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CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR MEETING PLANNERS AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



Blue Janis
National Account Manager
Experient
Broadview Heights, OH

What Planners Want From Hotels

Forging Optimal
Relationships
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Why Meeting at Golf
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Credit: Gleneagles Hotel

Golf has come a long way since Scottish golfers used hickory sticks in the early 20th century. **PAGE 12**



Credit: Atlantis, Paradise Island

Atlantis, Paradise Island's newest event venue, Ocean's Edge, also features an indoor Pavilion and lush event lawn. **PAGE 20**



Credit: Colorado Springs CVB

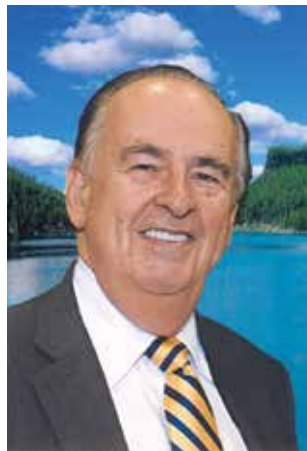
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Publisher's Message

Just Call Me Old-Fashioned

Rapidly advancing technology is changing the way we learn, the way we do business and the way we live our daily lives. It seems there is something “new” on the technology front to discover, explore and conquer everyday. That’s all well and good, but I prefer conducting my business the old-fashioned way: I pick up the telephone, either my desk model or my new smartphone, and call for a live chat. My first choice is always face-to-face, but because that is not always possible, I pick up the phone and call.



Many professional meeting planners happen to agree that building and nurturing business relationships by working the telephones is a good business strategy.

In our cover story this month, “What Planners Want From Hotels — Forging Optimal Relationships Requires Real Partnership and Communication,” Lisa Langford, corporate meeting planner for Finance and Resource Management Consultants, shares her vision of success. “I have always approached hotels with one simple, basic premise,” she says. “We both want our client to remember a great meeting, at their particular hotel, for a fair price.”

But how does she get to that point? Langford believes in what she calls the “retro practice of phone conversing.” This, she says, “goes back to my core belief that we both want this to work but need to strategize outside the box together. That doesn’t happen with short emails or choppy cell-phone conversations but with heavy, black, rotary-phone communication. Relationships built over the years have saved us several times recently, and all were fostered through conversations.”

Donna Patrick, CMP, CMM, associate director, global meetings and conventions for UnitedHealth Group in Minnetonka, Minnesota, adds that honesty is the best policy. “Planners should maintain open and honest communication always and follow up to let the hotel know why it did not win the business if it didn’t.”

Blue Janis, who graces our cover this month, is a national account manager for Experient in Broadview Heights, Ohio. He concurs that relationships must be infused with effective communication to work. “I believe that fundamentally, it comes down to communication,” Janis says. “The better each party understands the goals of the other, the more likely there will be a successful meeting and a happy client.”

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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AGUEL

Visit Orlando, U.S. Tennis Association Announce Exclusive U.S. Open Sponsorship

NEW YORK, NY — Visit Orlando has been named the exclusive global tourism partner of the U.S. Open, one of the world's highest attended sporting events. The news came on the heels of the United States Tennis Association's (USTA) announcement to build a state-of-the-art tennis facility in the Lake Nona area of Orlando.

"Becoming the exclusive tourism partner of the U.S. Open provides a unique forum for Visit Orlando to reach a global audience of potential travelers in all of our key markets," said Visit Orlando President and CEO George Aguel. "By working closely with the USTA through our U.S. Open partnership, as well as leveraging the USTA's future presence in Orlando, we plan to attract incremental visitation to our destination through the penetration of key audience segments." Aguel noted that the multi-year sponsorship will reach a loyal fan base of affluent visitors, giving Visit Orlando access to partnership extensions such as sponsorship of Arthur Ashe Kids' Day, with more than 35,000 attendees, as well as year-round marketing programs to reach the 750,000 members of the USTA and exposure in global broadcasts. Visit Orlando also will be able to connect with the more than 700,000 consumers attending the national tennis championships.

Set to open in late 2016, the new facility will feature 100-plus courts (a mix of hard and clay) and will house the USTA's Community Tennis and Player Development divisions. Plans also include a 200-room hotel with an additional hotel and conference center planned within 3–5 years of the facility opening, Smith said.

The agreement also allows for Visit Florida, the state's official tourism marketing corporation, to partner with Visit Orlando and the USTA on marketing programs aimed at uplifting the entire state's exposure in the domestic and international marketplace. www.visitorlando.com

AIBTM Announces Dynamic New Format, Changes Name to IBTM America

ORLANDO, FL — IBTM America 2015 is the new name for AIBTM and represents a simple and dynamic transformation of the event. IBTM (Incentives, Business Travel & Meetings Expo) America will remove the costs associated with exhibiting at a trade show by designing a unique turnkey solution where an innovative pod design, completely integrated in an exhibitor meeting space, will give privacy to meetings between 250 buyers and 250 suppliers. Exhibitors will pay one price for a modular booth design ready on arrival for them to start their business of meetings.

The exhibitors will be from all sectors of the MICE market and will be split 60 percent U.S. and 40 percent international.

New for 2015:

- Show layout. All exhibitors will be provided with an identical booth.
- The 8-by-8-foot turnkey exhibit pod will be ready for the arrival of the exhibitor.
- All exhibitors will be on a level playing field — each pod is the same, everything is included in the price.
- Exhibitors and buyers will take part in a mutual match system for their appointment diary.
- Hosted buyers will be rigorously pre-qualified, personally invited and be the most senior decision makers with guaranteed purchasing power.
- Each hosted buyer will have 30 pre-scheduled appointments giving exhibitors a similar schedule of meetings over the course of the event.

Set for Chicago in June 2015, the community of IBTM America also will join together for networking events and the IBTM professional Knowledge Forum. www.aibtm.com

Site Study: Group Travel Is Top Motivational Tool

CHICAGO, IL — Does prior experience with a supplier influence program decisions? This and related questions were the focus of a second joint research study conducted by the Site International Foundation and IMEX, the world-wide exhibition for incentive travel, meetings and events. The research revisits and compares results from a similar study conducted in 2013. Utilizing the combined databases of The Site Index Panel and the IMEX Group, the study asked industry professionals to comment on their experiences in purchasing motivational travel. Of the study participants from more than 16 countries, 40 percent are users of incentive travel and 60 percent represent providers.

Key observations:

- Group travel is growing in importance.
 - Past relationships with a supplier matters.
 - Higher management and purchasing departments influence buying decisions.
 - Providers believe that price is the major factor in not winning a bid.
 - Trade shows are a valuable source for identifying service providers.
- www.siteglobal.com



1 The AIBTM diamond allowed attendees to enter the AIBTM Selfie Photo Challenge during the 2014 show (see opposite page for story). **2** (l to r) Helen van den Elzen, project assistant for the Netherlands BTC, North America; Nienke Badia, director of sales, Hotel Okura Amsterdam; and Harvey Grotzky, publisher, *Corporate & Incentive Travel* magazine with a cutout of "Mr. Holland" at his booth at AIBTM. **3** Industry leaders at AIBTM included (l to r) Roger Dow, president and CEO of U.S. Travel Association; Paul Van Deventer, MPI president and CEO; John Graham, ASAE president and CEO; Michael Lyons, exhibition director, AIBTM; Larry Luteran, S.V.P. group sales and industry relations Hilton Worldwide; Deborah Sexton, PCMA president and CEO; Sallie Coventry, IBTM global events portfolio director; Kevin Hinton, chief staff officer, Site Global; and David DuBois, IAEE president and CEO. **4** David Middlebrook, vice president of operations, *Corporate & Incentive Travel* magazine, poses with Disney characters at AIBTM. **5** The AIBTM trade show floor opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony with (l to r) AIBTM Exhibition Director Michael Lyons; Deputy General Manager of Orange County Convention Center Yulita Osoba, CMP; IBTM Global Events Portfolio Director Sallie Coventry; Visit Orlando Chairman Paul Mears III; and President and CEO Visit Orlando George Aguel. **6** Networking at the one-day Exhibition and Conference Executives Forum (ECEF) in DC, which attracted a record 206 verified executives. ECEF 2015 will be held May 27, also at the JW Marriott Washington DC. **7** Kari Vrba (MotivAction) and Sean Mahoney (Silversea Cruises) at the Incentive Research Foundation's 21st Annual Incentive Invitational at the Secrets Puerto Los Cabos Golf & Spa Resort in San Jose del Cabo Mexico; and **8** getting into the spirit of things are (l to r) Brett Hatch, Melissa VanDyke, Todd Zint, Sandi Daniel and Jim Kelley. More than 400 professionals from the motivation, incentives and rewards industries represented a record turnout of high-level executives.

By Mary MacGregor

How to Decide if a CSR Activity Is the Right Fit for Your Event

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) continues to be a popular component in meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions. CSR event components are a good way for organizations to build social good will, set an example, inspire event participants to get involved in their own communities outside of the event and extend their brand promise. They also can be a lot of fun!

Simple to Intense

CSR components range in scope from simple things like every attendee donating a children's book to the local library where the event is being held to multi-day, labor-intensive activities to help build a medical clinic or school. It's quite hard to argue that CSR isn't a good thing. Generosity, caring and a genuine effort to make things better for the community certainly is a positive way for any organization to operate and expanding that mission to an event site can be a natural fit.

5 Questions to Consider

Determining if a CSR activity is a good fit for your event requires consideration of many factors. Group demographics, destination, budget and timing must be addressed. Ask yourself the following questions to help determine if a CSR component is appropriate for your next event:

1 Do the participants at my event share my CSR values?

Employees at a company-required meeting are more likely to embrace your CSR values. External customers may like your product and service, but may view your CSR values from a very different perspective. Make sure you are on the same wavelength with the majority of your participants.

2 Does the event component align with my CSR values?

If your organization routinely supports literacy, for example, make sure your event component relates somehow to literacy. This furthers your brand promise. Including an event that appears to have no connection to your organization is confusing and can come off as gimmicky or just a way to get a tax write-off.

3 Is the activity in line with the participants' interests and talents?

Participants need to feel comfortable and competent to do the activity you are asking them to perform. If it's working on a

construction site, do they have the skills and physical ability to do the job? If it's working with disabled children at a sports event, do they have the empathy and personality to engage with these special individuals? While it can be good to encourage people to step outside their comfort zones, it's not always in everyone's best interest to do so.

4 Does the CSR component add value to the locale where the event is being held?

Virtually every community has public-service and social-enhancement needs. Make sure your CSR component serves a real need in the community. Just because your organization's CSR strategy focuses on the needs of children, doesn't necessarily mean the community has the same priority. They may be in dire straits over serving an elderly population or veterans. Work with your destination management company or event planning agency for help on identifying the right component that aligns with both your CSR strategy and community needs. It would be unusual not to be able to find some common ground.

5 Am I willing to make participation at the event optional?

This can be tricky depending on who your attendees are. If everyone is a direct employee, how important is it to you to require participation? Some companies see the CSR activity in the same light as a teambuilding event — which they can be! If you do require participation for employees, make sure they can handle the work (see question 3). Someone who is afraid of water is not going to find going out in a canoe to do water-quality testing to be a positive and engaging experience.

When your attendees are sales channel partners, customers or industry colleagues, make sure everyone can graciously decline.

CSR Has a Very Valuable Role to Play

A well-planned CSR component can be extremely rewarding for your participants and the community you are helping. While not everyone will want to participate, you can make a positive impact on your brand, your organization, your attendees and the community where your event is being held.

When including a CSR component, make sure it is:

- **Meaningful:** It needs to make a real impact and not be a photo op to garner some good press.



A Clean the World event at MPI-WEC: Gently used hotel soaps and shampoo are recycled and redistributed to countries in need.



A volunteer works on home construction in a Ritz-Carlton Volunteering program.

- **Aligned:** It needs to relate to your organization's CSR strategy, mission, values or culture.
- **Appropriate:** Participants need to have the skills, abilities and confidence to perform the tasks.
- **Community-specific:** It needs to meet the top priorities of the community, not just be a "feel-good" experience for participants.
- **Relevant:** Participants must see the value of their contributions and in certain situations, must be able to opt-out.



A group with Fairmont's Meetings That Matter program works to restore habitats for native species in Hawaii.

Help Is Available

Consult with your event planning agency or destination management company for help in deciding if a CSR component is right for your event. They have knowledge of the community you are visiting and have good local contacts to ensure that your CSR activity is positive and productive for everyone involved.

For more information on how BI Worldwide can help your organization plan an engaging CSR event or examples of successful events planned for a variety of organizations, please visit BIWorldwide.com or contact us at info@BIWorldwide.com. **C&IT**

“You can make a **positive impact** on your brand, your organization, your attendees and the community where your event is being held.”



Mary MacGregor

joined BI WORLDWIDE (BIW) in January of 2013 as corporate vice president – event solutions. She comes to BIW after serving as the leader of business development, events and marketing for other major third-party organizations. In her current role she is responsible for all operating areas of the BIW Event Solutions Group including purchasing, design, delivery, group air, individual incentive travel, onsite operations, technology, communications and merchandise. She leads a team of more than 175 industry professionals who deliver memorable experiences and measurable results for their customers. In 2011, Mary served as global president of Site (Society of Incentive & Travel Professionals). For more information, visit BIWorldwide.com or email info@biworldwide.com

By Aaron Price

Engaging Audiences Through Gamification

Keeping an audience attentive and engaged is one of the most challenging tasks for any event organizer. The average attention span of adults is estimated to be about 10 minutes, a fraction of the time an average speech or presentation takes at most events.

Today, event organizers are turning to gamification to utilize technology and social media platforms to elicit excitement, interest and joy for attendees. These positive experiences incentivize interaction and keep participants attentive and contributive.

Think about how people willingly subject themselves to extra layovers to earn more flight miles. The time, effort and inconvenience to engage in an otherwise unpleasant activity is motivated by the promise of a future reward that is very desirable and rewarding. Similarly, a lifeless speech or event could be as arduous as a long layover, but an injected incentive as attractive as extra flight miles could change the perception of attendees.

Game content is key to the successful execution of gamification in events. Information and processes must be easily graspable by the average attendee, but also have the quality and reward system to keep the thought leaders engaged and interested.

Here are some best practices to using gamification at events, and tips on picking the right kinds of incentives, and building deeper attendee engagement:

- **Stay away from offering “stuff.”** Most people give out physical objects as rewards although it is the least motivating. Granted, if you give away a million-dollar sports car to the most engaged participant in a two-hour presentation, you might yield some enthusiastic interest. But the typical gifts (especially cheap corporate gift sets) are not the way to increase engagement.
- **Go with SAPS rewards.** The best rewards can be categorized (in importance order) by SAPS—Status, Access, Power and Stuff. Status means recognition. The person receives a badge during game play for example, or their achievement allows them to take a two-hour lunch. Think outside of

the box, beyond just the \$5 ticket for a free airline drink. Perhaps the top participant earns the right to ask the first panel question or earns dinner with the renowned speaker, giving them access to an influential person. You can give active participants the power of three minutes with the microphone to talk about their work in the company and recent successes. People want to feel special and to acquire something worthwhile for their efforts, so focus on SAPS rewards to keep the audience engaged.

- **Engagement for single events.** Engagement rewards for one-off events need to be immediate and impactful — you



only have one chance to grab their attention. Gamification in a single event needs to be relevant and allow attendees to complete the challenge within the session. Consider relevant trivia quizzes during the discussion to encourage engagement with the content and base incentives on participation levels.

