and critical eye toward a future site visit of their own. As Julie Coker, executive vice president with the Philadelphia CVB, told us, "Landing the DNC would provide huge visibility for the city of Philadelphia, so those customers who have not used the city in the past would have a great opportunity to see us on a national and international stage."

Harvey Grotsky  
 Publisher

Association Conventions & Facilities is published bi-monthly by Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394; 561-989-0600. Single copies \$13.00 U.S.A. only. Yearly subscription price is \$65.00 in the U.S.A. Canada and foreign is \$135.00. Back copies \$14.00 plus shipping and handling, U.S.A. only. Distributed without charge to qualified personnel. Periodicals Postage Paid at Boca Raton, FL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send Form 3579 address changes to Association Conventions & Facilities, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Nothing contained in this publication shall constitute an endorsement by Coastal Communications Corporation (Association Conventions & Facilities), and the publication disclaims any liability with respect to the use of or reliance on any such information. The information contained in this publication is in no way to be construed as a recommendation by AC&F of any industry standard, or as a recommendation of any kind to be adopted by or to be binding upon any advertiser or subscriber. Reproduction of any portion of this publication by any means is strictly forbidden. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care. However, the publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited photographs or manuscripts. Subscribers: Send subscription inquiries and address changes to: Circulation Department, Association Conventions & Facilities, 2700 North Military Trail — Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394. Provide old and new addresses including zip code. Enclose address label from most recent issue and please allow five weeks for the change to become effective. Printed in U.S.A. © 2014.



## Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center Reaches Construction Milestone

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Local and state officials along with Caesars Entertainment executives looked on as the Harrah's



Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center had its final steel beam signed and installed October 22, marking a significant step toward the building's completion. When



Rendering of Harrah's Atlantic City Waterfront Conference Center.

it opens in August 2015, the \$125.8 million meetings facility connected to Harrah's Atlantic City will be crucial in ensuring a successful future for Atlantic City, officials said.

"There are so many Fortune 500 companies in the area that do large product launches and have national sales meetings and are forced to go to Dallas or Orlando or Las Vegas. These

are all fine destinations but we want to see them be able to stay here at home in the fine state of New Jersey," said Michael Massari, Caesars Entertainment senior vice president of national meetings and events.

Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center will be the largest convention center-hotel complex from Baltimore to Boston with its two 50,000-sf ballrooms. The ballrooms can be divided into as

many as 29 individual sections and will offer state-of-the-art, technologically advanced meetings space that can be utilized by up to 5,000 attendees. In addition, Harrah's Atlantic City offers more than 2,500 hotel rooms that will be directly accessible from the meeting space, making it the perfect year-round destination where attendees can eat, sleep and meet all in one location. [www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com](http://www.caesarsmeansbusiness.com)

## Bookings at Detroit's Cobo Center Reach a 20-Year High

DETROIT, MI — Thom Connors, SMG regional vice president and general manager of Cobo Center, recently announced that several new multiyear event contracts have contributed to the most successful year at Cobo Center, Detroit. Larry Alexander, chairman of the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority (DRCFA), governing body of Cobo, and president of the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau, said, "Each new season at Cobo Center has realized a significant rise in bookings. Couple that with sound fiscal management and strict energy conservation measures, and you have the formula for our current success."

The last three trade shows this year in Cobo Center all exceeded anticipated attendance. Gerry Conover, managing director of ITS America/PRC Associates said, "We exceeded our attendance goal by 50 percent — 9,100 rather than 6,000. We could not have done it without the Cobo Center and Centerplate staffs. You all went above and beyond to help us deliver what is being called 'the best ITS World Congress' in the 21-year history of the event. And that's up against Paris, London, Tokyo, Beijing, Vienna and a boatload of 'name' international cities. We told 'em all along that Detroit was the best place to have a World Congress and you helped prove us right." [www.cobocenter.com](http://www.cobocenter.com)

## Austin Texas Considers Expansion of Convention Center

AUSTIN, TX — The Austin Convention Center, a LEED Gold certified building located in the heart of the capital of Texas, has a convenient downtown location surrounded by thousands of hotel rooms, many of them built in recent years to accommodate convention-goers. Nearly eight million people have attended 3,000+ events, including more than 800 conventions, at the convention center since it opened in 1992.

Now, according to [www.mystatesman.com](http://www.mystatesman.com) and other sources, the city is making its move, taking initial steps toward what could be a major expansion of the Austin Convention Center along an additional three or four city blocks. The city wants to acquire a block bounded by San Jacinto Boulevard and East Cesar Chavez, East Second and Trinity Streets. The block includes the Casa Chapala restaurant, a scooter shop and a Christian Science Reading Room. The northern half includes Gus's Fried Chicken, Robert Knight Real Estate and Micheladas Cafe y Cantina. The eight parcels that make up the block are valued at about \$9.7 million by the Travis Central Appraisal District. Several of the property owners were recently notified by the city that their land is being sought for a public use — the first step in the acquisition process. The city said the next step would be to have an independent appraisal done. [www.austinconventioncenter.com](http://www.austinconventioncenter.com)



1



2



3



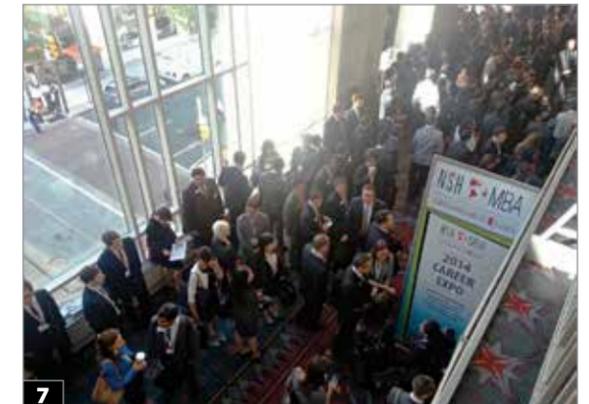
4



5



6



7

Credits: 1, 2, 4: IMEX America; 3: Meeting Professionals International; 5: Visit Orlando; 6: Convention Industry Council; 7: Philadelphia CVB

1-4 IMEX America's fourth edition was held in October at the Sands Expo, Las Vegas. The trade show was declared the largest to date. The number of exhibiting companies increased from 2,694 in 2013 to 2,900 in 2014. The total participants for IMEX America 2014 were 10,000, and total downloads of the IMEX App rose by 22 percent to 5,450. The number of one-to-one business appointments and booth presentations taking place at the show rose to 53,000, compared to 50,000 last year, and 1,250 group appointments were attended by 10,600 hosted buyers, an increase of 12 percent over last year. Future IMEX shows are set for Las Vegas, October 13-15, 2015; October 18-20, 2016; and October 10-12, 2017. 5 Visit Orlando and the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC) hosted a reception in Arlington, Virginia, for clients. Pictured are (l to r) Lisa Williams from the OCCC, Gena Galbraith of the American Academy of Physician Assistants and Diane Vidoni from the Coverings Show. 6 1999 Hall of Leaders inductee Howard Feiertag is flanked by fellow guests at the 2014 Hall of Leaders Gala, which kicked off IMEX America in Las Vegas and honored the industry's best and brightest. 7 The National Society of Hispanic MBAs (NSHMBA) hosted its Annual Conference & Career Expo at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia, drawing more than 4,500 job seekers — a 15 percent increase over last year and the largest gathering in the organization's history. "NSHMBA's record-breaking attendance is a testament to Philadelphia's great appeal as a convention destination," said Jack Ferguson, president and CEO of the PHLCVB. "We were proud to host this incredible organization and at the Pennsylvania Convention Center where we know they received the highest level of service from the staff in the building."

# Taking the Leap From Hotel to Convention Center



Christine Shimasaki, CDME, CMP

## Use the CVB Safety Net to Make a Fearless Transition

Think you're ready to jump, but nervous about taking the leap? Planners considering a transition from a single hotel meeting to a convention center and, perhaps multiple hotels, worry about many unknowns including:

- Possible loss of networking opportunities.
- Increased walking distances.
- More costs, more contacts and more contracts!

You don't have to go it alone. Seasoned convention and visitors bureau (CVB) sales professionals in every destination are there to guide planners through the whole process.

### NETWORKING

Tricia Fleisher Willhide, CMP, CEM, hasn't made the leap yet, but she's pretty sure it's inevitable. When she does decide to jump, she'll be educated about the process, have trusted partners to assist, and end up looking like a star!

With nearly 2,000 attendees, Tricia's meeting — the Community Health Institute & EXPO, the annual convention of the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) — is limited in the number of hotels capable of providing sleeping rooms and function space under one roof. "Utilizing convention centers would allow us to consider additional destinations and allow for growth," she observes. The biggest concern about using a convention center? "Losing people: By being self-contained in one hotel, you will run into your friends, acquaintances and colleagues after hours in restaurants, at the coffee shop, in the bar. ...When you are using a center and a few different hotels, the networking element becomes at risk."

When Tricia does branch out to include a convention center, the CVB can help ensure that networking opportunities stay alive and well. CVB experts can suggest venues for attendee events that foster interaction, and they can pass on tried-and-true tips: For instance, longer coffee breaks in the convention center and less unstructured time for attendees to go their separate ways can set the stage for mingling and knowledge exchange.

We reached out to Scott White, president and CEO of

the Greater Palm Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau, for advice from the destination viewpoint. "A smaller center, like the Palm Springs Convention Center (92,000 gsf of exhibit space), has a lot of experience with groups transitioning out of hotels," Scott says. "Ask the center for references on other similar conventions and get examples of how previous groups maximized the space and created networking opportunities."

### THE DISTANCE HURDLE

A convention center convert, Jane Dahlroth, CEM, CMP, director of meetings and exhibits at the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics, says exhibit sales have increased by 71 percent and attendance by more than 45 percent since making the move to convention centers beginning in 2007. "Although we never could have imagined the phenomenal growth we experienced when we moved to a convention center, we did anticipate continued growth in both exhibits and attendance and knew a facility would be needed to accommodate and foster the increase." ACMG overcomes the potential obstacle of limited attendee interaction by choosing a large headquarters hotel and connected convention center where possible, or otherwise keeping the entire lodging and center package within easy walking distance.

Using a combination of hotel and convention center meeting space is not unusual for conventions with a disproportionately large number of simultaneous breakouts, and may be the main reason for incorporating the convention facility into the package.

### COST AWARENESS

Expect rental fees for meeting rooms and exhibit space to be considerably higher than the relatively low rental rates and complimentary meeting space when self-contained in a hotel. Scott White explains, "Convention centers do not have the benefit of hotel room revenue and must charge a fee for exhibit space and meeting space."

Like any of us in a new situation, a transitioning plan-

ner may not know what they don't know; there may be work rules, vendor restrictions and labor minimums in a center that aren't typically encountered in hotels. "As you research centers, you should ask for pricing on electrical, audio-visual, security (how much is needed), drayage (decorator), Internet connections (usually done via their AV company) any costs to hang banners and anything unique to your group," advises Scott. "Ask the center how many times they will turn your meeting room. Some centers will only change the setup once and charge a fee for additional configurations. As long as you have all of the pricing up front, you can build these fees into your exhibitor rates."

manager will be your primary point of contact and assist you with coordinating between the different entities. At larger centers you may work directly with the electrical company, security company, audio-visual company, catering and decorator. If this is your first center booking, ask for a list of items that are important for them to have from you and the CVB team. They know the building and understand what it takes to be successful."

### YOUR CVB PARTNER

All the above planners agree that the best first contact is the convention and visitors bureau. The CVB is uniquely

*The CVB is uniquely qualified to share their comprehensive view of the destination, to help you find the right fit and to navigate the entire process with you.*

The more information you have, the better the center staff can work with you on outlining your total costs.

CVB professionals can be invaluable in guiding a client through this unknown territory and, of course, will be instrumental in procuring the best proposals from the hotels and convention center.

### MORE CONTACTS...AND CONTRACTS

In a hotel/center combination, "the meeting planner will have more departments and people to work with," notes Jane Dahlroth. "In addition to convention services and catering at the convention center, if there are events at the hotel there will be additional contacts, planning meetings and follow-up required." Even more players may become involved if you branch out to offsite venues. Be prepared for these additional pieces to be added to the puzzle and call on the CVB to reach out to coordinate with the hospitality community on your behalf.

"Depending on the location, you may have to coordinate and communicate with multiple entities," Scott concurs. "Generally at smaller centers, the convention service

qualified to share their comprehensive view of the destination, to help you find the right fit and to navigate the entire process with you. And, because the CVB's efforts are funded by their local government and stakeholders, there is no charge to the meeting planner. Ready to take the leap? To compare destinations and get connected to more than 135 of the country's top meeting and convention destinations, visit [empowerMINT.com](http://empowerMINT.com).

As Tricia Willhide concludes, "In a world where I need to do more with less, I need the bureau's resources and expertise to help coordinate and execute a successful meeting. I can't do without them, really. ...I just don't have the time for the extra layers of communication that would be required just by having more players in the game." We couldn't have said it better. AC&F

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

# Beyond the Show Floor

Julie Ferry and Sara Haukap



## How to Engage Your Members Year-round

Association managers are always striving to find new ways to keep members engaged — not just during conferences, but every day of the year. Whether it's offered virtually, through a 20-minute "Coffee Break" or in smaller regional events, year-round engagement programs can keep members connected to each other, their industry and the association. A variety of organizations find success implementing year-round engagement plans. By reviewing the best practices of these groups, association managers can adapt and develop their own programs to meet their membership's goals. Let's examine a few.

**PROVIDE UP-TO-THE-MINUTE UPDATES.** Members rely on their associations to provide them with the latest information about the industry. One business trade association provides "Coffee Breaks," 20-minute webinars that share the latest information, tools, techniques and strategies in the industry. These breaks have become a highly valued member benefit with up to 1,000 members participating.

### VIRTUALIZE THE EXPERIENCE.

Three years ago, a large medical services association started offering a virtual component in conjunction with its conference. The virtual extension of the event continues to attract members who are unable to attend the event in person and has not cannibalized the live audience.

At its 2013 event, the association had 325 people attend virtually. The virtual component of the conference continues to grow each year, bringing value not only in terms of revenue diversification for the association but also keeping members engaged, whether they can attend the conference or not.

**FORM YEAR-ROUND PARTNERSHIPS.** Members, especially those in technology user communities, are hungry for access to product developers, service representatives and other partners. That's one of the reasons they attend annual conferences and trade shows. But how do you connect users with technology partners throughout the rest of the year?

A telecommunications user community created a program that provides exclusive opportunities to connect users with their partner communities. Benefits, which vary based on level of participation, include membership, year-round recognition on the association website, social media posts, notification of

chapter events, ads in the year-round publication and the opportunity to present a webinar. The program was implemented in 2011, and the revenue received to date in 2014 doubled what was received in 2011.

