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THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS



The Hot Ticket

Once-in-a-Lifetime Sports Incentives
PAGE 24

Planners' Favorite Travel Apps

Manage Life 'Out of Office'
PAGE 20

A Melting Pot Approach

The Art of Building Enterprise-wide Buy-in for Your Meetings
PAGE 16

Lee Ann Adams Mikeman
Director, Conference Planning and Special Events, Leidos

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Credit: MetLife Stadium

The Super Bowl, held last year at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey's Meadowlands, is the hottest ticket in sports. **PAGE 24**



Credit: MGM Resorts International

Corporate branding of this Mini Cooper is frozen in time at the Minus5 Ice Bar in Las Vegas. **PAGE 48**



Credit: New Orleans CVB

Spectators form a "second line" parade as they follow the brass band in New Orleans. **PAGE 60**

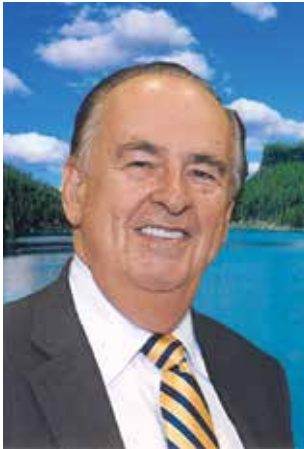
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SPECIAL
Meet Me in Miami
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Publisher's Message

Meeting Planning Grows Up

We first started featuring articles on strategic meetings management programs (SMMP) nearly a decade ago. As our contributing editors queried professional meeting planners about SMMP programs, some had no idea what we were talking about, others were very curious and anxious to learn more, and then there were a handful of visionary pioneers like Lee Ann Adams Mikeman, who is depicted on our cover in this issue. Lee Ann, director of conference planning



and special events for Leidos in Reston, Virginia, is the guiding force of the 10-year-old successful SMMP at the national security, health and engineering company, which was formerly known as Science Applications International Corporation.

According to the GBTA's benchmarking tool — the SMM Maturity Index — Leidos' program is now classified as being in the mature stage.

Not that there weren't challenges along the way, says Lee Ann who was passionate about the company's mission. One of the secrets to their success, Lee Ann notes, was "the engagement of key functional stakeholders early on coupled with strong support from mid-level and upper management." In true melting pot fashion, Lee Ann says she worked closely with "collaborative partners from facilities, procurement, legal, communications, marketing and travel to ensure they understood our SMM goals and how the program could benefit them through increased efficiency, reduced costs, mitigated risk and standardized event delivery." Overall, she suggests that the company's "holistic approach for managing meetings and events across the enterprise resonated" with all the departments because they also "wanted to contribute to making the program successful."

For additional pointers on how you can engineer a successful SMMP, turn to our cover story "A Melting Pot Approach to Meetings — The Art of Building Enterprise-wide Buy-in" on page 16. This issue is chock full of great ideas: Learn on page 20 how apps can "Take the Stress Out of Getting There, Save Time and Manage Life 'Out of Office,'" what the hot tickets are in sports incentives on page 24, and the latest trends in seating arrangements on page 46.

"Meet Me in Miami," a must-have special section devoted to all things Miami, kicks off on page 27; planners share fabulous ideas for branding and more in Las Vegas on page 48; and the best of everything New Orleans offers is on page 60.

Harvey Grotsky
Publisher

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A COASTAL COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION PUBLICATION

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Harvey Grotsky
harvey.grotsky@themeetingmagazines.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Mitch D. Miller
mitch.miller@themeetingmagazines.com

MANAGING EDITORS

Susan W. Fell
susan.fell@themeetingmagazines.com
Susan S. Gregg
sue.gregg@themeetingmagazines.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

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

PRESIDENT & CEO

Harvey Grotsky

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS

David A. Middlebrook
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES

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

CT, DC, MA, MD, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT

David Middlebrook
561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

FLORIDA/CARIBBEAN/BAHAMAS

Stan Pearlman
561-989-0600, ext. 109 • Fax: 561-989-9509
stan.pearlman@themeetingmagazines.com

AL, GA, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, VA

David Middlebrook
561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

AR, IA, IL, IN, KS, KY, MI, MN, MO

ND, NE, OH, SD, WI, WV
Cheryl Solomon
847-749-4875 • Fax: 847-241-0125
cheryl.solomon@themeetingmagazines.com