- **Event series engagement.** A series of events that are tied together provide opportunities for deeper engagement. Smaller achievements can be gamified throughout a series of events so attendees can earn rewards as they progress through the series. Use technology to keep track of attendee retweets and other activities over time, so the top “interactors” can be rewarded at the end.
- **Incentivize sharing and networking.** People attend meetings and events to either find ideas or meet interesting people. Tie gamification to the act of sharing information through social platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. The technology enabling gamification needs to allow seamless connection to social sites in order to be used by busy attendees, and not distract them from the actual event. You also can incentivize networking by rewarding people for making connections with others, or making the sharing of virtual business cards a game in itself.
- **Leverage real-time feedback.** Event presenters can use new technology tools to monitor attendee engagement in real time. This allows them to maximize the impact of the event by marginalizing low-engagement content and promoting the topics that are stirring interest and inter-group discussions. Presenters who are giving multiple talks

can use real-time feedback to refine their discussions so the next talk can be more engaging and productive.

- **Knowledge leaders.** If you see several people who are very engaged in the content (through observation of their sharing patterns or aptitude on quizzes), quickly accord them some form of recognition to spur them on. Utilize these people to help others in the group to understand the material, and give them a gamified “leader” status so they are proud of their deeper involvement. If you spot top thought leaders over several sessions, then perhaps these individuals can be recruited for special projects or tagged as management candidates.
- **Use surveys to gauge interest.** You can gauge engagement indirectly by looking at attendees’ sharing activity and conversations, or measure it directly through surveys. Gamification within the survey can make it fun and exciting for participants to offer their honest opinion. The standard questions such as “what did you learn today?” could be built into a game, with incremental rewards for answering multiple questions.

An important consideration before introducing gamification is to remember you aren’t looking to make your event into just a game. Gamification is a complement to the event experience, a way to present relevant incentives in a more engaging and fun context. It provides a simple yet compelling way to motivate and focus audience behavior while giving event organizers a more active audience and livelier event. In a way, gamifying the event experience can be seen as the proverbial dangling carrot, incentivizing engagement and maximizing audience participation of the attendees.

C&IT

“Event organizers are turning to **gamification** to utilize technology and social media platforms **to elicit excitement, interest and joy** for attendees.”



Aaron Price

is the cofounder of livecube, the world’s most engaging event app used by many Fortune 1000 companies. He’s also the founder of the the award-winning NJ Tech Meetup, New Jersey’s largest tech community. With an early entrepreneurial drive sparked when awarded a patent in high school, he went on to found deliverU, affordables and weCraft. Price lives in Hoboken, New Jersey, with his wife and their two proudest startups, their two daughters.

Site Selection



What could be better than a round of golf at The Broadmoor amid the splendor of the Rocky Mountains?

Playing to Win

Credit: The Broadmoor

By Derek Reveron

Golf and spa resorts have always been popular choices for planners but they took a big hit during the recession. Boasting glorious green spaces and sumptuous spas, these luxurious properties are back in vogue and are not resting on their laurels. From coast to coast, these properties continue to upgrade and refresh their unique combination of world-class championship golf courses, specialty spas, grand guest rooms and ample meeting space.

That's good news for planners who turn to these resorts not only for memorable meetings and incentives, but also for golf experiences, which enhance networking and relaxing spa treatments, which recharge and pamper attendees.

Planners find all of the above in properties such as the 379-room AAA Four Diamond PGA National Resort & Spa in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. That's where the regional headquarters of a large company held meetings in 2013

Why Meeting at Golf and Spa Resorts Is Back in Vogue



Tiger Woods performs at the 2012 Honda Classic at PGA National Resort & Spa.

Credit: ©JasonMyers, PGA National Resort

courses, including the famous Champion Course, site of the PGA Tour Honda Classic and other pro tournaments.

The company's three-day meeting at PGA National Resort last August included 73 senior account executives. Golf was a big reason for choosing the property. "Golf was definitely utilized, and it was a big bonus," says the regional headquarters' meeting planner. "A lot of us extended our stay for two days to have an organized Saturday morning tournament. We did our own foursomes, and the PGA helped us set up and get us going." As the June 2014 meeting drew nearer, the planner said the attendees began asking for extensions so they could stay the weekend to play more golf.

While golf is a potent draw, the planner favored the PGA National Resort

and has another meeting set for June 2014. The company, which elected to remain anonymous, selected the resort after some of its South Florida branches met previously at the property and raved about its amenities and service.

The PGA National Resort offers 40,000 sf of self-contained conference space and 90 holes of championship golf on five

for other key reasons as well, including meeting space. "We used one ballroom, the Bella Lago (one of the PGA's newest ballrooms), for the meeting, ordering catered morning buffets and lunch," says the planner. "I did snack breaks at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., and there was a lot of space toward the back of the room for them to roll in the trays with the power bars, cookies and drinks. The ballroom was located near the golf course so people could walk outside and see the greens during breaks. But it was far enough from the main lobby, bar and restaurant to be secluded."

There's No Substitute for Good Service

Excellent service also was a big factor. "They respond very quickly during planning," the planner says. "If I send an email, my phone will ring within 10 minutes with more questions about what I asked or an answer. I plan meetings year-round with different hotels, and as the meeting approaches, agendas and the number of attendees will change. They are very good about booking more rooms and extending stays."

The planner offers the following example of the PGA National Resort's quick turnaround service. "On my drive from Fort Lauderdale International Airport to the resort for the meeting, I got voicemails that more people would be attending a dinner and either adding or canceling days," says the planner. "I called the PGA and said 'I have

to change the numbers of rooms and restaurant reservations.' I got a call back 10 minutes later that it was done. It was great."

Dade Paper, based in Miami, selected the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa for a meeting in March for 400 of the company's managers, executives, business partners and their guests, according to Laura Craven, director of communications and marketing. Dade Paper was impressed by the four championship golf courses accessible to the Northwest Florida Gulf Coast's largest full-service beachfront resort. Attendees had their pick of Raven Golf Club, Burnt Pine Golf Club, Links Golf Club and Baytowne Golf Course, which features three golf holes located in front of the Hilton Sandestin.

Away from the fairways, attendees pampered themselves in the Hilton Sandestin's Serenity by the sea spa, which was ranked 26 in the *Condé Nast Traveler* 2013 Readers' Poll "The Top 270 Spas in North America, the Caribbean, Hawaii and at Sea."

While Dade Paper has met at spa and golf resorts previously, it was the company's first time at the Hilton Sandestin. "The No. 1 reason I choose golf and spa resorts is to have everything in one building and keep people on-property," says Craven. "When we use convention center space and you have to have a second hotel, you have to go back and forth. From a planner's perspective, it's nice to have everything in one place."

The Hilton Sandestin's meeting spaces were just right. "They had the best of all the things I was looking for so they won the bid," says Craven. "They had the right specs for meeting space. The main ballroom was the right size. Another ballroom where we had our luncheon was the correct size. All of the numbers lined up. It was on the beach, and that's a nice draw."

Dade Paper chose the Hil-



The inviting lounge at the refreshed Serenity by the sea Spa at the Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa in Destin, Florida.

ton Sandestin 18 months before the actual meeting as the property was undergoing a four-month, \$12.5 million renovation. The project included refurbishment of all 200 Spa Tower rooms and a redesign of the indoor pool and main lobby.

Serenity by the sea Spa also received a facelift, adding a new color scheme, carpet, all new paint, nine new spa beds and zero gravity lounging pedicure chairs with hammered copper bowls.

Renovated Properties Are More Attractive

The renovations were an additional enticement. "We knew everything was going to be in great condition," says Craven. "I asked them from time to time if they were on schedule. They were always right on the money in terms of the construction schedule. I visited the property three months before the meeting and had a tour of everything as it was being worked on so I had a comfortable feeling. They were done a month before our event."

Some groups are so enthralled with golf and spa resorts that they return year after year. In June 2014, a major corporation held its fourth consecutive yearly meeting at the The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The resort is literally the company's favorite property. "We have a website that allows employees to register for the meeting and select from 15 different locations. The Broadmoor is usually the first one that shows up," says the meeting planner who wishes to remain anonymous.

Last July, the company held a three-day meeting for 400 managers and ex-



The recently opened Plantation Golf Club at The Sea Pines Resort, Hilton Head, South Carolina, includes space for incentive groups for up to 125 attendees.

Credit: The Sea Pines Resort

ecutives at The Broadmoor following its \$57 million expansion and make-over. Attendees were impressed by the redesign of all guest rooms and suites. The Broadmoor's two new restaurants — Ristorante del Lago, an Italian eatery, and Natural Epicurean, which serves natural and organic food, were well received by the group.

Attendees also got their fill of golf. "It's always a huge hit with the executives. We didn't have any golf tournaments, we just let them play," she says.

The group enjoyed The Broadmoor's three courses — the East Course; the West Course, a challenging course that combines the original 1918 design with the 1964 redesign of Robert Trent Jones Sr.; and the Mountain Course featuring renovations by Nicklaus Designs, which appeals to a range of skill levels and handicaps. All three courses of-

ally, I have to say it's one of the highest service-level properties I have ever worked with," observes the planner. "They make the guests and those who work the program feel like family."

The Broadmoor's superb service stood out when executives requested space for last-minute meetings they needed. "Generally, we take up over 80 percent of The Broadmoor's meeting space," says the planner. "One evening, our executives said they needed to have a meeting from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, and they told us at 8 a.m. The staff found the room, turned it around and had it ready by 9 a.m. When I say they turned it around, I mean the setup, food and beverages, and AV."

In addition, the resort caters to the smallest needs, including special diets. "We have people with food allergies," says the planner. "They even go so far as to have the chef sit with them and go menu by menu what they can and can't eat, and provide them with specific menus to meet their needs."

The Broadmoor's meeting space was made to order for the company's black-tie banquet. "We held our banquet in the International Center Meeting Room, which we turned around in about four hours after a day of meetings," says the planner. "People couldn't believe they were in the same room. The International Center has two sections to it. At one end, we made our cocktail recep-

tion. On the other side was the banquet area. The centerpieces and table settings were over-and-above beautiful. We covered the walls in sheer beige draperies with up-lighting. We had 8- to 10-foot-tall, see-through cylinders with floating candles inside them and a live band."

Golf and Spa Resort News

Groups who book stays at **PGA National Resort & Spa** before September 31, 2014 will be eligible for the property's "Free Golf/Free Spa" meeting incentive. Groups that book at least 100 room nights, each occupied on a peak

Laura Craven
Director of Communications and Marketing
Dade Paper
Miami, FL



"The No. 1 reason I choose golf and spa resorts is to have everything in one building and keep people on-property. ...From a planner's perspective, it's nice to have everything in one place."

night, can choose a complimentary round of golf or a 50-minute Swedish or facial massage at the 40,000-sf Spa at PGA National.

The AAA Five Diamond, 250-room **Ponte Vedra Inn & Club**, located on Florida's northeast coast, reopened its Beach House in March after a thorough renovation. The Beach House's 20 oceanfront rooms and suites received new king and queen beds, oversized windows, designer furniture, custom art work and carpet and draperies. The Lodge & Club's new swimming pool also reopened in March. The resort's Ocean Course, which opened in 1928, offers golf-related group functions such as "closest-to-the-pin cocktail receptions" and "putting green coffee breaks." The Inn & Club offers 17,000 sf of meeting space and the Lodge & Club provides 13,000 sf of function space and seven meeting rooms.

The Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa near Fort Lauderdale has opened



Corporate groups have the best of both worlds at Ponte Vedra Inn & Club: championship golf and spa.

ferred attendees gorgeous views of the Rocky Mountains.

Most of all, the group soaked up The Broadmoor's relaxing environment. "Once you get there, you basically forget about the rest of the world," says the planner. "You don't have to go off-property because they have everything there, even a bowling alley. They always love the pool and spa. The restaurants were phenomenal."

Service is always a major calling card of golf and spa resorts, and especially so with The Broadmoor. "I have been in this industry over 30 years and, nation-

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Golfers on the Resort at Pelican Hill's Ocean South Course in Newport Beach, California.

Credit: Resort at Pelican Hill

its Heavenly Spa by Westin. The 14,000-sf facility offers 10 treatment rooms as well as a halotherapy salt steam room, a Vichy shower and a relaxation area with a "Wall-of-Rain." The Westin offers 998 rooms and over 200,000 sf of flexible function space, including a 50,000-sf Great Hall. Golfers will enjoy the Westin's par-72 course dotted with royal palm and banyan trees.

The 204-room **Resort at Pelican Hill** in Newport Coast, California, ramped up its golf appeal by opening its 7,000-sf terrace-like Golf Pavilion last year. The Pavilion is located conveniently near the resort's two Tom Fazio-designed golf courses, one of which has three holes along the ocean. The Pavilion complements Pelican Hill's 20,000 sf of meeting space and accommodates up to 500 people for receptions, outdoor barbecues and seated events for up to 300 guests.

Additionally, Pelican Hill offers seasonal Golf Academy programs led by *Golf Magazine* Top 100 Teacher Glenn Deck.

The Spa at Pelican Hill includes 22 private treatment rooms, a full salon with a private salon treatment room and ample areas for rest and relaxation in the luxurious Aqua Colonnades, complete with herbal steam rooms, saunas and saltwater Roman soaking tubs.

Also situated in Newport Beach, **Island Hotel Newport Beach** is a five-diamond, four-star luxury coastal hotel featuring 292 guest rooms and suites, more than 23,000 sf of event space, the largest ballroom in Newport Beach, a spa, fitness center and resort-style pool.

In addition to The Resort at Pelican Hill and the Island Hotel, the Irvine Company Resort Properties owns and manages Hotel Irvine Jamboree Center, an independently owned lifestyle hotel; the Oak Creek Golf Club in Irvine, featuring a challenging, Tom Fazio-designed public golf course; and several marinas in Newport Harbor and Northern California.

As part of an earlier \$57 million expansion and makeover, **The Broadmoor's** 6,300-sf Cheyenne Lodge features a new exterior design with split logs and timbers. The makeover also includes a new look for the Golden Bee restaurant and bar, a new activity center in Broadmoor West, and the redesigned and expanded West Lobby Bar.

The Westin La Cantera Hill Country Resort in San Antonio, Texas, debuted its new Westin Workout Fitness Studio. The facility features fluorescent lighting technology to help energize guests' workouts. The resort opened Henrietta's, a grab-and-go restaurant, and is adding the San Xavier room, a new meeting space.

The historic, 483-room **Omni Homestead Resort**, located in Hot Springs, Virginia, offers legendary golfing at its Old Course, built in 1892 and boasts the oldest first continuously used tee in the nation. The Omni's Cascades Course, host to several PGA Tour contests and USGA championships, features stunning views of the Allegheny Mountains. The property offers 72,000 sf of meeting space and activities such as archery, falconry, kayaking and carriage rides for the romantic.

The 1,500-room **Rosen Shingle Creek** in Orlando features the Shingle Creek Golf Club with an 18-hole course and five sets of tees. The club's customized website helps groups plan and track golf tournaments. In addition, a GPS system helps organizations spot golf sponsors and pass out tournament notes. *Golfweek* named the Shingle

Creek course "One of America's Top 40 New Courses." The course was designed by David Harman and features fairways and waterways stretching along Shingle Creek. Golf lessons are available from the Brad Brewer Golf Academy. Rosen Shingle Creek features 490,000 sf of function space.

A prominent Northwest Native American-owned resort is the 370-room **Tulalip Resort Casino**, located just a 30-minute drive from Seattle. The AAA Four Diamond property, operated by the Tulalip Tribes, features several tribal touches including 25-foot house posts hand carved from a 1,000-year-old red cedar tree. Meeting space totals 30,000 sf and includes the 15,000-sf Orca Ballroom and several breakout spaces. All meeting rooms include Wi-Fi, LCD projectors and drop-down screens. The Oasis Pool is located next to the meeting areas and serves as a unique function space.