The program has other positive results as well. The group's outreach expanded. Each partner is provided with an allotment of memberships to give to their customers, resulting in an increase of new members. Participation grew with new webinar topics being offered and new partners getting involved. This additional content helps provide increased benefits to the members and prospects who now have access to at least one webinar per month discussing the latest advances.

**OFFER REGIONAL PROGRAMS.** Another technology users community, also facing increasing demand from members to have access to tech experts, favors smaller regional events over one large annual conference. The software services users group hosts 40 regional events throughout the year, both domestically and throughout Canada, Europe and Asia. The priority of the users group is to provide year-round educational opportunities through user conferences. Each event offers a full day of education content on varying topics important in the virtual technology industry. Since 2011, the users group increased membership by 150 percent. There also are sponsorship opportunities for partners to get engaged year-round and provide a revenue stream for the organization. The revenue is realized through speaking opportunities, recognition as event sponsors, company description in event promotions, tabletop advertising at the event and collateral distribution.

### INVEST IN YEAR-ROUND MOBILE APPLICATIONS.

Associations are taking their mobile applications to the next level by moving toward a year-round application for their members to keep them engaged long after the event is over.

A large software services users group is using a year-round app to share its Special Interest Group and Regional User Group directory, provide an easy way to access its newsletter, make education available in one place and encourage networking. Another benefit is the ability to send push notifications as needed to get the attention of members when new member benefits are launched and new events are added.

While the users group is still measuring the results of their new tool, the expectation is that it will increase connections with members and prospects throughout the year and be a way for members to easily tap the users group as a resource.

**OFFER SUBSCRIPTIONS.** Two years into a webinar program, a technology association began offering subscriptions to organizations with larger teams interested in the webinar content throughout the year. The subscription program allows organizations to provide professional development training and continuing education units (CEU) to their employees, at an affordable rate. Organizations can purchase anywhere from 20 to 200 seats in the webinars at discounted prices — the more seats purchased, the greater the discount. The result of offering

- What member resources have been used in the past 12 months?
- What member resources are the most valuable?
- What is the preferred method to learn?
- How do members rank the importance of certain factors such as cost, length of training, distance to travel, etc., when choosing training?
- What sources do members currently use to educate themselves?
- How do members rate potential new association educational offerings?
- What are members' top three education priorities for the next 12 months?

*Mobile technology, creative sponsorship opportunities and online tools are making it easier for us to connect with members on a year-round basis.*

subscription options was increased attendance, additional revenue and member engagement for the association.

**CREATE AN ONLINE BEGINNER PROGRAM.** A special dentistry association created a "quick start" online course containing several online modules tailored specifically toward those new to the special dentistry industry. The online course is available year-round and allows new practitioners to learn at their own pace, while preparing them for more advanced content at the annual conference. It also attracts young professionals and those new to the industry, providing more membership leads.

**HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR OWN PLAN.** Ask yourself, "What is the overall goal?" Typically, goals include diversifying revenue, attracting younger generations and/or retaining existing members. Next, determine how the goal fits within the overall association strategy. Once the goal is defined, incorporate key performance indicators into your plan to measure success.

**ASSESS THE AUDIENCE NEEDS.** The next step is to fully understand the needs of your target audience and what they perceive as valuable. A needs assessment can accomplish this through a survey and/or focus groups. Some sample questions:

- What business issues are most critical to members and the organization?
- What industry trends will have the greatest impact on your day-to-day responsibilities over the next two to five years?

**DEVELOP A YEAR-ROUND PLAN.** Use the research to build out your plan and define clear metrics so you can measure the success of the offering. Maximize the opportunity to engage your target audience virtually, in person and in print, through webinars, online courses, conference replays, year-round mobile applications, regional events and partner programs.

The annual conference or trade show does not have to define your association. Mobile technology, creative sponsorship opportunities and online tools are making it easier for us to connect with members on a year-round basis. Incorporate year-round engagement into your strategic plan today to find what areas will work for your association!

Julie Ferry is a director in education and learning services and Sara Haukap is a manager in event services at SmithBucklin, the association management and services company more organizations turn to than any other. [jferry@smithbucklin.com](mailto:jferry@smithbucklin.com), [shaukap@smithbucklin.com](mailto:shaukap@smithbucklin.com), [www.smithbucklin.com](http://www.smithbucklin.com).

# The Race to 2016

By Patrick Simms

## When Cities Vie for the Nation's Top Political Conventions, Planners Win

conventions could reap the benefit of all those improvements for years to come. Doubtless, the bidders know that hosting such a high-profile convention would most certainly win them new convention business.

The decision on where to hold the 2016 Republican National Convention already has been made, with Cleveland landing the winning bid, thanks to a rapidly growing meetings infrastructure (see sidebar). David Gilbert, CEO of Destination Cleveland, recently told the *Cleveland News-Herald*, "Right now, Cleveland is

enjoying a renaissance along with the benefits of billions of dollars in new public and private development and improvements. The city is stronger and healthier than it has been in a long time, and these new hotels capitalize on a growing tourism and meetings market here in Cleveland."

### FIVE CITIES IN THE RUNNING FOR THE DNC

Site selection for the Democratic National Convention (DNC), to be held in the summer of 2016, is still underway. The city that hosts the convention will bask in media visibility and enjoy a significant economic boost, thanks to the more than 50,000 visitors expected, including 5,000-6,000 delegates. On the short list are Birmingham, Alabama; Columbus, Ohio; New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Phoenix, Arizona. At

The competition among Convention and Visitors Bureaus to attract high-profile conventions and events is best exemplified by the wrangling that's been going on nationwide to land the most coveted of America's citywide convention heavyweights — the Republican National Convention and the Democratic National Convention, both of which take place next summer. These are momentous occasions indeed as the parties choose their nominees for U.S. president and vice president. As a result, target cities under consideration have gone above and beyond, ramping up their meetings infrastructures and services to demonstrate that they can handle the influx, not to mention the media scrutiny. Association meeting planners are paying close attention, too, as their own



The City of Brotherly Love showcased its colonial heritage for the DNC's site visit.

## RNC Votes for Cleveland

Four cities were in contention to host the 2016 Republican National Convention in May: Cleveland, Dallas, Denver and Kansas City. The following month, the Site Selection Committee cut the short list to Cleveland and Dallas. "These world-class cities know how to roll out the welcome mat," said Committee Chair Enid Mickelsen in a statement. Dallas even brought out live elephants during a site visit in June. But when the dust settled, the Committee unanimously voted Cleveland to host the RNC in what will be the first time the city has welcomed a national party convention since 1936.

Cleveland apparently learned from losing the 2012 RNC to Tampa, which had more hotel rooms in proximity to its convention site. Accordingly, Cleveland expanded

and renovated its hotel infrastructure surrounding the 20,562-seat Quicken Loans Arena, site of the convention, and will be offering 19 hotels downtown with 5,000 guest rooms within a 15-minute walk of the arena and the convention center, and 17,000 rooms within a 45-minute drive of downtown by spring 2016. Highlights include the 484-room Westin Cleveland Downtown, which completed a \$70 million renovation in May, and the new 600-room Hilton Cleveland Downtown is scheduled to open in 2016. In addition, the \$465 million Cleveland Convention Center, which debuted in 2013, will be available to RNC support staff and meetings.

Apart from the improved package of facilities, Cleveland edged out Dallas due to several other factors



(L to r) Chairman of the RNC Site Selection Committee Enid Mickelsen, Cleveland Mayor Frank G. Jackson, RNC Chairman Reince Priebus.

cited in the media. First, Cleveland, unlike Dallas, could accommodate RNC Chairman Reince Priebus' preference for an earlier starting date for the convention, as soon as June 28. Second, Cleveland is perceived as a blue-collar town working toward economic recovery, whereas Dallas carries the image of wealth that the Republican Party may have looked to distance themselves from. And third, Ohio has swing-state status, whereas Texas is essentially a red state. — PS

this point, all of the contenders have personally made their case to the Democratic National Committee, which has completed site visits to each city, the last one being Phoenix in mid-September. "The site visits include a Technical Advisory Group who evaluate the various aspects of a bid," explains Lily Adams, deputy communications director with the committee. "They will at some point in the near future report back to the chair and the CEO of the committee (Amy Dacey), who led the site visits, (providing) their analysis and findings for each of the cities bidding, and we'll go from there. The final decision will be made late this year, or very early 2015."

Numerous factors are weighed in a proposal, including convention infrastructure (e.g., number of hotel rooms, meeting venues, transportation), political considerations (e.g., battleground state status, presence of key constituency groups), security and fundraising ability. While the mayor's office typically presents the bid, "certainly on each of these site visits we've met the relevant folks from the CVB," notes Adams.

### Philadelphia

Julie Coker, executive vice president with the Philadelphia

CVB, recalls the site visit to the City of Brotherly Love as "a whirlwind 36 hours to showcase our city as best we could, but I think we really did a great job with giving them good information. We were very well prepared with our bid, so there were very few questions that came back. And then we had an opportunity to showcase some iconic sights in Philadelphia that their delegates would experience and enjoy."

Hosting the DNC would showcase the city within the association meetings market, Coker affirms. "Landing the DNC would provide huge visibility for the city of Philadelphia, so those customers who have not used the city in the past would have a great opportunity to see us on a national and international stage," she says.

While Philadelphia hasn't hosted the DNC since 1948, it was a more than capable host for the Republican National Convention in 2000, a precedent that is certainly a plus. In general, a strong track record with major conventions is seen as valuable experience, but that is far from the only factor. "Hosting big events teaches cities certain things and that's obviously helpful, but each bid is evaluated on its merits," Adams says. "So I wouldn't say it gives a city an advantage or it doesn't, but certainly I know that



Philadelphia faithful take to the streets to welcome Democratic party officials during their two-day evaluation visit.

Credit: PHILCOB/www.meetPHIL.com

in the last two months, we have a new customer satisfaction agreement and the work rules will be much more favorable to exhibitors as well as show management," says Coker. And while the PCC could have accommodated the DNC before the expansion, the extra 935,000 sf of space "just gives you more flexibility," Coker says.

As to the Clinton and Biden family ties to Pennsylvania, "I wouldn't necessarily say that puts us ahead," she adds. "We're relying more on the fact that we've done large events before and do them extremely well, mainly the RNC."

### New York City

Philadelphia's rival in the East Coast DNC bid, the Big Apple has been a strong performer in the meetings market in recent years. The city's tourism marketing organization, NYC & Company, reports that delegate visitation is up to 5.9 million in 2013 — from 5.6 million in 2012 — and delegate spending is estimated at \$5 billion — up from \$4.7 billion in 2012. In addition, there are 34 new hotels opening this fall and winter, which will take the five boroughs to approximately 104,500 rooms by year end. Brooklyn and Manhattan, however, are the relevant boroughs for the DNC, whose delegates would be lodging in Manhattan and commuting to Brooklyn's Barclays Center.

On August 11, Barclays Center hosted members of the Democratic National Committee's Technical Advisory Group for a tour of the arena. They were greeted by U.S. Sen. Charles E. Schumer, Barclays Center majority owner Bruce Ratner and senior members of Mayor Bill de Blasio's staff. The tour included everything from a demonstration of the center's technological capabilities to sampling food from the center's Brooklyn Taste program, which includes 55 Brooklyn restaurants and vendors.

In his speech, Schumer urged the committee to "take a close look at the endless benefits and amenities that could come from this multipurpose arena. It's brand new. It opened in 2012. It makes this complex state-of-the-art all around in technologies, amenities, and more." As to the attractions of his home borough, "for potential guests of the DNC they're endless. From a thriving restaurant scene, to historic sites, museums and parks, to sports and entertainment and more, Brooklyn and New York City have it all."

He also addressed the concern about transportation ease from Manhattan to Brooklyn: "Barclays could not be more accessible and connected to all the other boroughs, Long Island and beyond, thanks to New York City's top-flight transit system. The transit hub right below us has 11 subway lines, a commuter rail line, and it's going to be a key asset for this convention." Schumer said he had "no doubt" that New York City's Department of Transportation "will put a great plan in place to ensure a smooth flow of delegates. They've already arranged no-traffic alleyways and designated ferries between Brooklyn and Manhattan." On

the security issue, he emphasized that New York City is the safest "of the 25 largest metropolitan areas in the United States," with the lowest crime rate.

On August 26, Mayor de Blasio spoke to the local press about the DNC bid, summarizing the value of winning it: "It's indisputable that this convention will be a great boost for our city. The last time we had a convention in New York City, about a decade ago, it brought in over a quarter billion dollars into the New York City economy. This convention will bring in even more. It will be a great boost for Brooklyn and for the outer boroughs all together."

### Birmingham

Andre V. Bittas, head of planning, engineering and permits for the City of Birmingham, reports, "The city has satisfied all convention complex requirements stated in the RFP" sent by the Democratic National Committee. There was an issue regarding the number of suites available at the Birmingham Jefferson Convention Complex (BJCC). However, "The city provided a plan to add additional suites per their requirement," Bittas notes. "In addition, they requested staff offices and related workspace to be accessible from the arena floor level. The city developed a layout and a plan to satisfy this requirement."

Birmingham is no stranger to accommodating the needs

*"We're so pleased with the way Birmingham can host a convention of that size for that long of a period of time that we've committed to going back in 2017."*



Scott Wunn  
Executive Director  
National Speech & Debate Association  
Ripon, WI

of thousands of conventioners. A case in point is the Ripon, Wisconsin-based National Speech & Debate Association's National Tournament, the largest academic competition in the world. In 2009 and 2013, the tournament brought 7,000 participants, including 4,000 middle and high school students along with teachers, coaches, judges and parents, to the BJCC over eight to nine days. "We're so pleased with the way Birmingham can host a convention of that size for that long of a period of time that we've committed to going back in 2017," notes Scott Wunn, executive director.

A key feature for the tournament, and one that is also important to the DNC, is the AV capabilities of the convention com-

G R E A T E R O N T A R I O C A L I F O R N I A

Who says the main event has to be a speaker?

2000 E. Convention Center Way | Ontario California 91764

**W**e can help you realize a whole new level of meeting success and fun in Ontario, California. Convenient airport access lets you fly right into the heart of Southern California's best.