CO, LA, TX

Cheryl Solomon
847-749-4875 • Fax: 847-241-0125
cheryl.solomon@themeetingmagazines.com

AZ, CA, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY

Marshall Rubin
818-888-2407 • Fax: 818-888-4907
mrubin@westworld.com

ALASKA/CANADA/MEXICO/INTERNATIONAL

David Middlebrook
561-989-0600, ext. 114 • Fax: 561-989-9509
david.middlebrook@themeetingmagazines.com

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News & Notes

The 2,256-room Linq Hotel & Casino Set to Open in October

LAS VEGAS, NV — Caesars Entertainment will unveil The Linq Hotel & Casino at the heart of Center Strip at 3535 Las Vegas Boulevard in October. The 2,256-room hotel is a complete re-imagining of the current Quad Resort & Casino. The hotel will feature a completely renovated welcome experience built around a signature lobby bar, all new retail and spa amenities, and a dynamic new pool deck to deliver an entirely new guest experience. Combined with the world's largest observation wheel, the High Roller, and The Linq retail, dining and entertainment promenade, The Linq Hotel & Casino is set to become the new social center of Las Vegas.

"With The Linq we pioneered the creation of a new type of space for the changing Las Vegas consumer," said Tariq Shaukat, executive vice president and chief marketing officer of Caesars Entertainment. "The



A rendering of The Linq Hotel & Casino.

Linq Hotel & Casino will continue this revolutionary approach by offering a complete lifestyle experience at one of the best locations in Las Vegas. The resort will provide guests with a highly

social and connected environment, with all the great restaurants, shops and experiences available at the Linq promenade right at their fingertips."

www.caesars.com

Two Atlantic City Casino Resorts Prepare to Close Their Doors

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Caesars Entertainment Corporation announced that it will close Showboat Atlantic City, effective August 31, 2014, due to persistent declines in business levels in the area. And Revel AC Inc., the parent company of Revel Entertainment Group LLC, also announced that it filed petitions in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the District of New Jersey to commence a chapter 11 process to address liquidity issues and facilitate a sale of substantially all of Revel's assets.

Gary Loveman, chairman and chief executive officer of Caesars Entertainment, said in a statement, "While we regret the impact that this decision will have on our Showboat associates, we believe this is a necessary step to help stabilize our busi-

ness in Atlantic City and support the viability of our remaining operations in the vicinity."

Caesars is developing a new, state-of-the-art meetings facility adjacent to Harrah's Atlantic City and is pursuing other opportunities to stimulate new visitation and growth, including recently overhauling the gaming floor at Bally's and investing in new dining options throughout the company's Atlantic City footprint.

According to published reports since the initial announcement of the closure on June 26, Caesars Entertainment has said it is open to selling the Showboat to save the casino hotel from closure and is reviewing expressions of interest from a number of groups.

Revel, the newest casino resort on

The Boardwalk, filed for bankruptcy for the second time since its opening in 2012. It has never posted a profit.

The company has been searching for a buyer for about a year, and, in a letter to employees, said that the property may close on August 18 if a buyer is not found by that date. Scott Kreeger, president and COO of Revel Casino Hotel, stated, "We will work to reach an agreement with a new owner who will help ensure Revel's long-term financial stability and who shares our commitment to providing Revel's guests and players an exceptional experience in lodging, gaming, entertainment and recreation."

Revel expects to continue normal business operations throughout the process. www.caesars.com, www.revelresorts.com

La Cantera Hill Country Resort to Undergo Major Transformation

SAN ANTONIO, TX — La Cantera Hill Country Resort, managed by Destination Hotels & Resorts, has committed to a multimillion-dollar transformation. Changes include the construction of a new, freestanding destination spa, an extensive reconfiguration of the front entrance, lobby and lobby bar, and a complete redesign of the San Saba Courtyard including a new event lawn. A junior ballroom, expanded meeting and convention space, redefined restaurants, bars

and lounge concepts, and contemporary pools and family areas also are included in the most extensive reshaping of the resort since its opening in 1999.