Credit: Château Élan

Château Élan's newly renovated spa boasts a refreshed couples suite.

The philosophy at Tulalip Resort revolves around a profound reverence for nature and a respect for balance of mind, body, heart and spirit. This sense of harmony endures in T Spa, their exquisite Seattle spa oasis. A luxurious 14,000-sf sanctuary, where guests indulge in stress relieving deep tissue massages and native inspired spa rituals and therapies including steam rooms, cedar saunas and grotto showers. Golf is available nearby at the Battle Creek Public Golf Course and the Cedarcrest Golf Course.

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Credit: Baha Mar

The new Jack Nicklaus Signature Course is nearly finished at Baha Mar in The Bahamas.

Château Élan, located in Braselton, Georgia, north of Atlanta, is a popular meeting destination that offers championship golf, a full-production winery and a European health spa.

The 3,500-acre conference destination, where French provincial and Southern hospitality combine, features a golf course designed around three lakes and two winding streams. There are also villas within walking distance of the Château Élan clubhouse where the pro shop and golf grille are located.

Golf options include three short course options, golf tournament hosting, hourly golf lessons, a Dave Pelz golf school as well as night golf shootouts.

The newly renovated spa at Château Élan offers specialized spa options, such as the signature antioxidant winery treatment.

The Sea Pines Resort, Hilton Head, South Carolina, host of the RBC Heritage, which is held annually on the resort's Harbour Town Golf Links, opened its new Plantation Golf Club, which includes gathering space for large incentive groups (up to 125) with private balcony access. The new Beach Club, opening this summer, has a rooftop bar and private gathering/banquet space to host up to 150 guests.

Recently, golf legend and course designer Jack Nicklaus made one of the last in a series of scheduled visits to the **Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course** at **Baha Mar** before the course and the resort open in December 2014. It is one of only a handful of Nicklaus Design courses located in the Caribbean.

"We are proud to be home to a Jack Nicklaus Signature Course, one of the premier golf courses in the world. It is part of the collection of diverse, world-

class experiences that Baha Mar will offer," said Paul Pusateri, Baha Mar's COO, in a statement. "These experiences, along with the superb hospitality of our team, will put The Bahamas on the world stage in a way that has never been seen before."

During his recent visit, Nicklaus inspected final details on the golf course, which has been grassed with saltwater-tolerant Platinum TE seashore Paspalum grass and is now in the grow-in phase. The 18-hole, par-72 championship golf course at Baha Mar boasts ocean views and a picturesque peninsula green. The golf course is designed to offer "two courses in one," with the front nine holes providing dramatic play, while the back nine holes wind through inland forest and native habitat.

"I feel blessed that golfers around the world have shown an affinity for our course designs, and Baha Mar should only perpetuate that," Nicklaus said.



Credit: Sandals Resorts

Designed by golf legend Greg Norman, the award-winning course at Sandals Emerald Reef Golf Club in the Caribbean features six holes that hug the coastline.

"Travelers are going to come to Baha Mar for the casino, the world-class hotels and the beautiful water. We also believe that they are going to enjoy the golf experience that we will provide. While most of the golf courses in The Bahamas are designed on smaller pieces of land and, as a result, are fairly tight, there is plenty of room to play golf on this course, and it will appeal to golfers of every level. Better golfers will appreciate the strategy and the shot values,

but every golfer should love the playability and aesthetics of the course."

The Radisson Fort McDowell Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona, will rebrand as the **We-Ko-Pa Resort & Conference Center**, effective September 30, 2014. Honored as one of the best golf facilities in the country by *Golfweek*, the resort features two award-winning 18-hole courses designed by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw (Saguaro) and Scott Miller (Cholla).

The new We-Ko-Pa Resort & Conference Center features 246 guest rooms and suites, and luxurious spa treatments at the Amethyst Spa.

Designed by golf legend Greg Norman, the award-winning course at **Sandals Emerald Reef Golf Club** is recognized as one of the most scenic oceanside golf courses in the Caribbean and renowned for its challenging fairways. A golfer's paradise, prevailing tradewinds promise new experiences with each game.

Sandals offers all-inclusive Caribbean golf resorts on some of the most chal-

lenging and prestigious golf courses in Jamaica, St. Lucia and the Bahamas.

Final Thoughts

Golf and spa resorts are ideal for incentives and meetings that seek an idyllic, self-contained paradise to focus on business or pleasure. While the resorts are a plus for golfers, those who aren't big fans of the fairways can find a range of other entertainment and self-pampering activities during their free time. **C&IT**

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Site Selection

It's Better at the Beach

The Rewards of Getting Your Day in the Sun

By Karen Brost

A famous philosopher (OK, it was Jimmy Buffett) once said, "If there's a heaven for me, I'm sure it has a beach attached to it." Considering the popularity of beach destinations for meetings and incentives, there are plenty of meeting planners who just may share that same philosophy.

Mike Farmer, vice president of group travel business development for Meridian Enterprises in Hazelwood, Missouri, has been in the incentive travel industry for more than 25 years. He listed the factors that make the Caribbean a popular beach desti-

nation for groups. "Most of the incentive programs and award trips go in the spring when everybody wants to get away from the snow. The Caribbean offers a chance to get into the warmth. Generally speaking, you don't have to go too far to get to the islands, and that is certainly attractive compared to European destinations. And, of course, there are the beaches. The opportunity to get out and play in the sun is probably the biggest reason that it's such an attraction."

The Bahamas

Last September, Farmer attended the Caribbean Meeting & Incentive Travel Exchange hosted by The Cove Atlantis in The Bahamas in partnership with Site. "It's definitely one of my favorite Caribbean destinations," he explains. "It's a little expensive, on the higher end of the Caribbean hotels from a price perspective, but the Atlantis resort has everything you could ever want in a group travel destination. At The Cove, you've got the great suite product with nice, high-end service. You also have signature, name-brand res-

taurants...Bobby Flay, Chef Nobu, things like that. You've got that wonderful water playground that they have. There's nothing else like that in the world. In addition, you've got a beautiful beach and shopping in downtown Nassau. It's a complete destination in one small area, and it's got great golf."

Atlantis, Paradise Island is an ocean-themed resort offering 3,400 guest rooms including The Cove, a resort within a resort that features 600 oceanview suites. Atlantis is also known for having the largest open-air marine habitat in the world. Its 141-acre waterscape contains

more than 20 million gallons of fresh and saltwater lagoons, pools and habitats that house more than 50,000 marine animals. But it's not all play and no work. The conference center can accommodate up to 4,000 attendees and includes the 50,000-sf Imperial Ballroom, 40,000 sf of prefunction space, 30 breakout rooms, and three boardrooms. There are 21 outdoor event spaces — totaling 300,000 sf — that take advantage of tropical settings including, of course, the beaches, lagoon, waterscapes, marine habitats and more.

Another major player soon will be entering the market in Nassau. A new \$3.5

billion development called Baha Mar is scheduled to open later this year. Being promoted as "The Bahamian Riviera," the complex will include these upscale hotels: The Baha Mar Casino & Hotel, which will contain 1,000 rooms, the 200-room Rosewood at Baha Mar, the 300-room SLS at Baha Mar and a 700-room convention hotel, Grand Hyatt at Baha Mar. Following extensive renovations, the 694-room Meliá will join Baha Mar. The complex also will include a Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course, the 30,000-sf ESPA spa, the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas and Waterside

Place, a shopping and dining complex. The Convention Center at Baha Mar will offer more than 200,000 sf of meeting and event space along with a 2,000-seat performing arts center.

Also of special interest to planners, thanks to the Tax Information Exchange Agreement the Bahamian government signed with the United States, The Bahamas is a tax-deductible destination for American companies.

The Numbers Game

Lorie Thomas, CMP, CMM, director, events and trade shows for Concur, an



Sandals Resorts' Luxury Meetings & Incentives Collection includes 15 resort locations in Jamaica, St. Lucia, The Bahamas, Antigua, Granada, Barbados and Turks & Caicos.

Credit: Sandals Resorts



Lorie Thomas, CMP, CMM
Director, Events and Trade Shows
Concur
Bellevue, WA

"The beach access (at Aulani) is awesome. A lot of properties don't have their own private lagoon."



Credit: Atlantis, Paradise Island

Atlantis, Paradise Island in The Bahamas features a whopping 300,000 sf of outdoor event spaces.

integrated travel and expense management solution provider based in Bellevue, Washington, had to get creative when she ran into a common dilemma that many planners face. She had to reserve her room block for an incentive program long before she knew what the final number of qualifiers would be.

Thomas had initially booked a block of rooms at The Westin St. John Resort in the U.S. Virgin Islands. When the number of qualifiers exceeded expectations, she was able to reserve some additional rooms at the 96-room Westin, but not as many as she needed. Her solution was to book an additional room block at the 166-room Caneel Bay Resort, an even more upscale property located seven miles away. Using two hotels instead of one presented a few more challenges. First of all, she had to determine who would stay at the overflow property. She did this by selectively looking at the attendees' job titles, and then she relied on her personal knowledge of the personalities involved to decide which property would be the best fit. The Westin had a more active setting whereas Caneel Bay was more laidback.

She says that this challenge actually turned out to be a blessing because everyone had the opportunity to experience two very different properties on the island. "The cool thing is I was able to work with both resorts and get permission for my group to experience both products," she notes, "so nobody could really complain about the fact that one person had something better than the other." She arranged shut-



A glittering beachfront event at The Westin St. John Resort in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

tle to take guests back and forth between the properties, and all group events were held at The Westin. Also, as guests were shuttled back and forth, they were able to see more of the island's natural land preserves than they would have by staying at one property, so that turned out to be another plus. Three-quarters of the island is a national park.

Hawaii

Thomas recently attended a FAM trip sponsored by Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa, which is set on 21 acres on the leeward coast of Oahu. The resort, which opened in 2011, contains 351 hotel rooms and 481 two-bedroom vacation villas in its two towers, along with more than 50,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space, including a crescent-shaped beach that fronts the resort's tranquil lagoon.

What makes Aulani unique among Disney resorts (and other resorts, for that matter) is that Disney uses its legendary storytelling skills to showcase the state's history and culture throughout the resort. Everything, from the build-

ing's architecture to the artwork, music and guest activities, authentically reflect the Hawaiian culture to help guests feel a true sense of place and embrace the island's aloha spirit.

"The beach access is awesome," Thomas describes. "A lot of properties don't have their own private lagoon. The kids' club (Auntie's Beach House) is amazing. We're very family-oriented, and at most properties you have to pay extra for the kids' program. If you're an adult or a couple who wants to have your own private time, there's plenty of space where you can go off to a private location."

Thomas also praised the quality of Aulani's Laniwai Spa, noting how important it is for properties to have a spacious spa to meet the expectations of today's



Credit: Baha Mar

incentive qualifiers. She was also impressed by how well Aulani embraces the Hawaiian culture. "They really teach that. It's not necessarily a Disney experience, it's a Hawaiian experience, and that's what I really appreciate." The Aulani staff also can arrange to bring in Hawaiian cultural experts to lead teambuilding activities and offer other cultural experiences. "It's the whole package," Thomas sums up.

Kevin Harvey, manager, pre-owned business for Porsche Cars North America Inc. in Atlanta, Georgia, chose The Kahala Hotel & Resort, a secluded beachfront property in Honolulu, for one of the company's programs. "Porsche Cars North America conducts a sales incentive each year for authorized Porsche dealerships to quality for an all-expense paid trip to a luxurious resort or destination. Typically, there are 33-40 people who attend the trip," he explains.

ing's architecture to the artwork, music and guest activities, authentically reflect the Hawaiian culture to help guests feel a true sense of place and embrace the island's aloha spirit.

The Kahala offers 338 spacious guest rooms and suites, and the resort has a private lagoon that is home to the Dolphin Quest Encounter where guests can interact with Atlantic bottlenose dolphins. Harvey describes what made the hotel a good choice for his program. "The Kahala is a premier luxury resort and hotel. The property's ergonomics, the culinary offerings, the exclusivity and privacy, coupled with exemplary service that exceeds expectations all encompassed my decision to choose them as the destination. ...Moreover, the Kahala is represented by one of the best hotel groups, the Landmark Hotels Group."

California

In January, The Resort at Pelican Hill earned Newport Beach's only Forbes Travel Guide Five Star award for the second year in a row. Set on 504 acres overlooking the Pacific, the luxury resort features 128 villas, 204 bungalow guest rooms and 36 holes of Tom Fazio-designed golf, most of which offer ocean views. In addition, The Spa at Pelican Hill, which has 22 private treatment rooms, earned its fifth consecutive Forbes Five Star award.



Credit: Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort

Event space overlooks the Ocean Links Golf Course at the Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort in Northeast Florida.

One fun way that meeting and incentive attendees can enjoy the beach while they're staying at Pelican Hill is to take a bike tour that departs from

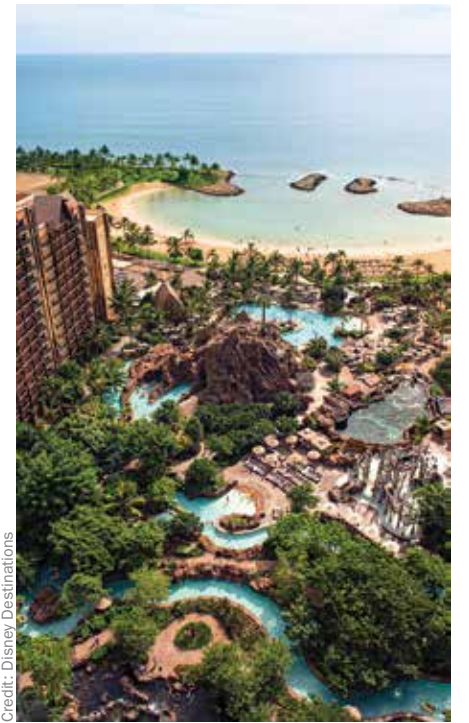
the resort. It takes bikers along the beautiful coastal bluff and stops for a tour of Crystal Cove, a historic seaside colony that was popular in the '30s and '40s. The colony's original cottages are still standing, and many have been restored to reflect their former glory. As an interesting bit of trivia, many movies were filmed at Crystal Cove, including "Treasure Island" (in 1918 and again in 1934) and the Bette Midler tearjerker "Beaches," in 1988.

Florida

For a lively beach destination with an art deco vibe, planners may want to consider the 790-room Loews Miami Beach Hotel set in the heart of South Beach. The hotel features a 900-foot beach, an oceanfront pool and a St. Tropez-inspired cabana deck along with 65,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space. Whenever attendees can pull themselves away from the beach and pool, there are seven restaurants and bars to explore.

Last May, the Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort, located on 1,350 acres in Northeast Florida, celebrated its grand reopening after an \$85 million renovation. The 404-room resort offers panoramic views of the Atlantic and access to 3.5 miles of pristine beach. It also features 54 holes of championship golf, 23 Har-Tru tennis courts and multiple pools, including an adults-only infinity-edge pool, a family-friendly pool and the Splash Park water playground. The amount of event space the resort offers is extensive, with 80,000 sf of indoor and outdoor venues to choose from.

The 15 tourism districts in Palm Beach County, commonly referred to as The Palm Beaches, are experiencing a building boom. More than 1,000 hotel rooms are expected to be added to the area's inventory by the end of 2014, and an additional 800 rooms are in development.