**A state-of-the-art convention center. World-class shopping. Beautiful weather. All ready and waiting for you when the business day is done.**

**Meet, explore and connect in Greater Ontario, California. For information on your next meeting adventure, visit: [discoverontariocalifornia.org/meetings](http://discoverontariocalifornia.org/meetings)**

**909.937.3000 | 800.455.5755**  
or email at [info@ontariocvb.org](mailto:info@ontariocvb.org)

meet • explore • connect



Credit: National Speech & Debate Association

The National Speech & Debate Association's National Tournament, the largest academic competition in the world, was held at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex.

plex. "We put a lot of pressure on the host city being able to provide a venue and an appropriate AV company that can do the finals," Wunn says. "It's obviously really important to us that the quality of the sound is great. (The BJCC's) concert hall is fantastic, and we've worked with Alabama Power each of the previous two nationals so the sound quality for our recordings and our DVDs, etc. is just spectacular."

Birmingham also offers room rates that are among the most affordable of the cities bidding for the DNC. "We have a lot of high school programs that have to raise the money to get there, and even the highest price point for us is very affordable and the low price points are just fantastic," says Wunn. In addition, the 757-room Sheraton Birmingham Hotel, where one of the debates is held, has demonstrated the ability to handle large meal functions. "We've been able to work out good situations for mass feeding on menus. The Sheraton has to feed in one hour over 500 competitors, and they do it without a glitch." The hotel is connected to the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex, which offers more than 385,000 sf of meeting and exhibition space.

Despite all of the virtues of the city's meeting venues, the National Speech & Debate Association "would not be coming to Birmingham if it wasn't for the attention we receive from the CVB," Wunn says. "We can call that office or email any time and get the information or troubleshooting that we need." Furthermore, he believes that the Greater Birmingham CVB is "proactively seeking out organizations and groups that really

fit the culture that they're trying to build and their convention repertoire, so to speak." The DNC would be quite an addition to that repertoire.

### Columbus

According to Megumi Robinson, spokesperson with Experience Columbus, "We had an excellent site visit with the (DNC) Technical Advisory Group on August 6 and 7. While they were in Columbus, we showed off our world-class venues, hotels, shopping areas, walkable neighborhoods, nationally recognized culinary and arts scene, ongoing developments and convention package, which includes the airport, convention center, hotels and the (19,500-seat) Nationwide Arena. ...Additionally, they were able to see and experience our city's collaborative spirit as public, private and civic partners joined together to welcome the team."

Regarding those "ongoing developments," the Columbus of 2016 will feature several infrastructure improvements, including:

- A \$125 million upgrade and expansion of the Greater Columbus Convention Center that will include an additional 40,000 sf of exhibit space and two levels of meeting space totaling 30,000 sf.
- An \$80 million renovation of the Port Columbus International Airport.
- The Scioto Greenways Project, a renovation of the area surrounding the Scioto River that runs through the downtown.
- Several new boutique hotels including the 135-room Le Meridien Columbus, The Joseph, debuting January 2015.

Overall, Columbus offers more than 4,000 hotel rooms downtown, with nearly 26,000 citywide.

AmericanHort (the consolidation of the American Nursery & Landscape Association and the Association of Horticultural Professionals), with offices in Columbus and Washington, DC, partners with 10 hotels, primarily the Hyatt Regency Columbus and Hilton Columbus, for Cultivate, the largest all-industry horticulture exposition and convention in North America. The show draws more than 10,000 attendees to the city.

Margaret McGuire-Schoeff, CMP, event designer with



***"Columbus is extremely affordable for our attendees, and we also believe that the city is very accessible. ...They always go above and beyond to make sure our events run smoothly."***

Margaret McGuire-Schoeff, CMP  
Event Designer  
AmericanHort  
Columbus, OH



# The Best Is **HERE**

Everyone wants to be the next Silicon Valley, but no one can replace the original. As the Capital of Silicon Valley, San Jose now offers Wickedly Fast Free Wi-Fi beginning at the Mineta San Jose International Airport, within Downtown and throughout the Convention Center with technology born HERE.

Purpose built for speed and powered by multi-gigabit internet connectivity, designed to support multiple devices per attendee allowing thousands of attendees to stream simultaneously without interruption. Get your group's Geek on with the nation's best FREE Wi-Fi and no fine print. Really. It's HERE.

**Meet HERE. Book a meeting today!**  
sanjose.org  
800.SAN.JOSE

**SanJose**  
Innovation starts here



to none," claimed Steve Moore, president and CEO of Visit Phoenix, in a statement. "Our downtown has a compact footprint that makes it easy to walk between event venues and hotels, our airport is only five minutes from downtown, and our 62,000-room hotel portfolio includes an impressive collection of resorts with tons of meeting and caucus space." The Technical Advisory Group evaluated those logistical advantages when they visited Phoenix September 9-11. The site visit itself was of considerable promotional value to the city, reportedly generating almost 400,000 print readers and more than 450,000 unique daily online viewers from resulting articles.

Credit: Nationwide Realty Investors



Credit: © Nannette Beckway Stualo

Credit: AmericanHort

Columbus' Nationwide Arena was the site of a DNC welcome rally (above left). AmericanHort holds its 10,000-attendee-strong Cultivate event every year at the nearby Greater Columbus Convention Center.

AmericanHort, notes that one of the main reasons for the site choice is that the (Greater Columbus Convention Center) is "conveniently located to the restaurants and to the hotels, as well as to the Short North Arts District, the Nationwide Arena District." Other downtown districts — German Village, the Brewery District and the Theatre District — are within 10 blocks.

"Columbus is extremely affordable for our attendees, and we also believe that the city is very accessible. The airport is located about a 10-minute drive from the downtown area," says McGuire-Schoeff. "And the CVB is a great asset when we're planning Cultivate. They always go above and beyond to make sure our events run smoothly, helping us with our partnerships with the restaurants and hospitality community. It's a general attitude of always trying to develop relationships with us and our preferred vendors."

Like all the cities vying for a convention on the scale of the DNC, Columbus faces certain challenges. Security will reportedly cost about \$50 million, a sum that will need to be raised in greater part by the city now that federal grants for conventions have been pared down. In addition, about 100,000 sf of parking at the airport would need to be set aside for the party to set up a communication trailer and park charter buses, which would be the main form of transportation for delegates to the downtown.

## Phoenix

The Phoenix Convention Center is accessible via Metro Light Rail from the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. "In terms of logistics for an event like the DNC, Phoenix is second

since 2006. Completed projects include the light-rail system; the expansion of the Phoenix Convention Center; the construction of the largest hotel in Arizona, the 1,000-room Sheraton Phoenix Downtown Hotel (80,000 sf of meeting space); the creation of a downtown campus for Arizona State University; and a multi-use retail, dining and entertainment district called CityScape. The potential site for the DNC, the 18,422-capacity US Airways Center, is within walking distance of 3,000 hotel rooms.

## MORE WORK FOR THE WINNER

The strong bids and compelling site visits arranged by the five short-listed cities have required significant work on the part of city officials. For the winner, an entirely new layer of work will begin, as the city ensures it makes good on its promises to the committee come 2016. That includes delivering on fundraising. Cleveland, which won the 2016 Republican National Convention due in part to an expanded and renovated hotel portfolio, must now raise the \$60 million promised to the Republican National Committee in order to cover some of the convention costs. Work also has begun on finalizing a transportation plan to move delegates to and from the Quicken Loans Arena. Of course, there is a significant incentive for all of this work, as demonstrated by the previous RNC: The 2012 GOP convention meant an estimated \$200 million to Tampa's economy. And despite the unfortunate rescheduling due to Tropical Storm Isaac, Tampa showed it has what it takes to host one of the largest and most complex political conventions. Cleveland, and the city that will host the DNC, expect to show the same to the association meetings market. <sup>AC&F</sup>

# CHANGE YOUR POINT — OF VIEW —

MEXICO THE MEETING POINT



With nearly 16,000 hotel rooms, Vallarta-Nayarit is one of the destinations with greater infrastructure in México and it has consolidated as a meeting point for business industry, as it offers the best facilities, top services and hospitality you need to host any convention. A luxury destination, in Vallarta-Nayarit, are almost 200 miles of sandy beaches to enjoy.

Vallarta - Nayarit

México

LIVE IT TO BELIEVE IT

visitmexico.com/meetings

# Faith-based Conferences and Events

Attract Loyal Delegates with Affordable, Family-Friendly Destinations

By John Buchanan

**R**eligious conferences and events — represented by the “R” in SMERF — are among the least well-known or appreciated segment of the meetings industry. In a number of ways, faith-based meeting planners face a number of the same challenges and concerns as their corporate and association counterparts.

But there also are certain factors that make religious meetings unique and interesting.

“One thing that makes the religious meetings market unique is that it is not affected by a lot of outside forces, whereas you see in the corporate market, for example, that when the economy tanks, companies start canceling events,” says Dean Jones, director of conferences and events at the Religious Conference Management Association (RCMA) in Indianapolis.

“In the association world, if membership is declining, they

might not do an event here or there. But in the religious market, you see consistency and loyalty. And, if anything, in bad times — whether that’s economic or because of some crisis going on in the world — religious groups want to meet more rather than less, so they can discuss how to survive and thrive during periods like that.”

Another factor that distinguishes religious meetings is that one of their foundational pillars is large youth meetings, such as student retreats in the summer that can draw several thousand attendees or even more, Jones says. “And in addition to the summer, now you also see a lot of youth events between Christmas and New Year’s because they are all out of school,” he says.

“And hotels are looking to book business during that period, so you can get some great rates.”

Family-friendly meetings are yet another cornerstone of the faith-based market. “And those groups are looking to incorporate local activities into their meeting, so they’ll look for an amusement park or a great museum and build a half-day into the agenda for the students to experience that,” Jones says.

Frequently, families arrive a few days early or stay a few days after the meeting and treat the experience like a family vacation. “And that’s nothing new,” Jones says. “I’ve seen that happening for the last 20 years.”

Contributing even more to that characteristic is the fact that most religious meetings are held in destinations to which attendees can drive within a day. “And that means that attendees are



RCMA board member Debbie Mardis greets attendees in the Welcome Booth at the RCMA Emerge 2014 Conference held in Sacramento, California.

more mobile when they reach the destination, so they often do more exploring than a typical attendee at a corporate or association meeting,” Jones says. (See related story on page 32.)

## LONG DAYS

One of the most interesting characteristics of religious meetings is their duration. They often last for five or six days or even longer. And the formal agenda often runs from as early as eight o’clock in the morning to as late as 10 o’clock at night.

Such long days are the norm for the annual five-day meeting hosted by Chris Douglas, director of the conference office

at Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Illinois. The meeting draws 2,500 attendees and uses 250,000 sf of meeting space. This year’s meeting in Columbus, Ohio, was headquartered at the Hyatt Columbus and used the Columbus Convention Center as its meeting venue.

Compared to most corporate or association meetings, faith-based conferences are far more intensive.

“That’s especially true of the meetings I’m involved with,” says Deborah Davies, CMP, coordinator of meeting services at the Louisville, Kentucky-based Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which has 11,000 U.S. congregations. “And for us, part of that is just the



(L to r) A tour of the statehouse in Sacramento, California, during the RCMA Emerge 2014 Conference. Planners and suppliers connect during RCMA’s regional events, such as this one in Arlington, Texas, where participants networked at the hotel and on the field at AT&T Stadium, home to the Dallas Cowboys.

Calvinist work ethic. Our attendees who come to the meeting really feel like they should make the best use of the time. And meeting from morning until night means we can pack as much as possible into fewer days so that the trip is more affordable for attendees.”

For many religious groups, making the best use of time includes detailed discussions of legislative and political trends and issues.

For example, Douglas says, at her meeting this year, a topic of hot debate was climate change. “The discussion was about how the church could be more responsible in our stewardship of the Earth’s resources,” she says.

Another timely discussion among Douglas’ attendees was the kidnapping of 200 Nigerian schoolgirls by a terrorist group. “That school had actually been started by Church of the Brethren in the 1940s,” Douglas says. “When Nigeria nationalized all of the mission schools, it became a government school. But most of the families who send their children there attend Church of the Brethren. So it was really our girls that were kidnapped. And it was very dramatic for us to hear what the church is going through in Nigeria right now.”

Other important issues that are deliberated and decided at her big annual meeting, Douglas says, include how ministers are recruited, trained and ordained, along with congregational ethics. “We talked this year about why it’s so important today for a church to practice the highest possible ethical standards, even if that is as simple as always getting copyright permissions for things we publish,” she says.

Such internal debates raise another issue that Douglas be-

**“We’ll be marketing that meeting even more as a family vacation and encouraging families to treat it like their summer vacation. ...‘Hey, there’s lots to do in Florida. So plan and come for a family vacation, then attend our conference.’”**



Chris Douglas  
Director of Conference Office  
Church of the Brethren  
Elgin, IL

So we take the view that we might disagree on things, but we are still brothers and sisters in our faith.”

In other words, there is often a level of civility at a religious meeting that might not exist to the same extent at a corporate or association meeting where equally controversial and explosive issues are being discussed.

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

One thing that religious meeting planners share with their corporate and association counterparts is concern over mounting budget pressures as the pendulum has swung back to a seller’s market for hotels.

However, costs are particularly important to faith-based meetings because attendees generally pay their own way and often bring their entire family. “And always being able to make the meeting affordable is one of the challenges we face, especially for families,” Douglas says.

From his perspective at RCMA, Jones agrees that budgetary concerns never go away. “The topic that is always on the mind of our members is whether the economy is up or down,” he says. “For years, we had a great buyer’s market. Now we’re back to a seller’s market and rates are trending up, which causes concern to our members. Faith-based planners, for the most part, are always looking for economy. And in turn that means you’ll often find them using second- or third-tier cities, as opposed to first-tier.”

Affordability for attendees also is always on the mind of Davies. “That’s always the big issue for religious meetings,” she says. “Now that we’re back to a seller’s market, it’s getting hard to find good deals, even in second-tier markets. It’s not impossible, but it’s not as easy as it was a few years ago.”

A related issue that Jones hears about anecdotally from RCMA members, he says, is “that venues are not willing to lock in food prices until six months before the meeting. So for budgeting purposes, that can be tricky for a lot of faith-based organizations.”

F&B costs — and their sharp increases over the last 12–18

months — are a key concern of faith-based planners, Jones says. “F&B is often a huge expense for any meeting. But what you often see is faith-based planners picking locations where there is an abundance of affordable restaurants within walking distance. From my days as a faith-based planner, one of my events still holds the record for one-day sales at a downtown McDonald’s restaurant. And that was because a lot of my attendees were students, and they had a five dollar bill in their hand, and they were looking for a place to have lunch or dinner.”