Credit: Disney Destinations

The Waikolohe Valley recreational area at Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa on the island of Oahu.

The 179-room Wyndham Grand Jupiter is scheduled to open in September. Located on the Intracoastal Waterway, the upscale, full-service hotel will include 15,000 sf of meeting space, including the rooftop Mangrove Deck, which will offer more than 4,000 sf for events. The 403-room Palm Beach County Convention Center Hilton Hotel is expected to be completed in 2016. It will be connected to the 350,000-sf Palm Beach County Convention Center.

Puerto Rico

Meet Puerto Rico recently launched a new branding and image campaign titled "On a tropical island. In the Caribbean." It's designed to lure group business with images of the island's beautiful beaches, rainforests, undersea life and golf courses. Puerto Rico offers 1.2 million sf of meeting space, 14,000 hotel rooms and hundreds of non-stop flights. It offers other advantages, as well. Since Puerto Rico is a U.S. commonwealth, the U.S. dollar is the official currency, and U.S. citizens don't need a passport to enter the destination.

For planners who can't decide between the Caribbean and the Atlantic, El



Credit: Puerto Rico Convention Bureau

A pristine beach in Luquillo — known as the Sun Capital — in Puerto Rico.

Conquistador Resort, a Waldorf Astoria Resort on the island's northeastern tip, offers the best of both worlds. It is perched on 500 acres on a cliff top overlooking the spot where the waters of the Caribbean and the Atlantic converge. The resort's spacious 750 guest rooms and suites are allocated among five "villages," and to arrange one of the resort's more unique beach experiences, planners can book an excursion to Palomino Island, a private, 100-acre getaway.

Interest in All-Inclusives Grows

All-inclusive resorts, which are commonly found in beach destinations such as the Caribbean and Mexico, continue to grow in popularity with planners because meals, beverages and, in some cases, activities are included in the per-person rate, which can make the budgeting process easier and much more predictable.

"If you would have asked me five years ago, I would have told you that all-inclusives were on the downside of their popularity," Farmer notes. "But as usual, I was wrong," he laughs. "They just continue to grow, and companies are expanding their portfolios. The all-inclusives are a great product, quite honestly. The challenge is that you have to know what the good product is from the bad product."

As one of the leaders in the all-inclusive segment, Sandals Resorts' Luxury Meetings & Incentives Collection offers groups a comprehensive, all-inclusive program called Luxury Included. The collection is comprised of 15 resort locations in Jamaica, St. Lucia, The Bahamas,

Antigua, Granada, Barbados and Turks & Caicos. Sandals' Discovery Dining program allows attendees to choose from up to 15 gourmet restaurants at each property, and wines from Napa and premium brands of liquor are also included. Another budget-friendly advantage of meeting at Sandals Resort is that most activities are also included, such as unlimited golf (excluding Sandals Emerald Bay), waterskiing, wakeboarding and scuba diving. In fact, Sandals claims to offer "more quality inclusions than any other resort on the planet." Sandals even offers a convenient "Event Cost Estimate" calculator on its website that enables planners to get a ballpark estimate for hosting their event at any of the Sandals properties as they begin the planning process.

Program Patterns

Farmer says that the most common pattern he sees for beach-oriented incentives is to do a four-night event. "If you're doing an all-inclusive, you're going to have maybe a welcome poolside event, two days of sponsored sightseeing activities and on the final night, generally a beach party. Although you do save on the budget with an all-inclusive product, one of the challenges is that



Credit: Kahala Hotel & Resort

A lawn buffet just off the beach at the Kahala Hotel & Resort.

you kind of feel obligated to have all of your meals in the hotel. I have had clients that have said, 'OK, even though we're saving overall, let's take the final night off-property and do something unique on the island.'"

Giving Back at the Beach

The fact that beach programs may be more laidback than others doesn't mean that they can't be used to support a good cause. Scrub Island Resort, Spa & Marina in Tortola, British Virgin Islands, recently partnered with Pack for a Purpose, an organization whose mission is to positively impact communities around the world by helping travelers make meaningful contributions for the destinations they visit.

Scrub Island has chosen to support the BVI Autism Centre through Pack with a Purpose.

To participate, guests simply need to allocate part of their luggage allowance (as little as five pounds) to bring supplies requested by the Autism Centre, such as books, toys, art supplies and other items. The resort will ensure that the organization receives them. Scrub Island offers 52 guest rooms and a collection of villas, and is a member of Marriott's Autograph Collection.

Back to the Beach

There are many ways to gauge the success of a meeting or incentive program held at a beachfront location. Maybe it's the smiles on attendees' faces or their relaxed demeanor. Or, it could be the ultimate testimonial — the kind of response that Harvey noted. "Several of the attendees made plans to return to The Kahala on their own at a later date." We can only imagine that Jimmy Buffett would approve.

C&IT

"The all-inclusives are a great product, quite honestly. The challenge is that you have to know what the good product is from the bad product."

Mike Farmer
V.P., Group Travel
Business Development
Meridian Enterprises
Hazelwood, MO

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California innkeepers attend roundtable sessions discussing marketing, social media and more during the annual InnSpire Conference & Trade Show. (Right) Program Coordinator Jenn Wheaton leads a roundtable discussion on how innkeepers can use Pinterest as a marketing tool for their properties.



Credits: Wow! Zowi Productions and CABBI

The Future of Meetings

By Gabi Logan

Planners' Changing Roles Keeping Pace With Advancing Technology



Credit: lia sophia

The 2013 lia sophia annual Ignite the Dream conference, held at the Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium, utilized the latest in technology to make an impact with their attendees, especially the younger participants.

In the last 10 years, the meeting planning industry has undergone significant changes, many of which we could never have seen coming. The recession has both reined in budgets and caused planners to focus increasingly on ROI. Certifications have brought increased professionalism to the field, and planners bring higher and more specialized education backgrounds to their work. Furthermore, the recovering economy has put hotels in a strong bargaining position, giving planners less wiggle room and more work to find appropriate venues within budget.

But what will things look like 10 years from now? Or even five?

We asked planners and people in various functions throughout the meeting planning and incentive industry to break out their crystal ball and tell us what they see as the future of the meeting industry.

Technology Will Continue to Be an Asset to Planners

One of the larger perceived threats to the meeting planning industry in recent years has been the rise of tech-

nology enabling attendees to “meet” remotely. While many companies and key industry organizations have clearly announced that virtual meetings will never replace the value created by face-to-face meetings, planners have learned on the ground where technology can be an asset — and even more so as it continues to evolve to suit meeting planners’ needs — and where it detracts from the value of the event.

According to Casey Carignan, meetings and events coordinator for Wood

but now with the different opportunities speakers have, such as using pictures and video, the statements they make are more meaningful. Technology has really enhanced the industry.”

For Megan D. Tate, manager of event, meeting and travel management for San Diego, California-based Petco Animal Supplies Stores Inc. and another inaugural member of PCMA’s “20 in their twenties,” technology in meetings has a clear and growing place. “Obviously technology has completely revolutionized



“I don’t think (technology) is going to take away from face-to-face meetings, because, at least for us, we’ve tried (virtual meetings), and we’re actually stepping away.”

Megan D. Tate, Manager of Event, Meeting and Travel Management, Petco Animal Supplies Stores Inc., San Diego, CA

Dale, Illinois-based lia sophia, a jewelry multi-level marketing company, and an inaugural member of the Professional Convention Management Association’s “20 in their twenties,” “Younger planners are definitely bringing tech savvy and weaving it into meetings. With conferences, you often do the same agenda, and you keep going the same way year after year,

meetings,” she says. “You can’t put on a conference and not have multiple forms of technology going on, and in the future, even more technology we haven’t even seen yet will be incorporated.

“I don’t think it’s going to take away from face-to-face meetings, because, at least for us, we’ve tried them (virtual meetings), and we’re actually stepping

“People are looking at your website on their devices, and that’s a big change. You have to make sure every piece of your marketing can be seen on the phone, and it looks how you want it to.”

Jenn Wheaton, Marketing and Program Coordinator
California Association of Boutique & Breakfast Inns, Sacramento, CA



away,” Tate explains. “We did a leadership meeting with top leaders and corporate staff in one location and broadcast it out to locations around the country. For people in remote locations, even though they’re seeing what’s going on, they’re not involved in the conversation or asking questions. They’re very passive participants, and it leaves a bitter taste because they’re not being valued as much as the colleagues who are onsite.”

“I think the use of cloud-based systems will become paramount; the norm and how we do things,” she continues. “I manage anywhere from seven to 10 planners in the department during the year, and they’re going all over the place, and we need one place where everything lives.”

Jenn Wheaton, this year’s winner of the MPI RISE Award for Young Professional Achievement for her strategic use of technology and social media in her role as marketing and program coordinator for Sacramento, California-based California Association of Boutique & Breakfast Inns, agrees that the cloud is key for the future of meetings and not just for staff. “There’s a lot more balls in the air,” she says. “As a planner, I work with the Cvent app for registration. You can get a snapshot of how many attendees have shown up and who’s attending. There’s also an app that does trade show floor planning. Custom apps, though they can be expensive, can be great, and I’ve seen an increase in CVBs helping set up apps and customized websites for events. For the hotel and lodging association, we had an app for our large hotelier conference with all the speaker bios and all the supplier names, and it was great for us because I knew what room everyone was in with one touch all the time.”

While bandwidth availability is increasing, smartphone and mobile device usage will only continue to rise, and Wheaton

counsels that in the future, planners will need to be more savvy not only in their event app creation, but also how they approach their website layout for mobile use.

“A huge thing is making sure things are mobile,” she explains. “People are registering and booking from cell phones, and I know a big thing from our event website is to optimize mobile for iPhone, iPad and Android. People are looking at your website on their devices, and that’s a big change. You have to make sure every piece of your marketing can be seen on the phone, and it looks how you want it to. Tiny print or formatting makes it hard (to view) on the phone, unless you can come up with something that really makes it pop. We do a lot of marketing



Dominican Republic dancers entertained delegates at the 2014 Site Executive Summit designed to “assist destinations by conducting an educational program that will broaden the local community’s understanding of the unique needs of the motivational event and travel market.”

with emails with various topics and images, and you have to make sure that people can see those images on their phones. We’ve started to sort of phase out print marketing, and we don’t supply a registration form. We encourage them to go to our website.”

Carignan agrees that the digital switch

is the way to go — and even more welcomed by attendees than expected. “Something that I do in my work for lia sophia, is to use more of an app for the conference information and schedule instead printing a bunch of paper. A conference app can include everything you need, and make it easier to push out changes. Last year was the second year that lia sophia did an app, and we really promoted beforehand so they wouldn’t show up onsite to ask for a paper schedule. We did a ‘know before you go’ email to our attendees, and the feedback was amazing. We saw a 300 percent increase in the download rate. If you approach it correctly, there shouldn’t be much push back. (For more information on mobile apps, see the article on page 32.)

“It needs to be user-friendly, with the generational gap,” she continues. “That means user-friendly for everyone, no matter his or her level of tech savvy. You’ll have younger people and people who are more experienced that buy in quicker, but

we’re working on tutorial videos of a couple of people in our office showing what the app is like, rather than just sending a list of instructions.”

Managing attendee expectations regarding the availability of meeting technology may be an issue meeting planners face now, but as the culture of imme-

diacy created by technology grows more and more ingrained, planners will face new challenges.

“In thinking about how technology impacts our events, the biggest difference that I see now is attendees expecting to have an immediate voice in what they’re experiencing and a forum to share that on,” says Tate. “People don’t wait until two weeks after the event to say what they think, so you must incorporate into the architecture and design of the meetings that you’re planning and provide the tools to do it.”

Some larger events now incorporate a screen showing a live feed of the event’s Twitter hashtag on stage behind speakers so that the conversation becomes a central part of the event. But in a corporate climate, the where and how of attendees’ social media contributions and real-time interactions often needs to be negotiated.

According to Tate, her attendees are all corporate, and “they’re required to attend events, but they don’t have company issued smartphones, so we have to either provide devices or rely on them using personal devices,” she explains. “We haven’t provided devices onsite in the past, but we’re looking into it. We obviously supplement with paper in some cases, but 90 percent have their own devices that they’re using for real-time, immediate access to information about that event.”

Where Are the Hot Destinations and How Will We Get There?

If there’s one place crystal ball predictions could save big bucks, it’s knowing which destinations are hot before everyone else starts booking them. As hotels gain more and more strength in negotiations, planners are having to book further out to secure the destinations they desire.

“With the economy getting better, this is the way it’s going to be,” Wheaton explains. “I don’t see it getting any easier. Our B&B conference is fairly small, and just this last year when we were sending RFPs, it was harder to get space than in the past. We’ve been trying to book a con-

ference in northern California, and we tend to book a little over a year out, but it’s becoming more and more apparent that even though we’re small, we really have to plan ahead to get into the market. But things change so much, it’s hard to book two or three years out. I don’t know what’s going to be going on in the industry, and booking two or three years in advance with a deposit can be hard in case some shifts in the industry.”

As a leader in the incentive field, Kevin M. Hinton, chief staff officer



“We did a ‘know before you go’ email to our attendees, and the feedback was amazing. We saw a 300 percent increase in the download rate.”

Casey Carignan, Meetings and Events Coordinator
lia sophia, Wood Dale, IL

of Chicago-based Site International Foundation, is finding that, “Specifically in incentive travel, business has gotten better, but because of some of the supply and demand factors, prices have gone up in some factors, and the biggest issue we are facing is airline fares,” he says.

“Incentives are sold to a client 18–24 months out, and because that’s when the budget is put together, and you budget for X airfare, but now that they’ve qualified the names it’s Y, they’re spending more than they planned on airfare, which makes it hard to get some other things,” Hinton explains. “You see airlines decide that they no longer want to do group sales, but others, like Emirates, are looking to expand. I envision that some day I might have to fly to Dubai to get to Europe because those airlines are investing immensely in this marketplace and the group space.”

Emirates has already made headway into Europe, with its new New York to Milan offering, though that route is facing appeals in court after The Lazio Regional Administrative Court near Rome ruled the service breaches terms of the Italy-United Arab Emirates bilateral air service agreement. Even if they lose the route, their competitor Etihad Airways is working on a partnership with Alitalia. In the coming years, as Middle Eastern airports are set to become the world’s busiest and Dubai

continues to gain ground as a top shopping, resort and dining destination, it may begin to trend as an ideal incentive and meeting location for companies looking to provide a top-notch destination experience with a more reasonable airfare and lodging price tag.

“Otherwise, the Caribbean is always popular, particularly from North America,” Hinton continues. “However you define that region south of the border, it has a lot to offer, with Mexico remaining strong and Panama growing in interest.”

Tate agrees. “The Dominican Republic is actually where we’re doing our incentive trips,” she says. “We looked at Panama last year, and for the right group, I think it’s going to be very interesting and most cost effective. I think Central America is going to continue to be strong, as flight costs to Europe are very prohibitive.”

Looking farther south, Hinton finds that “South America will continue to grow, especially cities of Colombia. With what’s happening in Brazil, they’re not as focused on group travel right now because of the World Cup, but London hotels were looking for business after the Olympics left, and my opinion is they have enough going on right now with these big mega events, but I think the cities in Brazil will be great destinations after that. Also, whether Chile or Argentina, there will be a great recognition in this part of the world of all that South America has to offer.

“As far as the next frontier, we’re looking to take our conference to India, which is on a lot of people’s bucket list, but it’s a crazy combination, it’s a bit too much for some people,” he continues.

“If there’s one thing on the horizon, it’s cities. They’re becoming major incentive places. Not everyone is looking for fun and sun. Some people are looking for adventure, but others are looking for a cultural urban setting where you get great



A unique venue called the Orquideorama in the Botanical Garden of Medellin, Colombia, a country cited by planners as an up-and-coming destination for events and incentives.

restaurants and nightlife,” says Hinton. “Cities wouldn’t have been looked at for incentive travel before, but I live in Chicago, and I think it’s a phenomenal incentive. Major cities are great if positioned correctly,” adds Hinton.

The Shifting Role of the Planner

While strategic meeting management has quickly become an industry buzzword, it’s only the first step. “Planners by definition must take care of the logistics, but then they also have to think: What does this do for our clients or company and why are we doing it,” says Hinton.

“If you have the right people in the room, but it’s cold or the AV doesn’t work or the attendees can’t hear the speaker, it’s not a successful meeting. Logistics are always the foundation, but, at the same time, there’s this realization that meetings are for business.



They’re not luxury stuff. They’re a necessity — how we sell things or know what our clients are facing.

“There has been a lot of pullback during the recession, but there has also been a realization of the critical nature of events,” Hinton continues. “If it’s an important deal, you don’t do it on conference call or with some kind of technology. It’s time to get our story straight, we have the Meetings Mean Business campaign, but we need to do more as an industry.”

Amanda Cecil, Ph.D., CMP, professor in the department of tourism, conventions and event management at Indiana University in Indianapolis, has shifted her involvement in the meetings industry from the trenches to teaching, shaping the future of the industry. In the coming years, she foresees “a move to a really business savvy professional. There’s a need to be much more forward thinking, and much more strategic in terms of their thought processes,” says Cecil. “For senior planners, that means there has to be an executive type of training, including more of an

“In incentive travel, business has gotten better, but because of...supply and demand factors, prices have gone up...and the biggest issue we are facing is airline fares.”

Kevin M. Hinton, Chief Staff Officer
Site International Foundation, Chicago, IL

event marketing kind of look moving toward a business approach.

“As we watch business structures change post-recession, it changes where meetings are housed,” Cecil explains. “Some are shifting to global operations, and especially with planners who are multinational, that has to happen. As companies look at a more global approach, events and meetings should as well.”

Cecil says the university program, now includes a study abroad component “to

give students a more global mindset because some of these positions are reporting through a global reporting structure.

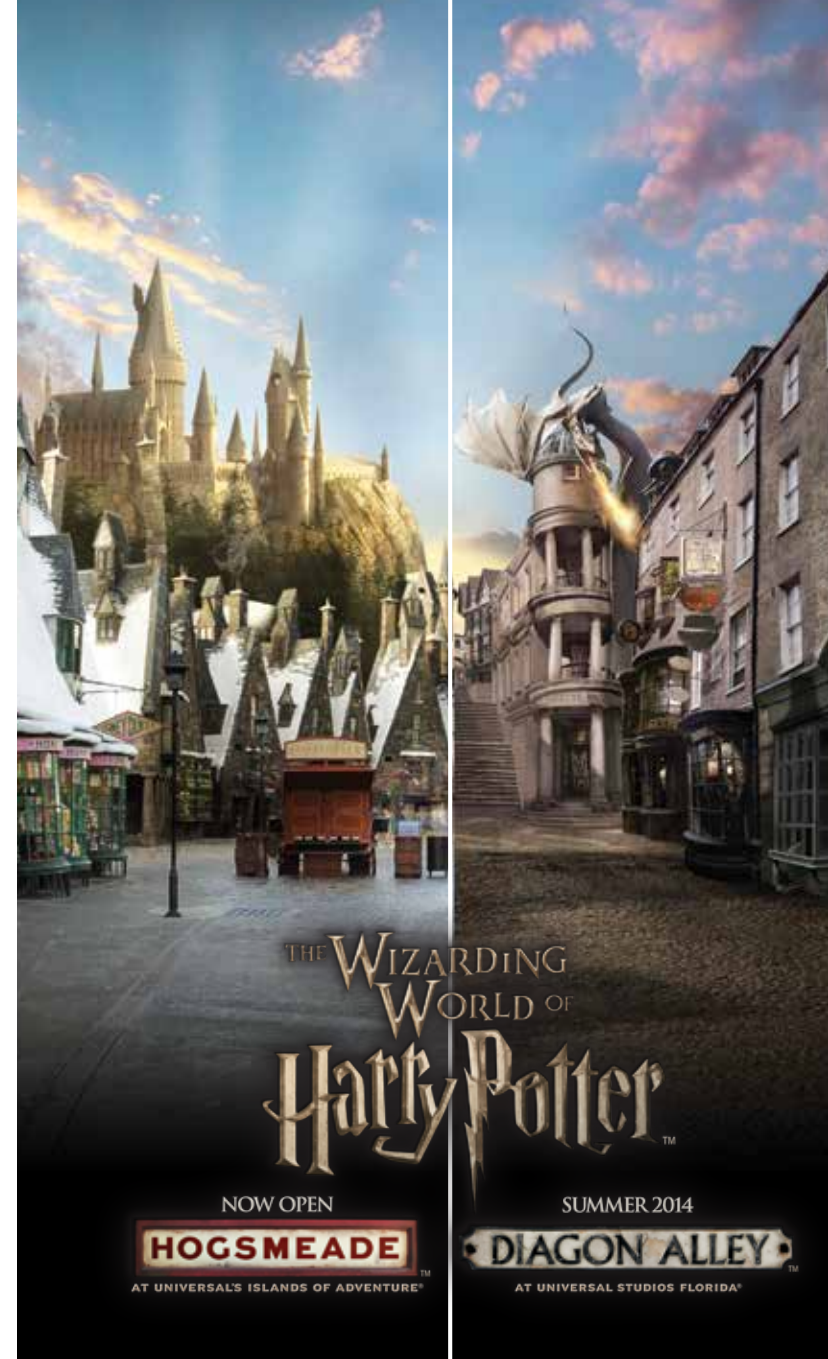
“Reporting through finance and HR I think will make a difference in how planners approach the philosophy of the meeting,” she continues. “They’ll have to be accounting- and finance-savvy and better understand both the procurement process and how to measure the intangibles, like attendee satisfaction,” she adds.

“I think the role of the planner has become more and difficult in terms of both qualitative and quantitative measurement. To prepare for this, we have added a business focus, and we’ve partnered with business schools. That’s been very well received. Students are looking for ROI on their degrees,” Cecil says.

Stand Up for Yourself and Take Ownership of Your Future

Most of all, Hinton is convinced that planners are in a unique place to show the value of their profession and reap greater — particularly in financial terms — rewards for their work. “I know people in this industry work hard. It’s not a traditional profession, but you get to see the world, and you attract the best and brightest. While the rewards aren’t necessarily financial...you don’t need to be underpaid; you *can* make a lot of money, but you need to plan for that.

“When you have a meeting or incentive, tell people why they’re there and say, ‘Yes, you might be enjoying that dinner and that bottle of wine and this amazing place, but ultimately you made a big impact on our organizations or you sold a lot of stuff, and we’re here to build a stronger community and a shared vision.’ Tell the story of why we are doing this. You have to advocate for yourself, stand up and take ownership for your own future.” **C&IT**



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Mobile's Going Mainstream

Creative Apps Make Content Count and Enhance Attendee Engagement BDA

By John Buchanan

Mobile apps have become one of the hottest topics in the meetings industry. Innovative mobile apps are not only popping up at a breathtaking pace but, in many cases, they are utterly transforming the process of planning and attending a meeting or event.

In May, at IMEX Frankfurt in Germany, IMEX Group, in partnership with mobile app technology innovator and market leader QuickMobile, released a groundbreaking research study that shed light on just who is doing what.

Although 60 percent of planners have used a mobile app in the past two years, the study found, most are only using them for a few events, such as major

annual meetings. Key reasons for such reluctance are budget concerns and the perceived amount of time it takes to create a customized app designed to deliver a set of precise capabilities.

Somewhat surprisingly, the survey found, only 24 percent of planners typically include the costs of a mobile app in their budgets, while 42 percent said they never include such expenses.

And despite the ever-growing list of things a mobile app can do, 91 percent of planners reported that the primary motivation for using one is planner-to-attendee communication and the sharing of information such as meeting agendas and program notes. A large majority, 79 percent, also said they viewed the ability

to facilitate communication among attendees as a key benefit, with 75 percent saying they wanted to get the interactive conversations started before the meeting and 78 percent noting they want to continue the conversations after the event.

The biggest and most important of the first-of-its-kind survey, says Patrick Payne, CEO of Vancouver, Canada-based QuickMobile, is that “while more planners are using mobile apps and seeing them as 365-day communication tools, they are just beginning to discover their strategic value.”

Bonnie Boisner, vice president of events management at global customer loyalty management firm Aimia in Plymouth, Minnesota, notes the speed

with which mobile technology has entrenched itself in the meeting industry. “Not that long ago, mobile apps were not that widely used,” she says. “But nowadays, they are expected. Mobile is not something that’s just nice to have anymore. It’s mainstream.”

And there’s a simple reason for that, says QuickMobile’s Payne. The most essential impact of mobile technology is the critical difference between real-time information and information that is *old*, even if by a day, which tends to render it as anecdotal rather than spontaneous, he says. “The question is if you have real-time information, what advantage does that give you? And I would say that after day one of a three-day conference, if you

can say, ‘This seems to be the hot topic out there, these are the things that people are most interested in, you can actually make adjustments on day two, as opposed to in the past when your only real option was to review the whole meeting two or three weeks later when you’re trying to figure out what worked and didn’t, and what changes you want to make for your next meeting.’”

Attendee Engagement

Although new capabilities and functions are being announced on an almost weekly basis now, it’s still attendee engagement, in one form or another,

that is driving the adoption of mobile apps by planners.

“Mobile technology has enhanced the way in which we engage with our attendees, and it allows us to do that on a whole different level,” says Kelley Butler, director of meetings and events at McDonald’s Corporation in Oak Brook, Illinois. “It allows us the opportunity to create experiences that engage our attendees before, during and after the meeting.”

That’s critical to McDonald’s, which hosts major meetings around the world.

Another key benefit of mobile technology for Butler and McDonald’s is the ability — before, during and after the meeting — to drive the development of more effective content. “And specifically, that means what our attendees want to hear about,” Butler says. “And that means giving us the ability to tailor specific messaging that is considered most relevant to attendees. It also helps perpetuate the dialogue that goes on about that content. And it also creates a way in which you can gather analytics about the behavior patterns of specific attendees and from that perspective, use those analytics to make very targeted and specific decisions about how you spend money and develop more meetings and trade shows moving forward, based on the information coming out of all those analytics.”

Boisner, a user of the Cvent meeting management platform and its CrowdCompass mobile app, as well as QuickMobile, agrees that attendee engagement is the single most important benefit of mobile technology. “The



“Gamification is the hot new thing out there. It’s a great way to drive results and get the specific outcome you want.”

Bonnie Boisner

Vice President of Event Management
Aimia
Plymouth, MN

McDonald’s attendees check mobile devices in the Engagement Center with the social media mosaic LED wall in the background.

Credit: McDonald’s Corporation

most common thing we use mobile for is to communicate information, such as schedules,” she says. “We also put our maps on the app and room assignments. We put all the details that attendees need in their hand via their smartphone.”

In effect, she says, it is a high-tech wayfinding function for attendees.

“But,” Boisner says, “it also includes things like speaker bios and meeting-related content, such as links to presentations or other content that people will be communicating about at the meeting. It’s not just about the agenda. It’s now about everything as it relates to the event and the experience of attendees.”

Another important dimension of her

use is personalization of the meeting experience for attendees. For example, Boisner says, attendees can adapt the meeting agenda to their own personal agenda — what sessions they plan to attend and what other onsite activities they will participate in — that is always current and at their fingertips.

Using an app that is a component of the market-leading Salesforce.com customer relationship management (CRM) platform, Boisner recently took engagement to a new level when she connected different groups of attendees who did not know each other previously. “We assigned individual group leaders and then they reached out and formed sub-groups

through the mobile app,” she says. “Then they were able to communicate and engage with each other prior to the meeting. And by doing that, they were able to exchange questions and other information that related to what they are responsible for and the experience they would have at the meeting.”

In turn, that made their interaction at the meeting more efficient and productive. “And that was all accelerated by that ‘get to know you’ phase before the meeting,” Boisner says.

Melanie Scharton, marketing programs manager at Behavioral Science Technology (BST) in Austin, Texas, is a relatively new adopter of mobile technol-



“We got more than a 50 percent adoption rate on the app our first year. And this year was even better. And we also found better ways to communicate and connect people onsite.”

Melanie Scharton, Marketing Programs Manager
Behavioral Science Technology, Austin, TX

ogy. She has used Cvent’s CrowdCompass for her last two annual user conferences, which each draw about 2,500 attendees. Her primary motive? Enhancing the attendee experience onsite.

“We want to make sure they have the

latest information,” Scharton says. “And if there is any updated information, like a session being cancelled or moved, then they get that information right away. And with printed material, any kind of change means your program guide is

now outdated and incomplete once attendees get onsite.”

But, Scharton says, she must master some change management, too. “This has been a learning experience for our attendees,” she says. “Ours are a little different from a lot of meeting groups. They are not necessarily tech savvy. They come mostly from the plant level floor in large manufacturing operations. And many of them don’t use a computer every day. So they’re not the most technology-forward group. So the first year was an experiment for us to see how well a mobile app would go over. And we were actually quite surprised to see how well it went over. We got more than a 50 per-

Hotel Brands Step Up Their Mobile Game

Although most of the chatter about the emergence of mobile technology has focused on how it can enhance the attendee experience, it also can make life easier for planners. And to exploit that reality to their advantage, a number of major hotel brands have developed planner-friendly apps for planners on the run — which they almost always are.

Such innovative hotel-based apps are designed to reduce the amount of back-and-forth communication required in order for planners to change menus, adjust meeting room seating charts or arrange audio-visual presentations. Additional features include the ability to specify room temperature settings in meeting rooms.

In an ever more competitive meeting arena, hotel brands share a common motive for trying to make life simpler and easier for planners. By doing so, they have some brand leverage when it comes to getting the business.

And hoteliers stress that apps are not intended to replace or eliminate the role of human assistance from a sales manager or other staff



Marriott’s Red Coat Direct app is personalized for each specific meeting.

member, but just to provide planners with more modern options for accomplishing certain time-consuming and often annoying tasks.

A year ago, **Marriott Hotels** launched its **Red Coat Direct** app at 350 Marriott-branded properties and then expanded it to most of its properties worldwide.

“We are rethinking all aspects of meetings from the physical space to the experience for both attendees and planners, and looking for ways to enable and inspire people to do their best work,” stated Peggy Roe, vice president, global operations services for Marriott Hotels. “Red Coat Direct’s technology allows planners to continually adjust requests without missing a minute of their meeting or keeping other professionals waiting.”

The app is personalized to the planner’s specific meeting. Requests can be made up to three days before the meeting and then throughout the meeting. Once the request is made, it is routed to the event manager and the department that can fulfill the request.

Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants touts a new suite of technology so-

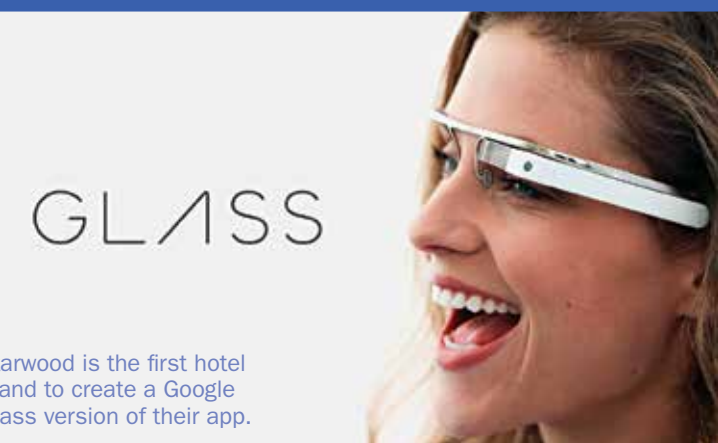
lutions designed to help customers book any time of day or night with their one-stop-shop online booking tool and sales app. Christine Lawson, senior vice president, sales and catering for Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, stated, “Our new tools make the guest experience of planning and booking a group or meeting a simple and hassle-free experience.”

The Kimpton iPad sales app shows photos, floorplans, menus and venue-specific information during a real-time discussion. The new app walks guests through Kimpton’s meeting and events philosophy, look and feel of all hotels, meeting space, adjacent restaurants and catering menus.

Additionally, the brand also launched **Kimpton Instant Meetings (K.I.M.)** — an easy-to-use online booking tool that provides anyone the ability to book a group or meeting quickly and easily in as little as five days out from their desired event. Ideally set for groups staying up to seven nights, accommodating six to 25 guest rooms and meetings for six to 50 guests, K.I.M. users are able to self-select their group and meeting needs, from dates and locations to catering and audio-visual needs.

Last fall, **Starwood Hotels & Resorts** introduced its **eVent Portfolio** app, which empowers planners to create F&B menus and set up audio-visual tools in real time on both iPhone and Android mobile platforms. The company expects to have 575 Starwood properties set up with the app by year’s end, according to a report in *Travel Weekly*. Mark Theis, Starwood’s divisional director of group sales in North America, stated, “eVent Portfolio is helping us communicate with our customers the way they want to communicate — digitally.”

Very recently, the brand announced the **SPG app for Google Glass**, according to a report in *Luxury Daily*.



“Innovation didn’t stop with the release of the smartphone or the tablet,” stated Chris Holdren, senior vice president for SPG and digital at Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, New York. “Glass complements our digital offerings from apps to mobile Web.

“The new app illustrates Starwood’s commitment to explore new technology and learn,” he said. “Glass lets us in on the ground floor of the new wearable technology movement.”

The Google Glass version of the app allows guests to search and book rooms at Starwood’s nearly 1,200 properties by destination or airport code; view photos of hotels and nearby areas; and get turn-by-turn directions to properties. Starwood will make improvements to the app, which is now in beta mode, as consumers make suggestions and Google Glass adds more features.

“Our guests are by definition in motion so they need their mobile devices to stay connected during their travels,” said Holden. “Being the first in the hospitality industry to introduce an app for Google Glass illustrates our larger strategy to be the industry leader in digital innovation.”

— JB



Credit: Behavioral Science Technology

Scharton uses mobile so attendees have access to the latest information onsite, such as a session being moved.

cent adoption rate on the app our first year. And this year was even better. And we also found better ways to communicate and connect people onsite.”

That’s very important to BST, Scharton says, “because one thing our conference does is help people network and share best practices among their different industries or find similar challenges that they want to network and communicate about. So that was another advantage of using mobile technology that we also

“Any time you can create something (gamification) that helps people participate more in your meeting, that becomes a best practice.”

Kelley Butler, Director of Meetings and Events
McDonald’s Corporation, Oak Brook, IL



identified the first year and did a lot more of this year.”

For example, Scharton says, “For this year’s meeting, attendees could use the app to build their own profile and then put that up so other folks could see it and connect with them electronically.”

Gamification

One of the fastest growing and most talked about capabilities of mobile technology is gamification, which means steering and rewarding specific kinds of behavior, such as on-time attendance at particular sessions, retention of educational content, or interaction with spon-

sors or exhibitors. Response mechanisms such as scanned QR codes are used to monitor and tally results. (See more on gamification on page 10.)

Butler used gamification for the first time last year at the McDonald’s U.S. owner-operator conference, which drew a total of 15,000 attendees to three Las Vegas events.

Butler chose to use gamification because the major event is tailored toward education. “So there was a desire from the planning team and the operator community to be able to engage those particular attendees in a different kind of way and also make the event fun and interactive,” she says. “We also wanted to allow people to compete because we are a very competitive brand by nature. And we also like to have fun at our meetings.”

As a result, Butler and her team created a game that attendees played by region, based on how they participated in educational sessions and what they did on the exhibit floor. “And based on those things, they could earn points that led to them being the winning region,” Butler says. “And what they were playing for

was to make a donation to the Ronald McDonald charity in their region.”

As a result of the success they had, they now consider gamification a go-to tool for attendee engagement and have deployed it for this year’s meeting. “Any time you can create something that helps people participate more in your meeting, that becomes a best practice,” Butler says.

Boisner is increasingly using gamification as way of getting attendees excited about a meeting.

“Gamification is the hot new thing out there,” she says. “It’s a great way to drive results and get the specific outcome you want.”

She uses the gamification capability within Cvent, as well as QuickMobile. She agrees that QuickMobile is currently the clear innovator and dominant brand in meeting-related mobile apps, largely because it can be customized and configured based on exactly what a client wants to do or accomplish. “We do a lot more gamification with QuickMobile,” she says.

Scharton is now preparing to investigate gamification. “I know our marketing team would like to look more into that,” she says. “They’re interested in going even further in improving upon how people interact at our meetings onsite. So gamification is something that we’ll be looking at for next year’s meeting.”

New Frontiers

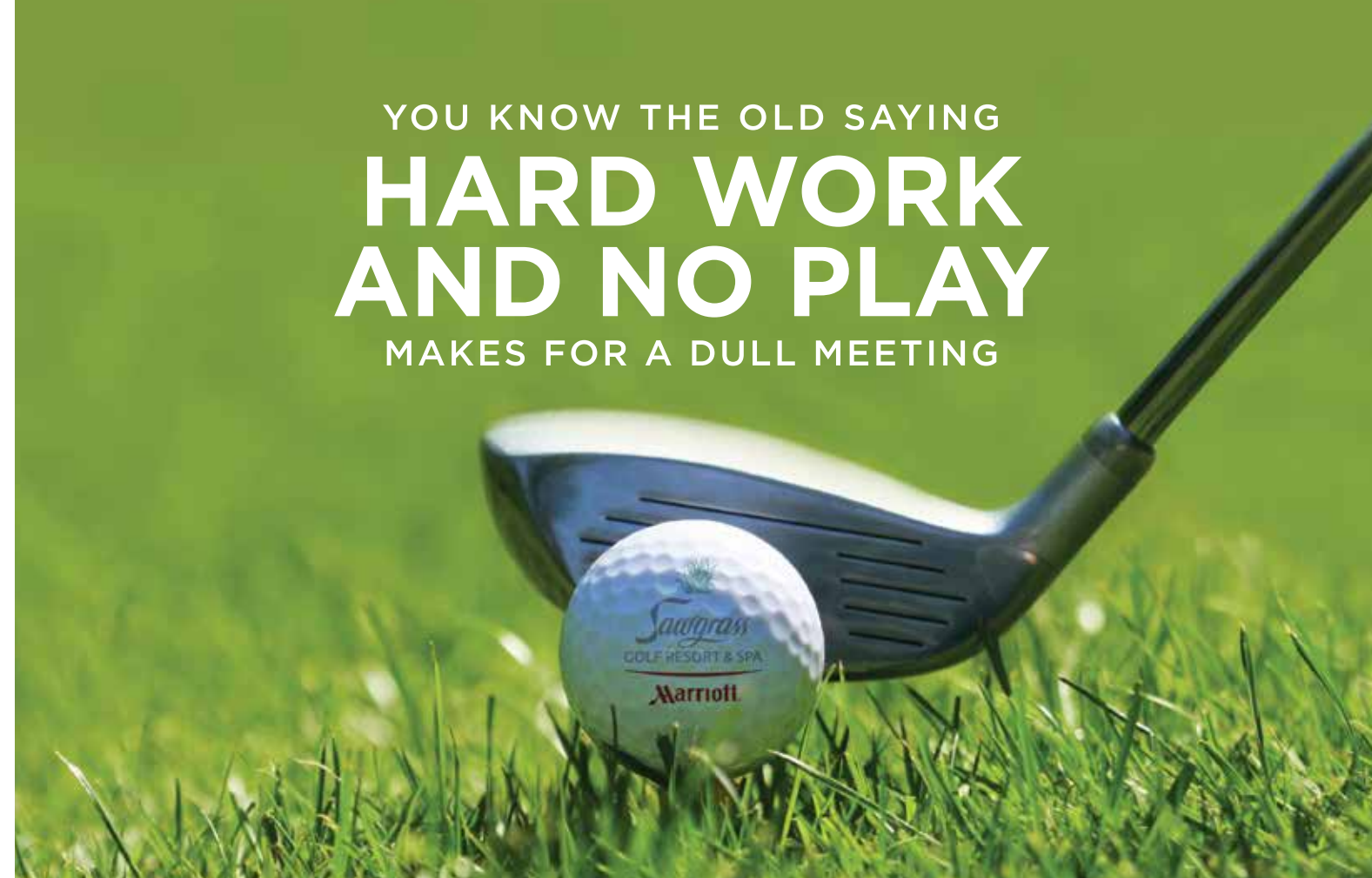
Although truly wide adoption of mobile apps is still a way off, according to the IMEX/QuickMobile survey, technology providers are betting on the premise that the sky’s the limit for new apps.

In April, Chicago-based startup Social Q&A introduced a new browser-based mobile app that enhances audience response by allowing attendees to participate in question-and-answer sessions from their smartphone, tablet or laptop. Attendees submit questions that in turn can be up-voted by other attendees, giving speakers or moderators real time insight into which questions are deemed most important by the audience.

BusyEvent, from The Meeting Pool, ups the ante when it comes to meeting-related business intelligence that helps meeting hosts and planners generate revenue. It allows the tracking of attendee activities such as personal agenda building, clicked links in digital meeting materials, one-to-one meeting requests with sponsors, exhibitors or vendors and more.

Another new tool is the business card reader for iPhones by ABBYY, which automatically transfers and saves contact information from business cards — in 21 different languages — to iPhone contacts or the app’s own digital storage capability.

And now that Apple has revealed that iOS 8 is on it’s way, the opportunity horizon for new app development is greater than ever. **C&IT**



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What Planners Want

From Hotels

By
Christine
Loomis

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Forging Optimal Relationships Requires Real Partnership and Communication

The relationship between meeting planners and hoteliers is complex. Both groups want many of the same things, including a strong economy and a thriving meetings industry, to attract attendees and make each meeting memorable and successful.

But they have differences, too. Planners must stay within budgets and get the most in return for dollars they spend. Hoteliers want to attract business that positively impacts their bottom line — they need to make a profit on that same

meeting for which planners are rightly scrutinizing each expenditure.

Given that perspective, planners and hoteliers should be adversaries. But that's far from the truth and hardly optimal.

"The relationship between hotels and meeting planners is crucial to both parties' success," says Kimberly Miles, CMP, CMHS, vice president, industry relations for the American Hotel & Lodging Association. "AH&LA is a strong supporter of the Meetings Mean Business campaign, which showcases the impor-

tance of the meetings industry to hotels and the U.S. economy. The hotel industry values the strong partnership with the meeting planner community to create the most successful events and experiences for its attendees."

We asked corporate meeting planners to give us their take on the positives and pitfalls of the planner-hotel relationship, which, as Miles points out, is a relationship that drives business for the U.S. economy, so getting it right is critical.

What do these planners want from

hotels? What are their pet peeves? How can the relationship be improved? Some of their insights echoed those reported in STR's "DestinationMap 2013" survey, highlights of which were published in January in *Hotel News Now*, a division of STR (Smith Travel Research). (See box below.)

But there were some very individual perspectives, too. And while having hotels meet basic meeting requirements is fundamental, the consensus on forging optimal relationships came down to two essential elements: partnerships and communication.



Blue Janis, National Account Manager
Experient, Broadview Heights, OH

The Basics

Like any relationship, this one is a two-way street. Planners bring meetings to hotels, hotels provide necessities for those meetings. Terri Crowley, vice president of event management at Photizo Group, a Kentucky-based consulting and marketing intelligence firm that organizes conferences domestically and abroad, puts it succinctly: "I want great service, updated meeting space, willingness to work with a planner, good catering services, and a friendly and knowledgeable staff."

Blue Janis, an Ohio-based national account manager with Experient, references staff, too. "Onsite, I expect the event manager and banquet manager to try to anticipate needs rather than having to be asked when something has already run out. Of course, it's much nicer when inventorying liquor or doing a room block audit to find that the hotel staff is helpful and agreeable."

Edward Perotti, CMP, CMM, senior director global meetings, events and travel with VMware, a Palo Alto-based software company, adds cost transparency as an essential. "I know everyone needs to make money and hit goals, profit lines, etc. I just want to know what we are spending money on. For example, with regard to third parties, I want hotels to be 100 percent comfortable with sharing and/or providing invoices or

"The better each party understands the goals of the other, the more likely there will be a successful meeting and a happy client."

documentation for me (the end client) to cross check/audit, and to document all charges and concessions related to my event." Additionally, Perotti wants creative food experiences and true partnerships of the entire chain portfolio.

Partnerships

The concept of partnering up appears to apply on every level.

"Both parties need to look at the relationship as a true partnership," Perotti says, "as the market flips from one seat of control to the other, the long-term vision is what is key to maintaining the relationship, the level of expectations and the service level."

It helps when both parties have a shared vision of success. "I have always approached hotels with one simple, ba-

sic premise," says Lisa Langford, corporate meeting planner for Finance and Resource Management Consultants, which works with the petroleum industry. "We both want our client to remember a great meeting, at their particular hotel, for a fair price."

Of course, some visions and goals are not shared — but they can still be understood and respected. "I expect the hotel to treat me as I treat it...as a partner in accommodating the needs of my client," says Janis. "Although I represent a very

large third party and my job is to secure the best pricing for my client, I believe it's very important to recognize that the hotel has fiscal goals and needs as well."

Donna Patrick, CMP, CMM, associate director, global meetings and conventions for UnitedHealth Group in Minnetonka, Minnesota, has a similar perspective. She says planners need to see hoteliers "as true partners and go into discussions and negotiations with a balanced win-win for both sides."

Miles says hotels must do the same. "Every event is different, and every hotel has its own approach to contracting," she says. "When both parties negotiate with an appreciation of one another's needs and goals, and with an understanding that they are entering into a mutual commitment to one another, they can create

Planner Booking Survey

STR's "DestinationMap 2013" report analyzed surveys of 750 meeting planners (half corporate, half association) regarding the factors they considered most important when booking group business. As reported earlier this year in *Hotel News Now*, a division of STR, results include:

Familiarity with the destination was the most influential consideration for deciding where to hold a meeting, followed by attendee feedback, reputation of the location and other planner recommendations.

Costs figured prominently among the most important site selection considerations, which included good hotels; convenient airlift; travel costs to the location; food and lodging costs; ease of accessibility; good value for the money.

Good wireless Internet access was listed by the majority of planners as very important.

In addition, planners in the survey said they did not like being "nickel and dimed," still consider being green important, and expressed more willingness to book extravagant destinations compared to previous years.

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a contract that is fair to both the group and the hotel.”

Cindy Wilson, president of San Francisco-based Wilsonwest, a corporate-event marketing firm that plans C-level meetings for such companies as Cisco, Chevron and Samsung as well as nonprofits, adds another element to the mix. “Establish a true partnership from

with e-RFPs easily bulk-sent with a click of a button. The time to think about how to work with us just isn’t there.”