Further exacerbating cost concerns is the fact that registration prices and other onsite costs can have a negative impact on attendance. “For religious meetings, the attendees are usually just down-to-earth, salt-of-the-earth people who are paying their own way. They’re not being taken care of in someone else’s budget. They don’t have a corporate credit card. Many times, they have saved up the money to travel to the meeting, and they treat it like a summer vacation. So sometimes there is fluctuation in attendance when the economy is bad or unemployment is up. That means you might indeed see a dip in attendance. But in the religious market, on the other hand, that doesn’t mean the meeting is going to be canceled because of that,” says Jones.

However, Douglas says, economic pressures in recent years and budget constraints that exist even in a healthy economy for religious meeting planners have motivated planners to increasingly look at second- and third-tier destinations, especially since the recession.

“We do that primarily because of the value proposition,” Douglas says. “And we generally work very hard to find places where we can get complimentary meeting facilities, which we have been able to do in a number of destinations in recent years.”

In order to optimize attendance, Church of the Brethren also promotes its annual meeting as a sort of a “family reunion,” Douglas says. “And that’s because many of our attendees are entire families. So we do activities by age group, from babies through young adults. And all of those age group activities run simultaneously while the business meeting is going on.”

Next year’s meeting is going to Tampa, Florida, because Church of the Brethren wants to push the family vacation selling point even further. “We’ll be marketing that meeting even more as a family vacation and encouraging families to treat it like their summer vacation,” Douglas says.

The simple reason, she says, is that the organization wants to increase attendance. “And we’re doing that saying, ‘Hey, there’s lots to do in Florida. So plan and come for a family vacation, then attend our conference.’”

RCMA meeting planners on a sightseeing tour; the opening reception at Sacramento’s Railroad Museum at the RCMA Emerge 2014 Conference; the Sacramento CVB booth during the trade show; the RCMA board of directors touring the Barber Motorsports Museum in Birmingham, Alabama — the site of the opening reception for Emerge 2015, January 27–29.



Credits: RCMA



Dean Jones  
Director of Conferences and Events  
Religious Conference  
Management Association  
Indianapolis, IN

**“In the religious market, you see consistency and loyalty. And, if anything, in bad times... religious groups want to meet more rather than less, so they can discuss how to survive and thrive during periods like that.”**

lieves set religious meetings apart from their corporate and association counterparts — and that is the tone of the discussions.

“There’s always the challenge, in any business meeting, about how do we disagree on things and still be respectful of one another?” Douglas says. “We might come out with different views on a particular issue, such as climate change. However, within the church, we really do try to maintain respectful relationships, probably a little more than a corporate group sometimes does.

## THE FUN FACTOR

For Cory Cooper, event coordinator at Anderson, South Carolina-based NewSpring, which operates 10 religious campuses in the state, a key consideration is that the 3,000-plus middle school and high school students who attend the organization's annual summer meeting have fun and feel as if they're enjoying a getaway that refreshes them and invigorates them for the new school year in the fall.

Given that goal, for the past five years the meeting has been held in Daytona Beach, Florida, with the Ocean Center convention facility as the event's meeting venue.



Cory Cooper  
Event Coordinator  
NewSpring  
Anderson, SC

***"We really love the Ocean Center facility. For us, it's the perfect size. And it's also a great venue for the kinds of sessions that we do. We can also provide a good meal right in the same building. And they are very accommodating."***

Never before has NewSpring used the same destination for five years running. But Daytona Beach is the perfect destination for its meeting, Cooper says.

"We really love the Ocean Center facility," she says. "For us, it's the perfect size. And it's also a great venue for the kinds of sessions that we do. We can also provide a good meal right in the same building. And they are very accommodating. The staff is just wonderful to work with. They meet all of our needs and requests every year. We also like the fact that it's across the street from the Hilton hotel, which serves as our headquarters hotel."

Cooper also uses The Plaza Historic Beach Resort & Spa, which is within easy walking distance.

Because of the nature and timing of the meeting, free time is built in for young attendees to have some fun. "So we offer free time at the beach and other activities," Cooper says. "We also want there to be time for students to meet up with others from other parts of the state."

Davies is equally enthusiastic about Louisville, the headquarters city of Presbyterian Church (USA). She uses the Kentucky Derby city for multiple meetings each year.

"Louisville is a very good destination for any meeting," Davies says. "But it's an excellent location for religious meetings. For one thing, it's pretty affordable. For another thing, it's pretty centrally located, so it's easy to get to. The downtown area has really been improved over the last several years, with new hotels and

a convention center that is going to be renovated. There are also a lot of attractions, including family-friendly attractions, located downtown. So when families do attend together, there is a lot for them to do."

She also gives high marks to the Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau. "They are excellent," she says. "We get great support from them."

The Louisville CVB and its counterparts in other destinations she has used in recent years also help Davies with another issue. As a result of the budget limitations most religious organizations face, hotels often say they want them to book when other, more lucrative groups typically do not host meetings. And being treated as a sort of second-class meeting can sometimes be frustrating, Davies says.

"And even more true if we're going to need the local convention center," she says. "So for our major meetings, we rely very much on the local CVB. And we find that often, because the CVB understands the value of religious meetings, they will work to make sure the hotels understand that, too. And that helps us get the dates we want."

Jones also understands the conflict in perceptions — and the opportunities — that can arise between a religious meeting and a corporate or association group that wants the same dates.

"If a hotel is given two pieces of business to bid on for the same dates, they're going to look at the bottom line for both of them and determine which is the best one for their hotel," Jones says. "And in that sense, one of the things that makes religious meetings popular is that generally speaking, when it comes to dates, they are flexible. They are also willing to meet at obscure times that allows them to fill in gaps for hotels. So in that sense, religious meetings have an advantage for both the planner and the hotel."

Another factor that plays to the advantage of many religious meetings is loyalty. Religious groups are very loyal," Jones says. "If they find a city or a hotel they like, they will remain very loyal and go back regularly on some sort of rotation."

In other words, NewSpring's five consecutive years in Daytona Beach are not an unusual occurrence.

Meanwhile, Jones says, out of economic necessity, religious planners also have learned the best way to build and maintain attendance at their major meetings.

"We have seen our attendance be consistent and grow over the last few years," he says. "And one reason for that is that we have been more attuned to and more accommodating of our membership, and we have really moved away from the idea that I think a lot of conferences adhere to. And that is, if you build it, they will come. We really focus on our membership and what their needs are. And then we program the meeting to make sure we meet those needs. And that is a significant change that we've followed through on over the last few years. And it has paid off for us, as it has for many other faith-based planners." AC&F

# WE MAKE IT EASY

**F**rom the RFP to the thank you letter, we value your time. Quick responses and great follow-up is our MO here at the South Point. One owner, one hotel makes it easy for you and us. Another value is we have very little turnover in sales... easy for you, repeat business for us. The South Point is a convention hotel that will offer your group enough amenities without the high prices and the crowds up the street.

### Easy One Stop Shopping, We Are A Destination With:

- ◆ 2,163 Guest Rooms/Suites
- ◆ 75,000 sq. ft. Conference Center
- ◆ 80,000 sq. ft. Carpeted Column-Free Exhibit Hall
- ◆ 4,600 Seat Arena
- ◆ Spa Costa Del Sur & Fitness Center
- ◆ 11 Restaurants
- ◆ 7 Bars/Lounges
- ◆ 64-Lane Bowling Center
- ◆ Movie Theater with 16 Screens
- ◆ Lagoon Style Pool

### Contact The Sales Department

702-797-8050

[sales@southpointcasino.com](mailto:sales@southpointcasino.com)

For a Full View of Our Amenities  
Visit [SouthPointMeetings.com](http://SouthPointMeetings.com)

**SOUTH POINT**  
Las Vegas



# Win-Win Negotiations

## Strike a Deal That Gives All Parties a Fair Shake

By John Buchanan

**A**fter struggling through a recession that yielded unprecedented sweetheart deals at the same time it presented often daunting budget challenges, association meeting planners today continue to wrestle with a new reality. And that is the return to a strong seller's market that is driving up costs across the board, from hotel rooms and F&B to airfares and offsite venues.

That relatively rapid change over the last few years represents the single most significant issue for planners, says Amy Ledoux, CMP, CAE, senior vice president of meetings and expositions at ASAE, Washington, DC.

"During the recession, hotels were very eager to get business into their property, so they were really negotiating and those negotiations were very much in favor of the planner," Ledoux says. "Now that there has been an upswing in meetings, and the properties are busier and have less space available, it's just a matter of supply and demand. And that means the hotels can charge more."

The real current challenge for plan-

ners, Ledoux says, is how planners can explain that shift to their executives. "What do you say when an executive says, 'I know we got a rate three years ago of \$150 and now it's \$275?' Or 'Our F&B costs were this much several years ago and now they're that much. Why are they higher?' You have to be able to explain that that's just the way it is, that the market has changed. And doing that is often a challenge for planners. It's an education process."

The practical bottom line, Ledoux says, is that the deals planners could get in contracts just a few years ago are no longer generally available. The sweetheart deals are a thing of the past and must be understood — and explained — as such.

However, says Jim Fowler, CAE, executive vice president of the Research Chefs Association in Atlanta, there is some good news, too, in the changed climate.

"Going back a few years, when we were in a seller's market before the recession, it wasn't a whole lot of fun going in and trying to craft and negotiate a contract, because the hotels basically said, 'Hey, this is our deal. Take it or leave it,'" Fowler says. "But since the recession, folks on the facility side seem to have a better attitude and a little more willingness to work with you and more flexibility in their poli-

cies and procedures. And that has created a much more pleasant working relationship. On the other hand, as planners we have to understand that the (deal) has to work for the venue or facility. You have to respect that and work toward getting the best deal you can while understanding that the facility has to make money."

cies and procedures. And that has created a much more pleasant working relationship. On the other hand, as planners we have to understand that the (deal) has to work for the venue or facility. You have to respect that and work toward getting the best deal you can while understanding that the facility has to make money."

### CONTRACT NEGOTIATION

One important result of more empathy from hotels has been a growing acceptance of client-side contracts, even for relatively small associations.

"We are finally getting some traction with hotels accepting our contract language," Fowler says. "We now actually have a hotel contract that we feel from our perspective works for our group. Instead of going into a city and getting a hotel's contract that is typically based on their terms and is to their benefit, we come in with our own contract. And we say, 'If you want us, here's our contract and you need to meet most, if not all, of our requirements.'"

The most significant and beneficial change, Fowler says, is that he finds that hotels are loosening their demands for strict attrition provisions — and in many cases backing away from a requirement of attrition clauses at all. And that's very good news for planners, he notes.

"It's really hard for us, as an association, to live with tradition-

al attrition clauses, because if all the stars don't align for one of our conferences, we're on the hook for the rooms," he says. "And as long as an association has a demonstrated and trackable history when it comes to their meetings, it just doesn't make sense to have to put yourself out on a limb when it comes to attrition."

Martin E. Bay, CMP, director, meetings and expositions at major association management company Kellen Meetings in Atlanta, agrees that a relaxation of attrition clauses represents an important change in the marketplace. He also points out that Kellen has played an active role in promoting that change.

"Kellen has had a 'no attrition' policy for several years now," Bay says. "We have what we call a 'room block performance clause' that says we will provide a history and that based on that history of (room) pickup, we will partner with the property to book the appropriate block."

Because of its size and buying power, Kellen has been able to enforce that self-imposed change of policy.

However, Ledoux says, she is not convinced that a genuine change in attrition requirements from hotels has taken hold — or will. "Hotels have to protect themselves, because they're taking one piece of business over anything," Ledoux says. "So if you don't live up to your expectations, then they're sitting there with empty rooms. So I actually see attrition clauses coming back."

In the meantime, however, Kellen also has aggressively addressed cancellation penalties.





Martin Bay, CMP  
Director, Meetings and  
Expositions  
Kellen Meetings  
Atlanta, GA

***“We have what we call a ‘room block performance clause’ that says we will provide a history and that based on that history of (room) pickup, we will partner with the property to book the appropriate block.”***

“Cancellation, with the Kellen contract, is always based on lost profit,” Bay says. “We do not agree to lost revenue. We say, ‘Why should we pay you for the soaps in the room if nobody is using it? Why should we pay you to clean the room if nobody



had to clean it?’ Let’s see what your lost profit is, and we’ll pay you for the lost profit on the room block and also pay you for lost profit on the F&B that we don’t spend.”

The tool Kellen uses in those negotiations is the accepted practices exchange (APEX) template developed by the Convention Industry Council (CIC).

“Our contract is based on APEX,” Bay says. “When we send out an RFP, we have a box on that RFP that asks whether they participate in the APEX standards.”

That, he acknowledges, is not yet widespread among medium-sized or small associations. “But if you talk to your major players,” he says, “I think you’ll find a lot of them are on the same page now.”

And, Bay adds, the use of such a negotiating tactic and tool is available to any planner who is aware of those options. In that spirit, he says, Kellen, ASAE and Association Management Companies International (AMCI) are currently trying to spread the word and encourage more associations to help make the APEX contract standards more universal.

Ledoux concurs that the APEX-based “lost profit” standard is an important improvement over the old cancellation provisions in hotel contracts. As a result, ASAE now does what Kellen does.

“But it’s also a matter of being fair to the hotels,” Ledoux says, “with whatever way you do it.”

She also agrees that hotels are now much more open to allowing buyers to use their own contract templates. “I think hotels are not very open to that kind of thing if they feel the provisions are fair to both parties,” she says. “If it’s just a different way to go about getting the dollars if you don’t deliver on what you promised, I don’t think hotels really care very much about how that gets done.”

But, Bay says, the overarching issue for planners is to understand that a change in negotiating stance delivers critical benefits. “Why should you agree to a guarantee when you can’t really guarantee anything?” he says. “Why should you agree to pay damages when the income is not coming in to pay for those damages? So the point now is to work out something that is realistic and agreeable. And that is not unfair to the hotels.”

### **BUDGET CHALLENGES**

Although planners are indeed enjoying a stronger negotiating capability based on changes that grew out of the recession, there also is a major concern these days. And that is that meeting costs are rising dramatically.

“Room rates are going up,” Bay says. “Airfare is going up. F&B is going up. Service charges are going up.” And the spike in airfares has been especially sharp, he says.

Ledoux agrees that sharply rising airfares and the related additional fees are the biggest concern among planners at the mo-

ment. “And as planners, we have no control over that,” she says, adding that increasing labor costs in major meeting destinations are, in turn, driving up the cost of virtually everything else.

Marguerite Leishman, meetings manager at the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) in Alexandria, Virginia, agrees that spikes in pricing are a big concern for planners. Like it or not, Leishman says, “the cost of everything is going up.”

Leishman’s primary concern now is F&B costs. And she works hard to come up with an effective way to cope with the budget challenges that often creates.