As a result, Langford has resurrected what she calls the “retro practice of phone conversing.” This, she says, “goes back to my core belief that we both want this to work but need to strategize out-

is that planners tend to return to places they’re familiar with. The survey also highlights six elements respondents considered most important when selecting a destination: good hotels, convenient airline service, travel costs to the location, food and lodging costs, ease of attendees

getting to the location and good value for the money. It’s not surprising that three of the items are related to cost. In fact, the report notes that the average hotel room rate paid by planners for their largest meeting increased in 2013, with corporate planners paying an average of \$189 per hotel room.

The planners we talked with say the survey provides an accurate snapshot but there are more variables than it suggested.

“The most important considerations are the ones that are unique to the client, the participants and the unique characteristics of the event, though service and relationship with the hotel sales and operations team are paramount,” Wilson says. “Specific meeting types demand specific considerations. For example, a C-level event would have less focus on value for the money and costs and more focus on excellence in service and standards. As far as venue details,



Lisa Langford, Corporate Meeting Planner
Finance and Resource Management Consultants, Divide, CO

the outset,” she says, “then communicate any changes along the way.”

Communication

No relationship can work in the absence of effective communication. “I believe that fundamentally, it comes down to communication,” Janis says. “The better each party understands the goals of the other, the more likely there will be a successful meeting and a happy client.”

Says Patrick, “Planners should maintain open and honest communication always and follow up to let the hotel know why it did not win the business if it didn’t.”

Langford favors old-fashioned conversations between planners and hoteliers:

“Up until recent history, our frustrations would rate pretty low on the meeting planner’s version of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. We wanted sanely priced AV or greater flexibility on attrition — simple and straightforward, monetarily defined items,” she says. “Though those things remain, the more pressing frustration is higher on the scale: lack of conversation. Our RFPs have never had as many flat-out ‘no’ responses as we’ve seen in the last six months, with no real information as to why or suggestions for alternatives. I think part of the problem is RFP spam; hoteliers are inundated

side the box together. That doesn’t happen with short emails or choppy cell-phone conversations but with heavy, black, rotary-phone communication. Relationships built over the years have saved us several times recently, and all were fostered through conversations.”

Of course, as Patrick points out, the communication must be appropriate. She finds that some hotels over-contact planners or, worse, develop an attitude. “Let the process work, give your best offer and don’t



Edward Perotti, CMP, CMM
Senior Director Global Meetings, Events & Travel, VMware Inc., Palo Alto, CA

get defensive if business isn’t won this time,” she advises. “Many times I have given another program to a partner based on how they handled an earlier situation. It’s okay to be disappointed and verbalize that; it’s not okay to be unprofessional and get angry with a client.”

Site Selection

One interesting part of the STR survey relates to site selection. One finding

“We have been going back to the Hilton... due to the frontline employees. They know our culture, people and expectations and are generally excited to have us back. The attendees feel that energy, and it helps the overall experience.”

if you know guest participation might be limited if the venue is not easily accessible for international travelers, you might rule out a property. If it’s a conference that is heavily reliant upon meeting space and technology, having access to multiple ballrooms with plenty of set-up time might drive the hotel choice.”

Janis agrees. “I think the choice of location varies depending on the makeup of the organization,” he says. “One group

may feel more comfort in a familiar location while another actually prefers offering something new to its attendees. I think it’s incumbent on the planner to avoid letting his or her personal bias get in the way of site selection.”

Perotti offers insight into why many planners do return to hotels they have booked before. “We have been going back to the Hilton San Francisco Union Square for years for certain programs,” he says, “due, in fact, to the frontline employees. They know our culture, people and expectations and are generally excited to have us back. The attendees feel that energy, and it helps the overall experience.”

Pet Peeves

As the survey found, planners do not like to be nicked and dined, and Crowley pointed to a couple of areas where this is common. “I think hotels should update their Internet plans so that these are included in the price of the meeting space,” she says.

And then there’s AV. “The AV providers that the hotels contract with are always at least twice as much,” Crowley says, “and in many hotels, you are charged a fee if you don’t use their in-house companies.” Crowley rarely uses in-house AV because of the cost, and that complicates her job. “I would love for the hotel AV groups to be in line with outside providers and thus make my job easier,” she says.

For Wilson, a primary issue is turnover. “We are seeing a lot of movement with hotel staff, requiring us to start over with a new team,” she says. “For example, we spend two days on a site visit covering many details, then learn a week later our CSM has moved on. It would have been better to know this upfront. We might have chosen to change our site visit and/or have the hotel designate another staff member. The pet peeve is that there has not been a thoughtful transition to team members, and we are required to start over with the planning. We recently produced a meeting at a luxury property where we had three different catering managers in the course of three months.”

Another pet peeve: cut-off time. “Hotels expect us to have our room block full 45–60 days out,” Crowley says.

Key Takeaways

Here’s a snapshot of what planners interviewed for this story had to say about the planner-hotelier relationship.

Basic ‘Wants’

- Great service, updated meeting space, willingness to work with a planner, good catering services, and a friendly and knowledgeable staff.
- Hotel staff that anticipates needs.
- Cost transparency.
- Creative food experiences.

Partnerships

- Establish a true partnership from the outset and communicate changes along the way.
- Have a shared vision of success.
- The visions and goals that are not shared, are still understood and respected.
- Go into discussions and negotiations with a balanced win-win for both sides.

Communication

- Open, honest communication is key regardless of the outcome of negotiations.
- Old-fashioned telephone conversations between planners and hoteliers are an increasingly important part of the relationship equation.
- Strategize outside the box together.
- Hoteliers should let the process work, give their best offer and not get defensive if business isn’t won this time.

Site Selection

- Specific meeting types demand specific considerations: For example, a C-level event would have less focus on value for the money and costs, and more focus on excellence in service and standards.
- Choice of location varies depending on the makeup of the organization.
- Will return to a hotel with frontline employees who know your culture, people and expectations, and are excited to have you back.

Pet Peeves

- Being nicked and dined: for example, not including Internet plans in the price of the meeting space.
- Charging too much for AV services and charging a fee if the in-house company is not used.
- Staff turnover, which often requires starting over with the planning.
- Premature cut-off time: for example, hotels that expect a full room block 45–60 days out.

Contracts and RFP ‘Wants’

- Planners should be as detailed as possible with RFPs, and sales managers should respond with alternatives if specific concession requests cannot be met.
- More streamlined contracts; and sales reps who have a better understanding of the big picture.
- Standardized contracts.

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"Most of my attendees haven't even registered at this point."

Contracts and RFPs

Contracts and RFPs are a challenge on both sides of the table, but there are solutions, including increased communication. "I try to be as detailed as possible with my RFPs," Janis says, "and I appreciate it when the sales manager responds with alternatives if he or she is unable to agree to a specific concession request."

Perotti would like to see more streamlining of contracts and better understanding of the big picture, especially

our employee base increases, so do the event counts."

Langford says her group has seen consistent growth of about 10 percent over the past few years, however, "Our events don't fit the model the survey suggests. We have private member groups and expect (and get) near 100 percent attendance."

That said, Janis cautions that there are many factors at play, and he sees variation in the numbers, a consideration primarily for association meetings in which attendees must foot their own bill for the most part.



Cindy Wilson, President
Wilsonwest Inc., San Francisco, CA

"The most important considerations are the ones that are unique to the client, the participants and the unique characteristics of the event, though service and relationship with the hotel sales and operations team are paramount."

when hotels are dealing with companies that run many meetings in many parts of the country and the world. "We have streamlined our procurement process to keep in line with our internal process," he says. "The bottleneck occurs when a hotel has not and is still operating in antiquated ways, for example, if the hotel does not look at the global relationship with a client but instead thinks of each event as a one-off vs. a true global partnership and buy."

Langford would like standardized contracts. "I think many of us dream of a standardized contract. I've got four on my desk right now, all for like-meetings. The first hotel's contract is four pages long, the next is five, then eight, and the fourth is 20 pages."

Trends

Two trends apparent in the STR survey suggest that the industry is back on track. The first is an uptick in attendee numbers.

Perotti is seeing increases at his events. "Our team manages in some form over 3,200 meetings and events globally. This number has been on the rise and, as

Patrick believes the result is in part how meetings are managed. "I do think we've finally gotten past the 2008 financial crunch, and meetings are being managed with more strategic focus — measurement of ROI, not canceling meetings but changing them to leverage costs better," she says.

Also trending is that corporations are exhibiting less reluctance to book luxury properties. While Wilson agrees without qualification, Patrick and Langford say yes...and no.

"I believe (the reluctance) still exists and will always exist on some level," Patrick says. "I feel companies are careful not to lose sight of it and have their meetings looked at as boondoggles. I do agree there isn't as much paranoia about it as there was after the 2008 financial crisis. It also helps that many companies took the stand that an incentive trip is a reward for a job well done, and they should not be punished for rewarding employees."

Langford thinks demographics impact this trend and that certain groups simply don't want to book luxury properties. "For our existing core owner groups with a

demographic age 50–65, the luxury destination is still the priority value," she says, "because of the high confidence in service and food levels — you get what you pay for, and they know that from experience. Our growth area, however, is with groups of a younger clientele who define the experience more by its community story: What did they do together after hours? For them, an evening of baseball with a great local craft beer can carry a higher story value than recharging on the beach at a luxury resort."

Perotti also notes differences in demographics and industries, and how luxury hotels themselves are responding. "In the tech world, there is less fear of luxury brands; however, the luxury brands need to step up the experience for the attendee and update the experience for the new generation. Ritz-Carlton Hotels has done a great job of bridging from the retired upscale traveler to young, tech-savvy urbanites," he says.

Call to Action

The return to more stable business and increased numbers speaks to the resilience of the meetings and hospitality industries. As they move out of survival mode, Langford hopes that planners will partner with hotels in even more profound ways for the greater good.

"Personally, I am looking ahead to the meetings and hospitality industries becoming a powerful voice in the critical issue of human trafficking, just as they have been for green meetings," she says. "Hilton, for example, has adopted a corporate position on this, which all partners are supposed to sign on to. They are also implementing training to recognize (trafficking) on their properties and identifying how employees are required to respond."

"It's at hotels where a lot of this happens, so raising awareness is a way planners can be influential. Add it into the contract process by asking, 'Do you practice human-trafficking awareness with your staff?' Enough people asking the same question will bring about change, exactly the way it did with the green movement." **C&IT**

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Colorado

Setting the Scene for

Blue-Sky Thinking

By Christine Loomis

An amazing setting can inspire attendees and elevate a meeting. Colorado has no lack of inspirational backdrops and can be as rustic-wilderness or sleekly urban as a group wants. Even in winter the sun is likely to be shining boldly, and that alone fosters an air of positivity. And the physical reality of those brilliant blue skies may inspire attendees into the figurative blue-sky style of thinking, defined as creative thinking unfettered by preconceptions and convention — in other words, brainstorming out of the box.

MEET IN TOWN

Colorado's foremost meetings cities offer two variations on the urban experience.

Denver

"Denver has come to symbolize a young, active, innovative and outdoor city, and those are themes that many corporations and incentive groups want to be associated with," says Richard Scharf, president and CEO of Visit Denver, the convention and visitors bureau.

"Having a corporate gathering in Denver brings a spirit of adventure into the meeting room. We have a modern, clean, safe, pedestrian-oriented downtown, but when you look out the window, you see 100 miles of snowcapped peaks. That brings a big-sky, open-minded feeling into the corporate culture that you don't get in many other cities."

With so much going for it, Denver keeps many local companies meeting near home. "The global headquarters of Arrow Electronics Inc. is in the Denver area, which makes this city a preferred destination for many of our events," says Kirsten Lonquist, CMP, senior event manager. In March, 770 attendees gathered for the Spring Arrow Centralized Training 2014, based at the Hyatt Regency

Denver at the Colorado Convention Center. The hotel finished a \$23 million redesign of all 1,100 accommodations that same month.

"This event has been held in Colorado multiple times," Lonquist says, "but this was the first time it took place in downtown Denver." She calls Denver's accessibility to domestic and international visitors a good fit for the company and likes that attendees have so much available to them within walking distance during free time.

The Hyatt Regency's downtown location, plentiful accommodations and extensive meeting space with what Lonquist calls "excellent flow" added to the appeal. "Our event was a huge success," she says, "which can be attributed to the hard work every vendor, especially the Hyatt Regency Denver, and the Arrow ACT Team put in to meet the high standards we set."

Lonquist says event managers "should not be afraid to ask that tests or rehearsals be done with equipment or that



The Terrace at the Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center can be used for events or outdoor meetings, seating up to 300 attendees theater style.

walkthroughs be conducted for crowd-control or load-in and load-outs." Problems may still occur, she adds, "but rehearsals offer the principal parties the tools to be able to respond more quickly to an unanticipated problem."

To those considering Denver, Lonquist advises booking early. "Denver has become a popular city for events, and finding venues with the necessary meeting space coupled with adequate guest rooms can be a challenge. The convention center can provide more meeting space; however, there are finite hotel rooms available at any given time for those attending large gatherings. Planners need to encourage attendees to meet registration deadlines, thereby lessening the risk of some attendees having to book a hotel room less convenient to the event."

While Denver's walkability is



Arrow Electronics hosted its 2014 Spring Centralized Training at the Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center.

an asset, so is the city's bike-sharing program. Attendees can pick up a bike at any of 82 stations and then return it to any station after exploring and gaining a boost from the Mile High City's palpable energy.

Colorado Springs

If the view from Pikes Peak could inspire Katharine Lee Bates to pen "America the Beautiful," what might it inspire a corporate group to achieve?

Doug Price, president and CEO of the Colorado Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau, says meeting planners derive many benefits. "Colorado Springs is a vibrant metropolis. Attendees can experience a rich arts scene and 10 minutes later be exploring Pike National Forest. Our amazing blue skies, range of lodging, value pricing and extensive list of activities and attractions are just a few reasons the area entices so many planners year after year."

Inherently inspiring attractions include the U.S. Olympic Training Center, Garden of the Gods Park, the new Cheyenne Mountain State Park Archery Range (perfect for teambuilding), and, of course, Pikes Peak.

Accommodations can be inspiring, too, especially the historic Broadmoor with its European-influenced elegance. For Laurie Barr, event director and corporate secretary for the Denver Gold Group, The Broadmoor is a perfect setting for the company's Denver Gold Forum because "It is the best."

The group of 1,200 met at The Broadmoor in September 2011. Barr says the staff was proactive to the organization's needs and everything was first class. "I have only good things to say about The Broadmoor," she adds. "The food was marvelous, the hotel staff was delightful, the venue was superb, and everyone enjoyed it."

While everyone appreciates The Broadmoor's impeccable service and surroundings, Barr un-



The Broadmoor's 6,300-sf Cheyenne Lodge has both indoor and outdoor event and conference space.

“Denver has become a popular city for events, and finding venues with the necessary meeting space coupled with adequate guest rooms can be a challenge.”