“One of the things I look at is what the hotel charges for a gallon of coffee,” she says. “There’s a hotel where we’re doing a meeting and the cost of coffee is \$88 a gallon, plus fees. But in another city we’re going to, the cost is \$35 a gallon. And that kind of difference usually depends on where you are and what kind of facility you’re in. But I find that the cost of a gallon of coffee is always a good indicator of what the costs of food are going to be.”

And she finds that it is often negotiable. “I also look at the F&B menus when I’m planning a meeting,” she says. “And I’ll often go back to the hotel and say, ‘If you really want our business, we need to do some serious negotiating about the cost of food

***“Now that there has been an upswing in meetings, and the properties are busier and have less space available, it’s just a matter of supply and demand. And that means the hotels can charge more.”***



Amy Ledoux, CMP, CAE  
Senior Vice President of Meetings  
and Expositions  
ASAE  
Washington, D.C.

and beverage. And let’s start with the cost of a gallon of coffee and see how we can negotiate and how much I can get you to come down on that.’ And if they are completely inflexible, then I can take my business someplace else.”

Ultimately, Leishman says, that is the only real option planners have when it comes to effective negotiation that satisfies their budget limitations.

As a practical matter, she says, ACTE also has cut back on the number of events it does during a meeting. “We talk about

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

cap-i-tal [kap-i-tl]: of the very best kind  
-a truly capital idea

Celebrating our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with total upgrades to guest rooms and suites.

Cozy comforts.  
Smart conveniences.  
Contemporary colors.  
Designed for today’s traveler.

Stay Renewed. Check in with us.

**Hilton**  
AUSTIN

f t 500 EAST 4TH STREET, AUSTIN, TX 78701 512 682 8000 AUSTIN.HILTON.COM

Presidential Suite



Marguerite Leishman  
Meetings Manager  
Association for Career and  
Technical Education  
Alexandria, VA

***“And the pendulum swings both ways. What I want is for it to be fair for both sides. I want to get the best deals I can for my association and my members, but not at the expense of having a fair deal for the hotel as well.”***

To attract more sponsorship dollars, Bay says, “You have to be creative. You have to come up with something new and different. You have to get the attention of your attendees. And part of that today is with your website and on mobile devices. You can also use Twitter and Facebook. We now try to brand all of those things with sponsor logos. But it’s not for everybody. You have to know how to be innovative. But it also gains momentum quickly for the groups that are willing to do it and know how to do it.”

Fowler is seeing a slight trend of more sponsorship money being invested in his industry. “Companies are also starting to let more of their employees go to meetings again after putting a clamp on that during the recession,” he says. “Exhibit business is also starting to pick up. Companies that sat on the sidelines for a few years are starting to increase their use of exhibit space. So when all of those things start to happen, as they are now, that puts the association in a position to be able to ‘do more with more’ at their meetings.” (See related story on page 38.)

#### **LEVERAGING BUYING POWER AND LOYALTY**

Yet another current best practice when it comes to getting the most bang for the buck is negotiating based on an association’s total meeting expenditures, Ledoux says.

“Obviously, the value of your organization’s business to a hotel brand — and the fact you can say you book 20 meetings a year and that 15 of them are with a brand such as Marriott or Hilton — means you can negotiate based on the reality that you are a good customer and that you have a relationship,” she says. “But in order to do that, you have to really know the value of your business to that brand or hotel.” And an important part of that equation, she says, is ancillary business such as parties or individual F&B expenditures generated by attendees and exhibitors at an association’s meetings, along with an ability to negotiate good pricing for multiple meetings over multiple years.

At the same time, however, Leishman says, smart planners also will take advantage of another change created by the recession. And that is a shared desire to reduce the adversarial negotiating climate that was driven historically by whether the industry was in a buyer’s or a seller’s market, with each side extracting maximum advantage at either extreme.

“I’ve been around for a long time, and I’ve seen this kind of stuff go on for years,” Leishman says. “And the pendulum swings both ways every so often. Sometimes it’s in the planner’s favor, and sometimes it’s in the hotel’s favor. But ultimately, what I want is for it to be fair for both sides. I want to get the best deals I can for my association and my members, but not at the expense of having a fair deal for the hotel as well.”

That, she says, is the new formula for a genuine win-win situation. AC&F

the things we absolutely need to do, like our awards banquet,” Leishman says. “But we also ask whether we need that extra coffee service for committee meetings. Now it’s a matter of finding those tradeoffs where we can save budget and where we can put a little more money into the budget for food if we eliminate a coffee break.”

However, Ledoux says — and Leishman agrees — another aspect of the new, more expensive post-recession market environment is rising fees such as gratuities, resort fees, and state and local taxes.

F&B fees and taxes can now total more than 25 percent, Ledoux and Leishman say. “So when you’re budgeting now, you have to ask what the tax and gratuities and service charges are,” Ledoux says. “And for some recent meetings we’ve done, when you add up everything including taxes, you have to add as much as 30 percent to the bill. And you need to know that ahead of time so that you can budget appropriately.”

Unfortunately, Ledoux says, rising fees and other ancillary costs represent a permanent change that simply add more pressures to the budgeting process.

#### **COPING MECHANISMS**

When it comes to dealing with budgeting challenges, planners have a limited number of options. The most basic are raising attendee registration fees, increasing exhibitor fees or generating more sponsorship dollars.

No matter how a planner looks at the problem, Bay says, the only real solution is always on the revenue side.

“Most associations are now thinking about ways to get additional revenue,” he says. “And sponsorships are always an important topic when you’re talking about revenue. So today you have to be asking yourself whether you’re following best practices or brainstorming with your staff about ways to generate more sponsorship dollars. And you have to be asking yourself whether you’re doing the best job you possibly can of selling the value of sponsorships.”



# REIMAGINE *meetings*



*ReImagine* your next meeting in a place where unforgettable surroundings *inspire creativity*. Expertly designed facilities provide the perfect backdrop for meetings from 15 to 5,000. With two decades of *service expertise* backed by *award-winning* accommodations and dining, this is the world you’ll experience at the *Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort*.

800.524.4939 • [www.swandolphinmeetings.com](http://www.swandolphinmeetings.com)



# Drive-in Meetings

## When Planners Put the Brakes on Costs, Attendance Accelerates

By Gabi Logan

**A**s airline prices rise and become increasingly unstable, many association planners are turning to regional drive-in meetings to keep costs down and draw the maximum number of members in one go.

Katelyn Weeks, CMP, director of conferences and events for MSFC in Philadelphia, says, "Reducing costs is something we've always been doing as a non-profit. We actually subsidize costs for students to attend to keep our events affordable, but because we work with medical students across the U.S. and Canada, as well as internationally, sometimes it's hard to get everyone in one area.

"We try to have events in areas that are drivable to reduce

costs for students and the organization as well. We take a look at what the most cost-effective region is first," says Weeks. "If the driving distance is under four hours, they're happier to do that than to fly. We'll save them money and time."

### PRICE IS PARAMOUNT

Attendees understand the importance of attending association events, even in the face of global or personal economic concerns, but price is always a factor. "Showing up in person is huge for members, especially for the networking," says Lyn Henderson, CMP, president of the Orlando, Florida-based Women in Film & Television-Florida and previously executive director and meeting planner for the Maitland, Florida-based Violin Society of America.

"This is true for every association I've ever done events for. You can do distance learning, but you can't replace in-person networking," she continues. "You can Skype or do Facebook, but there's nothing like when someone from California finally

meets someone they know from Ohio in person. Face-to-face meetings will never go out of business.

"Price is the No. 1 thing for many attendees though," Henderson says. "For small associations or associations for members who don't have expense rules, like non-corporate members, finances play a huge part: event fee, travel expenses and hotel expenses. On the planner side, sometimes you can't negotiate the resort fee and the Internet fee, and it gets to be quite a burden. Anything a planner can do to mitigate that is always better for the ROI of the meeting.

"Many times people are paying for everything themselves," she continues. "When I worked for the Violin Society of America, a non-profit created for the purpose of promoting the art and science of making and preserving stringed instruments, such as violins, violas, basses, and cellos, our members were artisans and scientists. Of the people who would come to our biannual meeting and international competition were people vying for medals, and it's very serious business. Some are people who live in the woods and make two instruments a year, and that's their whole income."

While cost concerns have always been a major factor for association event attendees, recent developments in the airline industry have made the situation more difficult in regard to event-related travel specifically. "It's a huge cost saving when they can drive to an event, because I think flying has become a bit of a hassle for a lot of people," says Debbie Farnum, CMP, senior meeting planner at the Austin, Texas-based Texas Association of School Boards Inc. "Even with our large meetings like our convention, which has 7,500 attendees for instance, the great majority, probably 85 to 95 percent do drive, even though those meetings rotate between Dallas, Austin and Houston."

For someone who doesn't live near a hub airport, if attending an event requires a flight, it can simply be out of the question in many cases. As major U.S. airlines have consolidated, a process that kicked off in 2008 with the Northwest Airlines-Delta merger and winds down as US Airways now becomes part of the "new" American Airlines, small and mid-sized airports have fewer and fewer flights available. The ones that



Drive-in meetings are key for members of the Violin Society of America — a non-profit that promotes the art and science of making and preserving stringed instruments — as they must pay their own expenses.



remain are often at inopportune times and priced as high as cross-country flights due to lack of competition.

"Even on short hops within the state, it's still very expensive," says Farnum. "When you can use one vehicle and fill it up twice each way, going and coming, at \$40 or \$50, that's less than the cost of one flight. For public officials spending tax dollars, that savings is very attractive." Taking into account the extra fees imposed by airlines today — \$200 change fees, \$50 checked bag fees, and even fees just to get a seat assignment — driving one car can even cost less than putting one person on a plane.

Because attendees pay the same for gas whether they drive solo or in a group, it also allows more members from the same area or company to attend a meeting. "Because we're school boards, they're bringing a school vehicle," Farnum continues. "They'll pile six people into a Tahoe, and it's great bonding time for the board. It gives them an opportunity to get to know each other while saving the district a tremendous amount of money, so if it's practical, they'll do it. At many of our meetings, the parking lot is full of school vehicles. It also saves on parking when they get in if they carpool."

For drive-in meetings, you also are less tied to destinations close to airports and urban centers, opening up a wide variety of properties that not only have the parking you need when the majority of attendees drive, but also have more availability for rooms and meeting space and often scenic locations or unique activities.



Katelyn Weeks, CMP  
Director of Conferences  
and Events  
MSFC  
Philadelphia, PA

*“Reducing costs is something we’ve always been doing as a non-profit. We actually subsidize costs for students to attend to keep our events affordable. ...Sometimes it’s hard to get everyone in one area.”*

In the Northeast and mid-Atlantic, the two main casino areas — Atlantic City and central Connecticut — have increasingly lured planners in the region who are having trouble negotiating the space and rates they need at city hotels, while many hotels in Virginia, particularly within easy driving distance of Washington, DC, offer a retreat-like atmosphere ideal for educational meetings.

#### DOWNTOWN IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

When planning a meeting that’s easy for attendees to drive

Credit: Associated Luxury Hotels International



The AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center, located by The University of Texas at Austin, is an ideal venue for a drive-in meeting.

to, typical site selection factors such as walkability and ease of getting to the city center from the airport give way to parking availability and ease of reaching the meeting location from the interstate. But while airport hotels or other venues on the outskirts of major metropolitan areas seem the natural choice when prioritizing these factors, they sometimes don’t make the most appropriate choice for association meetings.

“It’s hard because they may have the availability, but when you’re trying to draw in students to attend your event, if there aren’t things for them to do near the venue and it’s hard for them to access the city, it’s a hard sell,” Weeks says. “But, at the same time, for us that’s a benefit, because our events are educational and there’s no distractions. You have to keep that in mind when you look at cities like Las Vegas where there’s so much to do. Is it a distraction?”

“Right now we’re working on train-



A huge majority of attendees drive to meetings that Debbie Farnum plans for the Texas Association of School Boards Inc., many of which rotate among Dallas, Austin and Houston.



Credit: Texas Association of School Boards Inc.

ing institutes that are done by an application process, and we’re fully covering their travel,” she explains. “So because we’re funding them to attend it, it’s a very solid, action-packed weekend, and we use less expensive rooms and F&B, and just one hotel night, so it can be in an out-of-town airport location. They fly in Friday and leave Saturday, with the program all day, so we pick places that have a hotel and something to do within walking distance, but it’s not as important in terms of things to do as our large meeting.

“For our larger meeting the location is more of a draw, it’s a larger audience, and it may also be their only free weekend that term while they’re in medical school. We’re very, very conscious of where we are and what students can do there. The education part is 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., so they have evenings to themselves to explore the city.

“Because of the cost for us, we aren’t able to select some of the downtown locations anyway, and there are usually definitely a lot of options outside the city that are appropriate for drive-in attendees, but it depends if there’s a citywide going on. It’s a mix of



In downtown Dallas, the Omni Dallas Hotel is well suited for drive-in meetings as it is connected via sky bridge to the Dallas Convention Center.

whether there are fewer or more options available for drive-ins, because sometimes you assume there will be availability outside the city center, but if there’s a citywide, the airport hotels book up in cities like Philadelphia or Washington, DC. Then you can pair with the citywide to get whatever space is not being used at a good rate for regional meetings, but for larger meetings I try to plan for when there’s not a citywide going on,” Weeks adds.

As an association that conducts most of its meetings and events on a regional basis, dynamic, activity-filled city center locations are an important part of the draw for Farnum’s large annual events. “It depends where we are, but sometimes we do meetings in really small towns,” she says. “A lot of regional meetings are done either at universities or education service centers,

*“It’s a huge cost saving when they can drive to an event, because I think flying has become a bit of a hassle for a lot of people.”*



Debbie Farnum, CMP  
Senior Meeting Planner  
Texas Association of School Boards Inc.  
Austin, TX

so we limit the ones done at hotels. For our large conventions we always do the downtown convention center.

“We just added Austin to our rotation, and in the city of Austin there’s so much in the downtown area,” she explains. “It’s known as a downtown city and the music capital, so attendees like staying downtown. There’s a lot of really good restaurants and live entertainment, and the downtown area is square and laid out in even blocks so it’s easy to get from hotel to convention center to restaurants. However, the downtown traffic stinks — there’s quite a bit of construction going on — so attendees like to get downtown and stay downtown. There’s a lot of stuff going on all the time, and the lake is downtown.

“It’s the same thing in Dallas,” Farnum says. “Dallas has really come up in terms of having more things downtown. It’s done a huge transition downtown with museums and restaurants, and they also have the Dart (Dallas area rapid transit), and we’ve found that a lot of members utilize the Dart to get around once they’re in the city.

“In Houston, right in front of the convention center there’s a plethora of restaurants, music venues and things to do that didn’t used to be there,” she continues. “There are new hotels, new everything. It’s very much changed in the last six to eight years, and I think members appreciate being somewhere where they can literally park the car and go not very far by foot to find interesting things.

“I’ve found that the best source of finding out if attendees would prefer to be downtown or not is to check with the CVB,” she advises. “The CVBs can lead you to think of things you wouldn’t have thought of. They know the city best and can be a huge resource, but I also use regional salespeople for various hotels, like the regional sales managers for Starwood or Marriott and places like that, because they know the area.”

When you know that a sizable percentage of your attendees will be driving, once you zero in on the best location for your attendees and for your meeting, you have to negotiate the biggest hurdle of drive-in meetings: parking fees.



Lyn Henderson, CMP  
President  
Women in Film & Television-  
Florida  
Orlando, FL

*“You can’t replace in-person networking. You can Skype or do Facebook, but there’s nothing like when someone from California finally meets someone they know from Ohio in person. Face-to-face meetings will never go out of business.”*



Credit: Marriott Marquis Washington, DC

An aerial view of the grand lobby of the recently opened Marriott Marquis Washington, DC, adjacent to the Walter E. Washington Convention Center.

### HEADING OFF POTENTIAL PARKING PAIN

When one of the main drivers for planning a meeting attendees can drive to is cost savings, the fees associated with driving come into sharper focus than ever, particularly parking. “Honestly parking and parking fees were a huge issue for my drive-in meetings,” says Henderson. “I remember looking for the Violin Society at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay, which was a fantastic hotel, but the parking was \$25 per day and these people are there five or six days.

“We ended up going to the Crowne Plaza in Baltimore, which had tons of free parking, and while it was not as nice, it was a good, solid, familiar hotel and had the space we needed,” she continues. “There were a couple other hotels we looked at outside Philadelphia and Cincinnati, when we were looking in the Midwest, and it just seemed that more people could drive to Baltimore from more areas.”

One of the best ways to combat the parking fee issue is to be as rigid about it as you would with your space or AV needs during the RFP process. “We always put free parking in the RFP,”

says Weeks. “We mostly use hotels for the package base, because it’s easier for us to work with. Out by the airport or suburban locations, parking is usually included and not another \$40 a day.”

In some cases, especially if the size of your event or continued patronage justifies negotiation, you can get the hotel to bring the fee down for attendees. “We always try to negotiate the price of valet, either discounted or free valet, but it depends if the facility owns that parking or not,” says Farnum. “Many don’t own their parking, though quite a few of them do. If they can offer us discounted parking for even \$5 or \$6 or \$10 off, it is a real plus for members. When they see the hotel has a discount, they really like that.”

### TO DRIVE OR NOT TO DRIVE

While it ultimately comes down to your audience — do they have access to vehicles? Is cost a primary concern? Do they often travel for meetings? — strategic use of drive-in meetings can be a substantial cost savings for both your organization and your meeting attendees when done properly. AC&F



Credit: Caesars Entertainment

A rendering of Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center in Atlantic City, which will attract droves of drive-in meetings when it opens in 2015.



# GET DOWN TO BUSINESS. THEN JUST GET DOWN.



**B**ringing your meeting or convention to New Orleans means you have access to one of America’s largest exhibition spaces—over 1.1 million contiguous square feet. It means coming to a city that knows how to do big events. It means staying in some of the nation’s finest hotels with meeting spaces designed just for you. It means you’re coming to the home of the hospitality pros. And it also means when business is done, you can loosen your tie or kick off your heels in a city like no other. It means a walkable city with world-class cuisine and a chance to toast your success in the place that does business better than anywhere else. **Contact us today to get started.**

f t YouTube i [www.neworleanscvb.com](http://www.neworleanscvb.com) // [www.mccno.com](http://www.mccno.com)

# New Age Sponsorships to the Rescue

By Gabi Logan

## Creative, Innovative Approaches to Generating Event Income

**T**he need for sponsorships, long the financial backbone of events, has come into sharp focus to help keep rates affordable for attendees and fund new initiatives, but the name of the sponsorship game is changing as sponsors reevaluate their investments and clamor for clearer return on their ROI. Thankfully, a new model of sponsorship that boosts attendee interest in sponsors, sponsor satisfaction and association revenue is coming to the rescue.

### SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES ENTER A NEW WORLD ORDER

No matter the audience, sponsorships large and small are a core part of association events. According to the IEG Sponsorship Report, in 2012, North American sponsorship spend was \$19 billion. While general association fund-raising and marketing has undergone vast changes due to technology, the sponsorship side



Alicia LeMasters, CMP  
Meeting Coordinator  
American Society for  
Nondestructive Testing  
Columbus, OH

*“Last year was our first year using an app, and we got 30 percent of attendees to sign on. ...We gave sponsors a free trial to put a splash page on the app. This year, we’re selling spots on the app.”*

has changed in light of the culture that the same pervasive technology has created.

Sponsors need planners’ help in competing in today’s high-distraction, digitalized environment, and they expect a quick and clear demonstration of ROI. Meanwhile, attendees are tired of being constantly marketed to and are increasingly only paying attention to sponsors who clearly demonstrate what they can do for the attendee.

As a result, the very nature of sponsorship has changed dramatically since the first wave of sponsorship began more than 40 years ago with the idea that simply flashing your logo would lead to marketing returns. While the second generation of sponsorship focused on short-term, sales-based gains and the third generation honed in on integration of multiple marketing objectives, the current wave is about nurturing a brand’s connection with a target market by putting their needs first, according to Kim Skildum-Reid, author of the white paper “Last Generation Sponsorship.”

Last generation sponsorship is marked by a shift away from a number of brand exposures or logo-covered signage and materials to a win-win-win model. “For years, good sponsorship was defined as being win-win, that is, the sponsor wins and the sponsorship seeker wins,” said Skildum-Reid in her white paper. “While having this kind of mutual benefit is a great idea, this approach completely left out the most important part of the equation: the target markets.

“The most important connection in the target market’s equation is their connection with the event,” she continues. “Over the years, sponsors haven’t exactly had a glorious track record of enhancing their event experiences. As a whole, games and events have become an escalating battle between sponsors trying to



The Tech Hub at this year’s IMEX America was sponsored by DoubleDutch, a global provider of mobile event technology.

draw people’s attention to their brands and people trying to ignore them, and those people are always going to win.”

As attendees have become highly practiced at ignoring logos, branding and other typical sponsorship avenues, planners can get caught in the middle of trying to keep two parties with competing goals happy. The way to marry these two previous disparate parties is not to try ever more convoluted ways of encouraging attendees to go check out exhibit booths or pick up sponsor materials. It’s to get the sponsors to enhance the attendee experience in a way they’re already yearning for and will appreciate.

### IT’S ALL ABOUT ATTENDANCE

To lure in and satisfy sponsors, it’s crucial to reach a certain horizon on event attendance. For many planners, in the light of recent economic issues, this is the first hurdle to generating sponsorship revenue, and creative approaches to drawing in more and more attendees are a top-of-mind issue.

For Alicia LeMasters, CMP, meeting coordinator for the Columbus, Ohio-based American Society for Nondestructive Testing, it’s matter of money, as most of her paid attendees come either from academia or government. “The issue is that money to attend is either nonexistent, in the case of education budgets, or severely restricted with government employees,” she explains.

“We just did a conference, and most of the attendees were government workers. They were basically told they couldn’t come; there’s no money in the budget. I think this trend is caused by the restrictions put on government travel by the GAO and by sequestration.

“At Ohio MPI (where LeMasters is an active member), we are finding creative ways to get people to register,” she continues. “In this case, what we did was try to have a sponsor register someone as a conference attendee. The sponsored buyer was a pet program of mine at MPI Central Ohio.”

Many of the events Gayle Weisman, CMP, senior conference planner with New York, New York-based Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Communications Society, plans also have a high academic attendance, and she finds her attendees often struggle to fit her events into their budgets. “They try to come in as a guest. I even had, at one conference in Belgium, someone leave an envelope at registration that was a badge they were passing on to someone else! Commonly, departments will only allow you to attend if you’re presenting a paper, but we can’t have everyone present. A lot of people are not able to attend just to attend.”

To help attendees justify the expense to higher-ups, IEEE began offering continuing education credits for attendance at its events. “We tried to offer CE credits, which is something we didn’t offer previously,” she says. “Now people can say, ‘I don’t have a paper, but



The American Society for Nondestructive Testing conference show floor.

they're offering hours, so can I attend? More people attend that didn't in the past when you offer that."

One of the conferences Weisman manages is virtual, which saves attendees on transportation and lodging costs, but can still be hard to justify from a budget standpoint since it is a new concept, so she's found new ways to encourage registration.

"The virtual conference is in its fourth year, but we've been having a hard time getting both attendance and exhibitors," she says. "One thing we tried to do to increase attendance is that, for the chapters, if they sign up at least 15 people from their chapter, they get \$500 for their chapter. It's definitely increased attendance. Also, if anyone signs up a first-time attendee, they get 20 percent off their own registration."

#### DIGITAL OFFERS DIVERSE NEW OPPORTUNITIES

When asked why they didn't attend an annual conference or other association event, association members often respond with one of two things: time or money. While creative attendance-boosting tactics can help with the latter, no amount of discount in the world can make time out of the office worthwhile for mem-

***"Making the resources, products and services available to members and guests at one point of purchase, we're able to generate greater revenue than chasing after individuals later after that lost opportunity."***

Rafael Rivera, CMP  
Executive Director  
Professionals in Human Resources Association  
El Segundo, CA

bers who are simply too overloaded with work. Thankfully, the solution to the no-time problem opens up new revenue sources for meeting planners while including more members in programming.

"Only about one-third of our members attend our conference, and many are not able to because they cannot get away from the office," explains Rafael Rivera, CMP, executive director of the El Segundo, California-based Professionals in Human Resources Association. "At times cost is a factor, but the No. 1 reason we hear from people who would like to attend is that they cannot get out of the office, so if the material was made available at a later date or on demand, they could take advantage of that."

Digital conferencing options allow association event staff to recapture both lost income and find new income by segmenting conference sessions into new products. "We are offering recordings of our conference," he explains. "It's a conference-on-demand product. Those that have purchased can watch or listen to the sessions they could not attend, since we offer at least seven concurrent sessions. They can access the material two weeks after the conference and a minimum of six months of access after the event."

Rivera continues, "Right now, we aren't yet doing it in a best practices way," he continues. "In 2015, it will be our third year, and we will offer that product at our initial point of purchase. We've found that the best way to package it is earlier at the registration process so individuals only make one purchase. Otherwise it becomes cumbersome to make that upsell, because it might be difficult for those who are already registered to justify the upsell to their supervisor."

"Making the resources, products and services available to members and guests at one point of purchase, we're able to generate greater revenue than chasing after individuals later after that lost opportunity," says Rivera. "That would be our No. 1 opportunity we see. We've also had conversations with third-party providers to repackage those products for a virtual attendance at a later point in time, so attendees could consume the continuing education piecemeal, so they don't have to sit through three days of sessions."

He adds, "I've seen other associations within our industry go a step further. Instead of offering a bundle, they're breaking out by sessions, so they're able to potentially see people purchase just one session. So if they only care about compensation and benefits in China, they're going to buy that one session at a higher price since it's split from the bundle."

Weisman also has found that she can still gain exhibitor revenue from digital events. "In general, we have a problem with our regular patrons and exhibitors, because we don't have the kind of

exhibits that are selling things," she says. "They're there to network with authors. So, last year with the publishers, we tried to really explain to them why it's beneficial to exhibit at the virtual conference. You don't have to spend the money on traveling and shipping. It's much cheaper than exhibiting at a regular conference."

"You have an hour a day when attendees go into virtual floor space, chat with exhibitors and download flyers," she says. Last year, Weisman set up a game designed to increase attendance for the exhibitors. She explains, "We ask questions that they only would have known the answers to if they had gone to xyz publisher."

Even if your association is not yet ready for the investment of creating digital conference products, you can dip your toes slowly into the event app space and still see sponsorship dollars.

Says LeMasters, "Last year was our first year using an app at ASNT, and we got 30 percent of attendees to sign on, so we're going to start using it at our spring conference. Last year, we gave sponsors a free trial to put a splash page on the app. This year, we're selling spots on the app."

#### INNOVATION TAKES MANY FORMS

Whether you focus on in-person or digital sponsorship opportunities or a mix of both, the key to helping fill in the third win in the win-win-win equation is identifying areas of attendee



An attendee checks out the mobile app for the 2014 IEEE International Conference on Communications.

need that sponsors can help fill. To do this, association meeting planners need to work both before sponsorship proposals come in and in the review process to assess the benefit the relationship will bring attendees.

Part of guiding sponsors to areas most likely to create a positive and lasting impression on attendees involves simplifying the sponsorship menu to zero-in on predetermined opportunities best suited to your audience. In turn, offering sponsors more limited options also helps bring in sponsorship dollars by eliminating the paradox of choice, in which too many menu items delay decisions and cause the quality of those decisions to suffer.

***"One thing we're doing this year is a very cool concept where the company comes to your conference and does a mini TV show. They get the university and corporations to pay for it, and we get a cut."***



Gayle Weisman, CMP  
Senior Conference Planner  
IEEE Communications Society  
New York, NY

A traditional revenue model for association events revolves around 85 percent income from booths and 15 percent from sponsorship, but new sponsorship opportunities can flip that ratio. "One thing we're doing this year is a very cool concept where the company comes to your conference and does a mini TV show," says Weisman. "They get the university and corporations to pay for it, and we get a cut, or all the proceeds after a certain number of sponsors. We don't have to do anything. All we had to do was give them the list of past sponsors, not even their contact info."

Though an unusual concept, the win-win-win is clear. "They do interviews, and it's exciting because everyone loves to be on TV and have their 15 minutes of fame," Weisman says. "Attendees like that sort of thing. The sponsor also gets to keep the video and use it moving forward. Let's say the University of Illinois makes this video, they can use it in the future to attract potential graduate students, because it talks about how they're doing xyz thing."

Wrapping technology into sponsorship opportunities is an ideal way to offer clear benefits to attendees, but it's important to keep the tie-in to the brand clear as well to create an understandable connection for attendees. Sponsoring additional power outlets, particularly at outdoor events, to help keep mobile devices charged while attendees are on the go all day offers clear value to attendees, but finding the right company for that match is key. At the world-renowned Glastonbury Festival, the telecommunications company Orange sponsored phone recharging facilities and DIY recharging areas like a dance-powered charger.

#### IT'S NO LONGER A BATTLE FOR DOLLARS

Though it can take some time to identify the most synergistic touch points and sponsorship options, win-win-win sponsorship ultimately reaps highly tangible rewards for associations.