Kirsten Lonnquist, CMP, Senior Event Manager
Arrow Electronics Inc., Englewood, CO



derscores that the purpose of the forum is to facilitate business. The Broadmoor does that impeccably, too. Denver Gold Group will gather there again in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

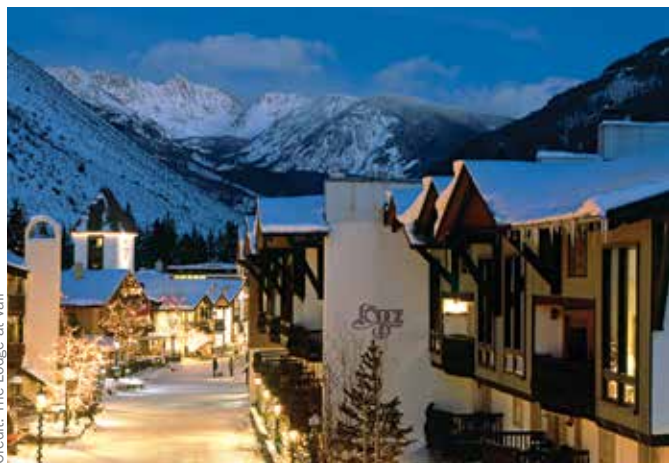
For something completely different, The Broadmoor recently announced an exclusive agreement with a private sporting ranch in northern Colorado, allowing groups to book a four-day/three-night private hunting-and-sporting experience, October through March.

MEET IN THE MOUNTAINS

Rocky Mountain panoramas offer inspiration on every level, but each town has its own personality.

Aspen

Audi of America has a long history with Aspen — an uber upscale enclave with mining roots — that includes sponsor-



The Lodge at Vail will update guest rooms this year.

ing ski events and local youth programs. Its meeting being held this month, the Audi A8 Dealer Launch and Incentive Event, is ideally suited to the town.

“The location absolutely plays a part,” says Erin Keating, senior manager, events and experiential marketing. “For this particular meeting, we are focusing on the launch of the benchmark of ultimate success in our product lineup, the A8. Therefore, we wanted a location that embodies the spirit and lifestyle of our ideal A8 customer.

“We have an ongoing partnership with the Aspen Skiing Company based on matching demographics of audience, the premium nature of the facilities and resorts, the availability

of high-end culinary establishments and the affinity with skiing, a core brand pillar for Audi.”

In keeping with its brand attributes, Audi booked The Little Nell, a Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond hotel. Some attendees stayed at the Forbes Four Star, AAA Four Diamond St. Regis Aspen as well. “The staff have been easy to work with at both properties,” Keating says, “with high attention to details and customer service. They have been very willing to assist us with items outside the purview of the hotel properties, and al-

lowed us a lot of time in the planning phase.”

Audi also arranged for a function at one of Aspen’s magnificent private homes, and a “lunch around” at various restaurants in town. While Aspen is a perfect geographical embodiment of the Audi brand, Keating notes that it comes with a price. “While we are a luxury brand and expect to pay for premium experiences, I will say the only thing planners really need to be prepared for are the high costs. There is definitely a premium price to pay for the privilege of hosting an event in Aspen.”

For the right group, it’s money well spent. “Aspen offers corporate and incentive groups an unparalleled setting where they can unwind and take a break from the everyday grind while still being productive,” says Debbie Braun, president and CEO of the Aspen Chamber Resort Association. “The ability for groups to get around Aspen by walking, biking or on a free bus makes planning a program here easy and efficient. Attendees have access to world-class mountains and hotels, over 100 restaurants and internationally renowned art and culture right at the doorstep of their hotel.”

In the end, though, Braun comes back to the setting. “The natural setting inspires greatness and motivates individuals to be their best self on both a personal and professional level.”

What better results could a meeting planner ask for?

Vail, Breckenridge & Keystone

January meetings in a Colorado ski town are anything but dreary. Slopes blanketed in snow under sunny skies are as enticing to some as palm trees and beaches to others.

Water Pik Inc., based in Fort Collins, Colorado, traditionally holds its executive meeting in January, combining a business agenda with time for employees to hit the slopes. The 2014 meeting was held in Vail, where old-school Alps intersect with today’s mountain chic. It was based at The Lodge at Vail, which

“I have only good things to say about The Broadmoor. The food was marvelous, the hotel staff was delightful, the venue was superb, and everyone enjoyed it.”

Laurie Barr, Corporate Secretary and Event Director
Denver Gold Group, Denver, CO



Attendees experience the real Colorado at Devil’s Thumb Ranch, two hours outside of Denver.

completed a \$1 million renovation to its pool area last summer and will refresh guest rooms this year.

“We like that you can step outside and be on the ski lift,” says Carrie Busted, executive assistant to Water Pik’s CEO and planner for the meeting. “We also enjoy Vail Village and the great restaurants. There was good service all around, and Nicole Spurlock, our event manager, was great at communicating with us up through the event.”

Dinners were held at different restaurants in town, with

“While we are a luxury brand and expect to pay for premium experiences...there is definitely a premium price to pay for the privilege of hosting an event in Aspen.”

Erin Keating, Senior Manager, Events and Experiential Marketing, Audi of America, Herndon, VA

Game Creek among the standouts. “Game Creek was phenomenal, and the staff was wonderful,” Busted notes. “The atmosphere of the dining room was lovely — flanked by a fireplace along one wall and window views of the mountainside.”

The 14 attendees took advantage of some of Vail’s top activities. “Free time was up to the individual,” Busted says. “Everyone who participated in the ski lessons really enjoyed the instructor. And the Mountain Musher dog-sledding tour was terrific.”

One regret Busted has is that she did not go to Vail ahead of time. “I had not spent time in Vail prior to the meeting, so it was hard to get a feel for the town, where things were, restaurants, etc. I wish I had taken a day to visit prior to the meeting.”

Vail, Breckenridge and Keystone are all part of Vail Resorts. Each town has something different for groups in terms of ambience, lodging and, of course, the slopes themselves.

Vail’s excellent meetings hotels include Vail Cascade Club; Vail Marriott Mountain Resort; Arrabelle at Vail Square, a Rock Resort; and The Sebastian-Vail, which claims the most meeting space in town with 8,500 sf. The hotel is currently undergoing a guest room redesign to be completed in December.

A classic Colorado mountain resort, Keystone is committed to green initiatives and meetings. Its Meetings That Move You programs educate and inspire groups, and connect them to nature. Also enticing groups is the 60,000-sf Keystone Conference Center. “Surrounded by beauty, built for business” is both tagline and spot-on description.

The highest of the three resorts is Breckenridge, its base a lofty 9,600 feet up. Among its coveted venues is Tenmile Station, which accommodates 200 attendees at a view-centric 10,234 feet.

MEET ON A RANCH

Many Colorado ranches offer meeting space, welcome groups and provide an experience that impacts conferences in surprising ways.

Workforce Insight wanted an amazing setting for its October 2013 company retreat, and found it outside of Frasier, Colorado. “Devil’s Thumb Ranch is the perfect location for us,” says Meghan Emswiler, vice president of HR and planner for the event. “Our headquarters is in Denver, and we wanted to be away from the city but not a four-hour drive into the mountains. DTR is about two hours, so it’s away, yet accessible. The fact that it’s somewhat isolated is perfect. Everything we needed was right there. Our employees weren’t driving anywhere or going off on their own instead of being present at the event. It was good for the company because it kept everyone talking and interacting in a way that doesn’t always happen. The fireplaces, both inside and outside, seemed to pull people in and bring them together. It was wonderful.”

The group of 70 ranged in age from 23 to mid-60s, and Emswiler says the ranch engaged them all. “Everyone loved the location and had only good things to say about the ranch, the people at it and the food.”

Emswiler found the staff willing to help plan and facilitate everything — even some unusual requests. “We wanted to do fun things in addition to the meetings. We have some jokesters in our group so, for example, one of our owners rode into the

“We like that you can step outside and be on the ski lift. We also enjoy Vail Village and the great restaurants. There was good service all around.”

Carrie Busted, Executive Senior Assistant to CEO and Marketing Coordinator, Water Pik Inc., Fort Collins, CO

first event on a donkey, dressed in a toga. We told the ranch staff what we wanted, and they made it happen.”

The retreat was a reward for employees and a way to bring the far-flung group together. “We have employees all over the U.S., and many have never been to the real Colorado,” Emswiler says. “We’re a very virtual company, and while our employees work together via computer, they don’t often interact in person.”

The first day was designed for fun and bonding. Company Olympics took place on the ranch lawn — a huge success to be repeated next year — and afterward employees tried fly-fishing, zip-lining or mountain biking with their workplace team or individually. Some chose simply to network around the fireplace.

Networking occurred elsewhere, too. “I liked that we had options in terms of how to accommodate everyone,” Emswiller says. “Some stayed in cabins, some in the bunkhouse and some in the main lodge area — all wonderful. But the bunkhouse became a gathering spot, a very organic way of people from all parts of the company getting together, and that was beneficial to the whole experience.”

Two days of business included breakfast and lunch in the expansive meeting space and dinner in different locations, including a buyout of the main dining area and bar.

But that first day set the stage for success. “Highlights for me included standing on that lawn and doing the Olympics, and afterward having so many employees come up to tell me how much they loved where we were and what we were doing,” Emswiller says. “They were so happy and appreciative. That set the tone for the whole meeting.”

“We do profit-sharing, so this retreat was paid for by all of the employees. They were glad we did it even if they maybe could have used that money for something else. It was a success from every perspective.”

EATING OUT

Attendees find diverse cuisines and a sense of place in local restaurants.

La Biblioteca, in Denver’s Riverfront Park neighborhood, serves Latin-Asian cuisine and a huge selection of tequilas. Private dining accommodates up to 40, a full buyout 60–100.

Hard Rock Cafe reopens in Denver this June following ma-



Denver’s historic Union Station is being transformed into a mixed use development with multiple venues for both indoor and outdoor meetings and events.



The new Pinnacle Club event space, with skyline views 38 floors up, at the The Grand Hyatt Denver.

jor renovations and a reimagined menu. The Red Rocks function room accommodates up to 80; buyouts are for up to 600 indoors while Block Party galas accommodate 3,000.

In Colorado Springs, groups can try some of the 115–130 bourbons on hand at Bourbon Brothers Southern Kitchen, some crafted by Colorado small-batch distillers.

Set high above Vail, Game

Creek Restaurant is a stunning mountain chalet open only certain nights and accessible via the Eagle Bahn Gondola. Buyouts accommodate up to 120, private dining, depending on the room, 28–60.

“We have employees all over the U.S. and many have never been to the real Colorado. ...They were so happy and appreciative. That set the tone for the whole meeting.”

Meghan Emswiller, V.P. of Human Resources
Workforce Insight, Denver, CO

Prospect at Aspen’s beloved Hotel Jerome is a modern, three-meal American bistro. Private dinners can be booked for up to 25, buyouts for 75–90.

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

The big news in Denver is the July unveiling of historic **Union Station**. The new dining/retail venue also will house the elegant 112-room Crawford Hotel, which will share meeting space with its historic affiliate across the street, The Oxford Hotel.

The 230-room **Renaissance Denver Downtown City Center** opened in May in the historic Colorado National Bank Building, melding neo-classical architecture with a sophisticated contemporary aesthetic. The 6,000 sf of meeting space includes three of the original vaults.

As part of its \$28 million redesign, **Grand Hyatt Denver** transformed the 38th-floor Pinnacle Club into striking function space with horizon-to-horizon views. Upgrades also included refreshing the 516 guest rooms, a stylish new lobby and Fireside, the lobby bar with its dramatic wall fireplace.

In March, **Four Seasons Hotel Denver** announced new sustainability measures including biodegradable room keys and biodegradable water bottles for meetings. The new Level 3 Salon within the spa is available for buyouts, a nice VIP treat.

Elway’s, The Ritz-Carlton, Denver’s signature steak house, now features a Chef’s Table with a window into the kitchen. The 12-seat table is ideal for executive boards and VIPs.

JW Marriott Denver Cherry Creek’s Fireside event

space received a \$1 million refresh. Accommodating 250, it features LED chandeliers with color enhancement and two walls of glass doors opening to a patio with two fire pits and lounge seating.

Cheyenne Mountain Resort in Colorado Springs invested \$3.8 million in its championship golf course, which



Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort and Spa offers 20,000 sf of newly renovated meeting space including the largest ballroom in Vail Valley.

reopened in May. Renovations include rebuilt bunkers, elevated tee boxes and an additional 47 yards.

The Broadmoor’s **Cloud Camp** opens in August, offering a unique option for an executive retreat or small group booking. Perched 3,000 feet above The Broadmoor, the Cloud Camp feels like a wilderness mountain getaway yet it’s just a shuttle ride away from hotel’s



Rendering of the Gant’s expanded Molly Campbell Conference Center in Aspen.

meeting space and amenities. There are 11 one- and two-bedroom guest cabins, seven accommodations in the lodge, and best of all, 360-degree views of all the surrounding alpine wonder.

A new entertainment venue opens

this month at **The Mining Exchange**, a **Wyndham Grand Hotel** in Colorado Springs. The two-level Gold Room features a mezzanine, stage, bar and adjacent kitchen, and accommodates up to 180 for dinner, 350 for a concert or reception.

Renovations to meeting space at the **Park Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort**

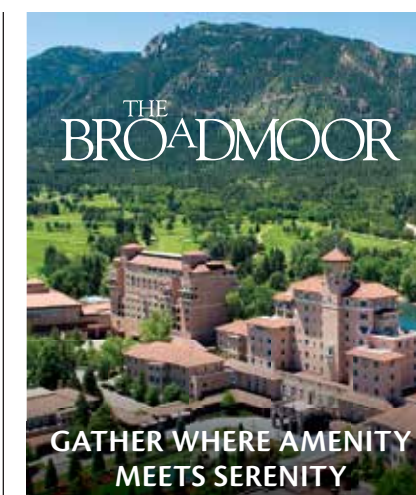
& **Spa** wrapped up in May, giving the Vail Valley its largest ballroom, which is bathed in natural light. Guest rooms were refreshed in November.

The Gant, by Destination Hotels & Resorts, in Aspen, debuts a \$5 million renovation and expansion of The Molly Campbell Conference Center this month. The conference center offers a panoramic rooftop terrace, a new specialty café, expanded flexible indoor and outdoor floor plans, and contemporary new furnishings and accessories.

The hotel-wide renovation at **DoubleTree by Hilton Breckenridge** in October included 208 guest rooms and 9,000 sf of function space. What’s new: an outdoor patio, and sound and lighting controlled via iPad.

Construction on the 519-room **The Westin Denver International Airport** is slated for completion late 2015. It will include a 26,000-sf conference center with 12 meeting rooms and three ballrooms.

Opened in May, **Woolley’s Classic Suites, Denver Airport** is business-ready with 9,000 sf of meeting space, complimentary Internet, free airport transportation and a Hertz Rent-a-Car kiosk with 24/7 vehicle availability. **C&IT**



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ON THE MOVE



DYER



ANDERSON



LEVINE



WOOD



SHOGREN

Mandarin Oriental, Atlanta has named **Kerry Dyer** as director of sales and marketing. She was director of travel industry sales for the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts corporate office based in Atlanta, Georgia.

Karen Wall was named sales manager for Visit Winston-Salem responsible for conventions and meetings business within the Southeast regional markets. She most recently served in convention sales for the International Market Centers in High Point, North Carolina.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Hotel, Orlando, Florida, has named **Nick Anderson** as group sales account director, responsible for the New York and New Jersey markets. He was senior account executive at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas.

The Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa & Marina, Cambridge, Maryland, has appointed **Christopher Levine** as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing at Hyatt Regency Sarasota, Florida.

The Westin Columbus in Columbus, Ohio, has named **Nathan R. Wood** as director of sales and marketing. He formerly served as director of sales and marketing at the Sheraton Omaha in Omaha, Nebraska.

Suzanne Shogren was named area director of sales and marketing for The Willard InterContinental, Washington, DC. She most recently served as regional director of sales and marketing for Polin/Miller Hospitality Strategies Inc. in Washington, DC.

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