Adding more value for attendees, especially when you are able to reduce attendance costs, will help grow your event year after year, while satisfied sponsors ensure you have the means and bandwidth to continue exploring new ways to enhance the attendee experience.

# We're No. 1

## Why Las Vegas Continues to Win Top Billing

By Derek Reveron

Although Las Vegas remains the nation's No. 1 trade show destination, the city demonstrates a relentless drive to constantly reinvent itself. Over the last year alone, Las Vegas has opened more than a dozen new resorts, hotels and meeting venues as well as new restaurants and entertainment options. According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, overall, there are more than 150,000 hotel rooms in Las Vegas and 10.6 million sf of meeting and exhibit space citywide.

The latest and largest reinvention effort by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) is the \$2.3 billion expansion of the Las Vegas Convention Center from 3.2 million sf to 5.7 million sf. It will be completed in two phases over the next five to eight years. Phase one includes 750,000 sf of new exhibit space and 187,500 sf of supporting meeting space. Phase two fo-

cuses on renovating the existing facility and includes a 100,000-sf general session space and another 100,000 sf of meeting space.

The expansion is part of the larger planned Las Vegas Global Business District project, which includes developing a district concept in the neighborhoods surrounding the center as well as a centralized transportation hub. "This project is a defining moment for our organization, our industry and our city," said Rossi Raalenkotter, president and CEO of the LVCVA, in a statement. "It will take us 25 years into the future and ensure we stay ahead of our completion and remain the envy of the convention industry."

Las Vegas' continuing reinvention is a powerful meetings lure for several reasons: Groups can have a unique experience no matter how many times they visit. Planners get good value because they spend less on entertainment for attendees, who often arrive early and stay later to enjoy all that the city has to offer. According to the LVCVA, on average, attendance increases 8 percent when conventions rotate into Las Vegas. Research also shows that attendees spend more time in meetings and on the trade show floor when programs are held in Las Vegas.

### ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW

Claudia Betzner, who has been the executive director of the Service Industry Association (SIA) for more than 20 years, is a veteran of Las Vegas meetings, having planned some 15 of them over her tenure. "They absolutely are always coming up with something new," says Betzner. "I have to keep up with what they are doing because I do so many events there. I'm very connected to the convention center, casinos and hotels. I get emails from them all the time on what they are doing and how they are changing."

Betzner observes that Las Vegas has reshaped itself considerably over the last 15 to 20 years. "Practically every hotel has had to reinvent itself," Betzner notes. "They were at the most 1,000



The Las Vegas Convention Center will complete a \$2.3 billion expansion in two phases over the next five to eight years.

## NAB's Blockbuster Show Perfect for Las Vegas Reruns

The ability to handle the largest of association trade shows attracting tens of thousands of attendees is the prime reason Las Vegas reigns as the No. 1 trade show destination in the nation.

One of Las Vegas' convention mainstays is the National Association of Broadcasters' annual NAB Show, held this year in April. The six-day event attracts more than 98,000 attendees and 1,700 exhibitors, encompasses dozens of hotels and involves more than 500 conference programs at the Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC). The NAB has held the event in Las Vegas every year since 1991 and has strengthened its commitment to the destination even more in recent years.

Four years ago, the NAB signed its first long-term deal to meet in Las Vegas — a five-year commitment through 2015. "We are in the middle of talking about extending it again," says Chris Brown, NAB executive vice president, conventions and business operations. "Whether it will be for five years or not, I don't know. But there is a good chance it will be a multi-year contract."

During its 23 consecutive years of meeting in Las Vegas, has the NAB ever considered choosing another destination? "Not seriously," says Brown. "We get feedback every year from attend-



The National Association of Broadcasters' annual show has been held in Las Vegas every year since 1991.

ees and exhibitors about the show. Occasionally, we ask is Las Vegas still the right place. From the attendees' standpoint, it tends to be overwhelmingly positive."

Brown considers Las Vegas to be the best option for the NAB Show, largely because of the hotel space. "That is critical because you are looking at room blocks not in the hundreds but in the thousands," he says. "That enables us to plan much more efficiently than if we were in places with smaller and fewer properties. In that case, we would need

many more properties. That obviously would make logistics — including getting people to the convention center — more complicated."

The geographic location of Las Vegas is also a big advantage for the NAB. "We draw tremendously from the West Coast and Los Angeles. Its proximity to Las Vegas is a huge plus for us. We don't have data on what attendance would be if we held the show in the middle of the country or on the East Coast, but we know that Las Vegas is a great location for us." — DR

rooms back then. Most are mega properties now and have as many as 4,000 or 5,000 rooms. That's probably the biggest change of all. They have also upgraded and updated their shows and dinner venues. So you now have as a good a dinner venue in Las Vegas as you have anywhere in the world."

Because of all that Las Vegas offers, Betzner has held the SIA's annual Global Executive Summit for Service Leaders in the city every year for the last 15 years. "In the beginning, I would have the annual meetings on the East and West coasts. Usually the East was Florida or the Bahamas and West would be Las Vegas or California. We did that for more than 10 years. Then we noticed that when we do it in Vegas we get more people attending, so we started having it there every year."

Like many associations, the SIA's attendees prefer to meet on

The Strip. "Our people want to be right in the center in that area where you have The Mirage, Caesars, Bellagio, Venetian, Paris, Wynn and Encore," says Betzner. "We do Caesars quite a bit. We do The Mirage more than any other."

Earlier this year, SIA held their Global Executive Summit at The Mirage Hotel & Casino. The meeting attracted 200 presidents and owners of companies worldwide. The highlight of the meeting was a dinner and networking event at the Tao Nightclub inside The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino. "It's an Asian-themed nightclub," says Betzner. "They have private areas for events. We went up to the Opium Room, which has its own bar, and later went into another private room for the dinner. We usually have music. Afterwards people can go back downstairs to the nightclub and have fun."



**“We know we will always have good attendance in Vegas, usually around 10 percent more. We know when we book Vegas there will always be people who stay longer.”**

Carine Desroches  
Meetings Manager  
American Society of Mechanical Engineers  
New York, NY

come up with an issue like a hotel being oversold, there are lots of other options.”

ASME decides whether to hold a meeting on or off center Strip based on the goals of the meeting and the group. “We want people to attend the breakouts,” says Desroches. “We are concerned about losing people to entertainment. That’s why we will do it off The Strip. You have the convenience of being in a resort while being a short drive from The Strip as well.”

Hotels booked by the ASME have included Caesars Palace, Tropicana Las Vegas, a DoubleTree by Hilton and Tuscany Suites & Casino. Since the start of 2013, ASME has held at least five meetings in Las Vegas with 30 to 700 attendees. The ASME plans to book its largest meeting, a six-day conference called Boiler Code Week, in Las Vegas in February 2016. The conference is expected to attract up to 700 engineers from the U.S. and worldwide.

Boiler Code Week is education-intensive and Las Vegas hotels have the meeting space that ASME requires. “That’s important because we use so many meeting rooms,” says Desroches. “We will have about 120 breakouts altogether with many of them being concurrent.”

#### TECHNOLOGY AND AIRLIFT

In addition, Las Vegas hotels offer the state-of-the-art technology and equipment that ASME needs for its numerous breakout sessions. “We are AV- and technology-intensive,” says Desroches. “We need wireless within every meeting room so people can download what they need to participate in the sessions, access

Betzner adds that she will continue to meet in Las Vegas for several reasons: “The hotel rates are higher than they used to be but we still get good value for our dollar,” she says. “Members always give meetings a better evaluation when we meet there. Some of them decide to use the trip as a vacation by coming early or staying on afterwards.”

Carine Desroches, meetings manager of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME), cites similar reasons for going back to Las Vegas again and again. “It’s the total attraction for any attendee,” she says. “We know we will always have good attendance in Vegas, usually around 10 percent more. We know when we book Vegas there will always be people who stay longer. The rates are great and there are so many great hotels that, if we

## New & Noteworthy

The LVH – Las Vegas Hilton has been acquired by Westgate Resorts and re-named **Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino**. A significant renovation of 1,200 of the Central Tower’s guest rooms is set for completion by December 2014. The hotel also plans to convert approximately 300 Central Tower guest rooms to 100 Time Share Villas, which will be available to groups when they are not occupied by timeshare owners.

Over the next several months, the renovation project also will include enhancements to the convention areas, renovations to the pool area as well as the Health Club & Spa and Cabanas; sports book improvements such as new seating and state-of-the-art TVs; new LED



The newly branded Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino will undergo a renovation.

lighting throughout various areas of the property; a new guest service program and customer service training. Also, several new restaurant concepts are in the planning stage.

Westgate Las Vegas, which can accommodate from 10 to 10,000 attendees,

features a 95,000-sf casino, 200,000 sf of meeting and convention space, restaurants, entertainment, a spa and fitness center, pool with luxurious cabanas, access to golf at the exclusive Las Vegas Country Club, and the world’s largest race and sports SuperBook. The landmark property, which was once home to such iconic legends as Elvis Presley and Liberace, is located just one block off the Las Vegas Strip, adjacent to the Las Vegas Convention Center. It’s also one of seven stations on the Las Vegas Monorail route.

**Stay Well Meetings**, the industry’s first-ever wellness meetings experience, was officially unveiled at MGM Grand Hotel & Casino in August. Created

*Continued on page 46*



## NEW ROOMS, NEW FUN!

Plan your next event and experience Circus Circus Las Vegas. Our remodeled rooms, today’s hottest games on the casino floor, award-winning dining, attractions at The Adventuredome and refreshed meeting space make Circus Circus the perfect spot for your next event.

### GROUP ROOM RATES AVAILABLE.

For more information visit [circuscircus.com/meetings](http://circuscircus.com/meetings).

OFFER CODE: ASSOCIATION15

MENTION THIS AD AND RECEIVE

**15% OFF**  
YOUR NEXT EVENT OR MEETING

**CIRCUS CIRCUS**

An MGM Resorts International® Destination.

facebook.com/circuscircus

twitter.com/circusvegas

Address: 2880 Las Vegas Blvd S.  
Las Vegas, NV 89109  
Sales No.: 800-765-4449 or 702-794-3983  
Fax: 702-691-5894  
Res. line: 866-755-7776  
Website: [circuscircus.com](http://circuscircus.com)

websites and Skype with other association members, colleagues and students in the U.S. and overseas who aren't able to attend. We also require many laptops, projectors and screens. We travel with our own AV company who works hand-in-hand with the hotel."

A planner for a major manufacturing association that has held meetings in Las Vegas many times, says technology is the key reason they'll return again. "The hotels invest in state-of-the-art AV and technology equipment that we use for our meetings," says the planner, who requested anonymity. "I have never had a problem with bandwidth at a meeting space in Las Vegas. I can't say that for other destinations."

Airlift also is a big plus. "It's easy for anybody to get there from anywhere affordably and easily with a lot of options in terms of arrival and departure times," says the planner. "You know that people will get there on time and leave easily after the meeting is over. The location of the hotels to the airport is great. It's not even a 15-minute cab ride. And the ground transportation is affordable."

#### UNRIVALED SERVICE

Service is another Las Vegas calling card. "Las Vegas is a well-oiled service machine, and they have it down like no other destination," says the planner. "They know how to move people better than anybody. When you arrive, a check-in desk is right there along with people waiting to pull your luggage. You find this in every property — high-end and others. The hotels are so large but they are very good at getting people to their destinations within the hotel. There is great signage, knowledgeable personnel and

service all over the place. All of this is important for a successful meeting."

Las Vegas also offers some of the best planner resources in the nation, from the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) to local DMCs. "Lots of DMCs in Las Vegas are experts and provide great information for attendees," says the planner. "More importantly, they have great CVB services. I live in a market where the CVB has a satellite office. They make phone calls, send emails and visit to keep me informed about what's going on — new builds, changes in restaurants and shows. They support meeting planners with accessible information before, during and after meetings."

#### OFF-THE-STRIP OPTION

Some groups are wary of meeting in Las Vegas because its endless attractions can tempt attendees to skip meeting sessions or arrive late. However, such concerns usually disappear with properties that offer a good compromise between focused meetings and access to the action.

For instance, the Wheel Rail Interaction Conference, an educational railroading conference, recently held a four-day meeting in Las Vegas for 150 people. It was the group's first meeting in the city. "They were anxious about going to Las Vegas because they thought they would lose people to the entertainment," says Brandon Koenig, CMP, president of Meeting Solutions, which managed the meeting. "Because this is such a technical group they didn't want any distractions. They didn't want people to be

*Continued from page 44*

by Delos, the pioneer of Wellness Real Estate, the program offers healthful environments for high-performance meetings with meeting rooms and spaces designed to optimize the health and well-being of attendees while complementing the existing Stay Well room and suite experience in the hotel's main tower. The Stay Well meeting rooms incorporate elements such as ergonomic seating, air purification, circadian lighting, virtual window lights, aromatherapy, healthful menu items, and much more. The Stay Well rooms feature vitamin C-infused shower water, advanced room lighting tailored to sleep/wake cycles, air purification systems, EMF protection and more.

**Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton** announced a March 1, 2015,



A Stay Well meeting room.

completion date for the expansion of the Pavilion. The expansion, which also includes enhancements to the existing pavilion area, will increase the resort's total meeting and convention facilities to 100,000 sf. The new 26,000-sf Tropicana Pavilion area will offer up to 11 separate breakout rooms, some with up to 16-foot ceilings, and will feature new private

restrooms as well as new escalators. The current Tropicana Pavilion also will be enhanced, including a decorative acoustic treatment for the walls. Once the addition is complete, the Tropicana Pavilion will provide 55,000 sf of meeting space.

Caesars Entertainment's **The Linq Hotel & Casino** welcomes its first guests beginning on October 30, 2014. The Linq Hotel & Casino, combined with The Linq retail, dining and entertainment promenade and the world's largest observation wheel, the High Roller, is located at the heart of center Strip. The hotel, which is a complete re-imagining of the Quad Resort & Casino, will feature 2,256 brand new rooms and suites, a completely renovated welcome experience built around a signature lobby bar, all-new retail and

*Continued on page 48*

# WELCOME TO THE NEW CENTER OF LAS VEGAS



The **Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino**, a property deeply rooted in the history of Las Vegas, is now the new game in town. Renovations and plans for the future abound to make this THE place for meetings ... more than ever before.

- 200,000 Square feet of updated convention space
- Over 1,000 newly renovated rooms by January with 60" ultra slim LED TVs
- Located directly adjacent to the Las Vegas Convention Center
- New restaurants online soon including Sid's Cafe, the quintessential American 24-hour diner
- Decades of meetings and conventions service excellence
- Convenient stop on the Las Vegas Monorail

**THE NEW WESTGATE LAS VEGAS RESORT & CASINO...  
WE MEAN BUSINESS**



**WESTGATE LAS VEGAS**  
RESORT ♦ CASINO

800-367-7917 | DOS@wgresorts.com | westgatelasvegasresort.com



Brandon Koenig, CMP  
President  
Meeting Solutions  
Wheeling, IL

**“People want to go to Las Vegas because of the gaming, the shows, the activities, and all the new attractions that people read about and want to see. Every association can find its niche in Las Vegas.”**

to, you don't have to see the casino because the meeting space is separated from the casino,” says Koenig. “You have to make a concerted effort to get to the casino from the meeting rooms.”

The group had one of its best-attended programs ever and is looking at returning in 2016. “Almost everybody thought it was a wonderful location and they want to go back,” says Koenig. “People want to go to Las Vegas because of the gaming, the shows, the activities, and all the new attractions that people read about and want to see. Every association can find its niche in Las Vegas.”

#### SMALL MEETINGS FIT IN, TOO

Koenig adds that even small groups like his can find their niche. He bears witness to Las Vegas having reinvented itself from a destination with a perceived reputation for not caring about small meetings to one that rolls out the red carpet for them. “Las Vegas has done a good job of catering to small programs within the last several years,” says Koenig. “They realized that if you get 10 small programs that can equal a large one, and that some small programs grow over time. They got smart about it.”

There is nothing a planner values more than predictable excellence in value, service, meeting space and entertainment. Las Vegas delivers all of that and much more due to its endless push to create new experiences for attendees. Every time other major destinations offer something new, Las Vegas ups the ante with its own cutting-edge offerings. Such dedication is likely to keep Las Vegas the No. 1 meetings destination for some time to come.

AC&F

on The Strip all night and not be able to get up and go to early morning meetings.”

But Koenig convinced the group that it could have the best of both worlds by meeting at Green Valley Ranch Resort, Spa & Casino in Henderson, less than 20 minutes from The Strip. “It wasn't on The Strip, but it had easy access to The Strip,” he says. “It was like being on your own island. We could capture them for the meeting, and they were able to explore The Strip at night. They were on their own after the receptions. We gave them information on things to do in Las Vegas and provided a link on the meeting website of where to go for information and tours.”

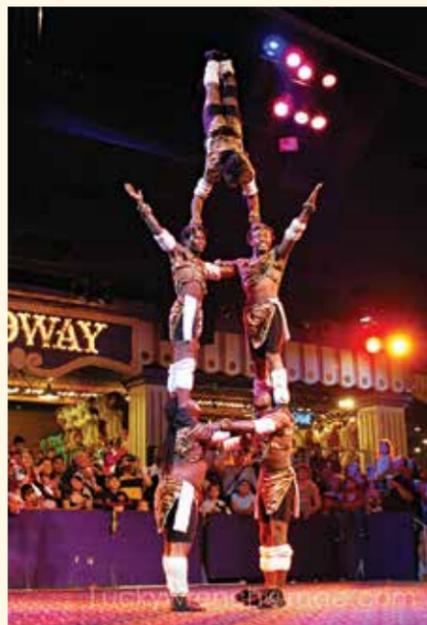
The group also was attracted by the location of the Green Valley Ranch's meeting spaces in relation to its casino. “That was one of the key points of selling this to my client — if you don't want

*Continued from page 46*

spa amenities, and a new pool deck.

Hakkasan Group has announced its newest nightclub concept, **Omnia**. Omnia will take over the former space of the iconic Pure Nightclub at Caesars Palace. Omnia, which is set to open spring 2015, spans 75,000 total sf. The multi-level venue will encompass an ultra-lounge, a high-energy main room and mezzanine, as well as a rooftop garden with panoramic views of the Strip.

The three-level **Mandalay Bay Convention Center** recently unveiled plans to expand the facility to more than 2 million sf from its current 1.7 million sf of event space. Plans call for the addition of more than 350,000 sf of exhibit space, as well as underground parking and additional carpeted ballroom space.



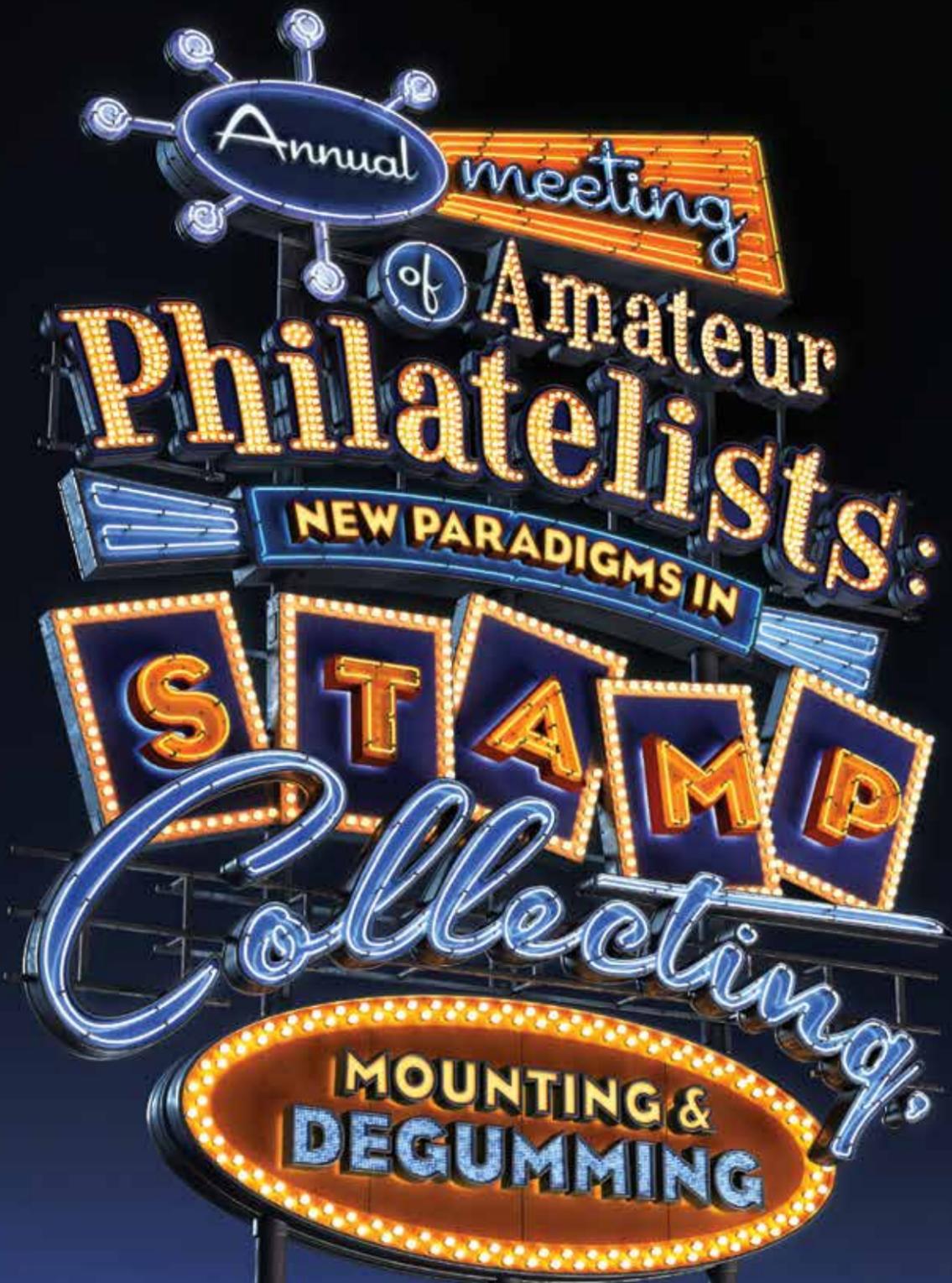
Circus Circus Las Vegas boasts the world's largest permanent circus under the Big Top.

Credit: MGM Resorts International

Construction on the \$66 million project is scheduled to begin this fall, and the new exhibit space is expected to be available in late summer 2015.

**Circus Circus Las Vegas** recently debuted the “gravity defying” new roller coaster El Loco at The Adventuredome, one of the world's largest indoor theme parks. The thrill ride features “a greater-than-straight-down diving drop producing a negative 1.5 ‘vertical G.’” Circus Circus also boasts the world's largest permanent circus, which performs under its hallmark Big Top. The Adventuredome is available for private groups of up to 4,000 attendees and includes a covered outdoor deck for groups of up to 500. Circus Circus features 3,767 newly re-modeled guest rooms and 21,400 sf of meeting and banquet space.

AC&F



**Las Vegas makes every meeting exciting.**

World-famous hotels. Non-stop entertainment. And more than 10 million square feet of dazzling event space. No wonder meetings in Vegas result in 8% higher attendance. Find out more at [VegasMeansBusiness.com](http://VegasMeansBusiness.com).





HEIDORN



RICE

The Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau has named **Jamie Heidorn** as regional director of sales for the CVB's Chicago sales office. She most recently served as a Chicago-based sales executive representing the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.

The New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center has named **Melanie J. Rice** as sales manager, responsible for clients in the West Coast and technology markets. She was national convention center sales manager at the Memphis Cook Convention Center.

**U.S. Postal Service  
Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation**

1. Publication Title: Association Conventions & Facilities
2. Publication Number: 003-500
3. Filing Date: September 30, 2014
4. Issue Frequency: Bi-Monthly
5. Number of Issues Published Annually: 6
6. Annual Subscription Price: \$65.00
7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 2700 North Military Trail, Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394  
Contact Person: Harvey Grotzky Telephone: 561-989-0600 ext. 106
8. Complete Mailing Address or General Business Office of Publisher: 2700 North Military Trail, Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394
9. Full Names and Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor and Managing Editor:  
Publisher: Harvey Grotzky, Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail, Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394  
Managing Editor: Susan W. Fell, 2700 North Military Trail, Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394  
Managing Editor: Susan S. Gregg, 2700 North Military Trail, Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394
10. Owner: Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail, Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394
11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: Harvey Grotzky, Coastal Communications Corporation, 2700 North Military Trail, Suite 120, Boca Raton, FL 33431-6394
12. Tax Status: Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months
13. Publication Title: Association Conventions & Facilities
14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: August/September 2014
15. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Request/Controlled
 

	Average Number Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 months	Number Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (net press run)	22,000	22,000
b1. Outside County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541	13,145	13,162
b2. In-County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541	0	0
b3. Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid or Requested Distribution Outside USPS*	0	0
b4. Requested Copies Distributed by Other Mail Classes Through the USPS*	0	0
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4))	13,145	13,162
d1. Outside County Nonrequested Copies Stated on PS Form 3541	8,672	8,651
d2. In-County Nonrequested Copies Stated on PS Form 3541	0	0
d3. Nonrequested Copies Distributed Through the USPS by Other Classes of Mail	0	0
d4. Nonrequested Copies Distributed Outside the Mail	40	40
e. Total Nonrequested Distribution (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3), and (4))	8,712	8,691
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and e)	21,857	21,853
g. Copies not Distributed	143	147
h. Total (Sum of 15f and g)	22,000	22,000
i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (15c divided by f times 100)	60.1%	60.2%
16. Electronic Copy Circulation: N/A
17. Publication of Statement of Ownership for a Requester Publication is required and will be printed in the Oct./Nov. 2014 issue of this publication.
18. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or owner (Signed): Harvey Grotzky Date: 9/30/14

Visit Spokane has named **Scott Zellers** as director of national accounts responsible for legal, government, public administration, agriculture and cor-

porate meetings and conventions. He most recently served as a sales manager for the Hyatt Regency Bellevue in Bellevue, Washington. AC&F

ReaderServices / AdIndex

PAGE	ADVERTISER	PHONE	WEB ADDRESS	CONTACT	E-MAIL ADDRESS
COV III	Caesars Entertainment	855-MEET-CET	www.cetmeetings.com	Group Sales	meet@caesars.com
45	Circus Circus Hotel & Casino	702-794-3983	www.circuscircus.com	Group Sales	groupsales@circuscircus.com
15	Greater Ontario California Convention & Visitors Bureau	800-455-5755	www.discoverontariocalifornia.org	Sean Kelihiolokai	info@ontariocvb.org
29	Hilton Austin Convention Center	512-482-8000	www.austin.hilton.com	Group Sales	auscv-salesadm@hilton.com
2-3	Hyatt Hotels & Resorts	855-374-9288	www.hyattmeetings.com	Group Sales	meetings@hyatt.com
49	Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority	702-892-0711	www.vegasmeansbusiness.com	Chris Meyer	cmeyer@lvca.com
19	Mexico Tourism Board	202-265-9021	www.visitmexico.com/meetings	Cecilia Cruz	ccruz@visitmexico.com
37	New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau	800-672-6124	www.neworleanscvb.com	Cara Banasch	cbanasch@neworleanscvb.com
25	South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa	702-797-8050	www.southpointmeetings.com	Maureen Robinson	sales@southpointcasino.com
17	Team San Jose	408-san-jose	www.sanjose.org	Mark McMinn	mmcminn@sanjose.org
COV IV	Tourism New Zealand	310-395-7480	www.businessevents.newzealand.com	Steven Dixon	steven.dixon@tnz.govt.nz
31	Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel	800-524-4939	www.swandolphinmeetings.com	Gino Marasco	meetings@swandolphin.com
47	Westgate Las Vegas	702-732-5631	www.westgatelasvegasresort.com	Sam Messina	dos@wgresorts.com

HE ASKED FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE.

SHE'S A MEETING PLANNER WHOSE STAR IS ON THE RISE...

STARRING  
Claire Holloway

HE WANTS A VENUE FOR 5,000 ON THE EAST COAST...

CO-STARRING  
Nick Grayson

CAESARS HAS THE ANSWER!

GUEST APPEARANCE  
BY Caesar

SEE FOR YOURSELF AT ASKCAESARS.COM

DON'T MISS "THE ANSWER" — AN ENCHANTING SPELLBINDER ABOUT A NEW CONFERENCE VENUE WITH TWO 50,000 SQUARE FOOT BALLROOMS, 56 BREAKOUT ROOMS AND 2,500 HOTEL ROOMS ON THE EAST COAST!



# MEMORIES BEYOND BUSINESS

Offering world-class facilities, spectacular landscapes, an unmatched array of activities all within easy reach, and warm, welcoming people, New Zealand will take your next event from ordinary to extraordinary. Plan the conference they'll never forget today.

A business event in New Zealand goes beyond expectation.



Te Puia, Rotorua

**100% PURE NEW ZEALAND**

[businessevents.newzealand.com](http://businessevents.newzealand.com)