“This substantial upgrade will allow the resort to enhance its spectacular setting and the exceptional amenities guests have come to expect,” said Destination Hotels & Resorts President and COO Jamie Sabatier. “It also will continue to position La Cantera Hill Country Resort as a world-class destination.”

The resort will suspend overnight accommodations and restaurant operations during the major phase of construction from November 3, 2014 through early April 2015. The award-winning golf courses, the Resort Course and the Palmer Course, will remain open and operate as usual during the renovations, as will their respective clubhouses and adjacent event venues. www.resortlacantera.com, www.destinationhotels.com

MGM Resorts Awarded First Casino License in Massachusetts

LAS VEGAS, NV — MGM Resorts International received a unanimous vote from the Massachusetts Gaming Commission (MGC) approving an agreement to award MGM Springfield a license to operate a resort casino in downtown Springfield. This is the first approval of a casino license in the Commonwealth, which still

faces the threat of a ballot repeal of the casino law.

MGM Springfield, an \$800 million investment, is designed to ignite an urban revival. Scheduled to open in 2017, the integrated resort casino is designed to enhance the entire urban center of Springfield. The mixed-used development project calls for a 25-story, 250-

room hotel with world-class amenities including a spa, pool and roof deck; 125,000 sf of gaming space; about 55,000 sf of retail and restaurant space; and a multi-level parking garage. Plans also call for a dining, retail and entertainment district with an eight-screen cinema, bowling alley and an outdoor stage. www.mgmresorts.com



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News & Notes

SITE Changes Name to Society for Incentive Travel Excellence

CHICAGO, IL — Since 1973, when SITE was founded as the Society of Incentive Travel Executives, the associa-



MILLER

tion's mission has been to serve as a source of expertise, knowledge and professional connections that enhance and sustain professional growth and build the value of

incentive travel experiences worldwide. As part of a long-term strategy to help grow and strengthen SITE — and the incentive travel industry as a whole — the association is embarking on a new chapter in its evolution with the strategic decision to rename the association the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence.

“As we implement the first year of SITE's strategic plan, every aspect of what we do is being questioned and scrutinized by the SITE board of directors,” said Paul Miller, SITE president 2014. “We have listened to the membership and will continue to react to the changes and demands of our industry as well as member expectations. These subtle but necessary changes in the SITE name and wordmark pave the way to building a more robust global community, which will help us achieve our goals and aspirations.”

The name change is based on feedback received from surveys and focus groups with SITE members and industry professionals worldwide. In alignment with the new name, a new logo, a new tagline, and refreshed values better illustrate the association's philosophy and value proposition, and ensures that SITE has a more compelling positioning and messaging to build an even stronger market presence into the future.

SITE will continue to reference the SITE Foundation as it relates to the critical roles that the Foundation Trustees carry out, however it will no longer be a separate brand. www.siteglobal.com

GBTA Says Individual and Group Business Travel Spending Up



MCCORMICK

WASHINGTON, DC — A Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) forecast finds U.S.-originated business travel grew nearly 3 percent year-over-year, with company spending for business travelers increasing 7.6 percent to \$71.2 billion during the first quarter of 2014. This indicates rising management confidence in the economic recovery.

Among the report's key findings, group business travel significantly outperformed individual business travel in 2013, growing 8.6 percent, a significant indicator that the business travel industry is recovering from the Great Recession and increasing discretionary spending.

“Business travel spending in the U.S. supports 7.1 million jobs,” said Michael W. McCormick, GBTA executive director and COO. “We continue to see a correlation: growth in business travel is intrinsically linked to jobs development and ultimately growth in the U.S. economy.”

Although things appear to be on the upswing, GBTA continues to be cautious. Lower-than-expected inflation poses risks for advanced economies, there is increased financial volatility in emerging market economies and increases in the cost of capital will likely dampen investment and weigh on growth. www.gbta.org



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Snapshots



1



2



3



4



5



7



6

1 The Incentive Research Foundation's 21st annual Incentive Invitational was held at Secrets Puerto Los Cabos Golf & Spa Resort in San Jose del Cabo, Mexico. A record turnout of executives shared four days of networking, education and destination showcase experiences such as riding camels along the beach and **2** enjoying a sunny day on the water. **3** Kari Vrba, Bich Lien Kahldahl and Scott Siewert pose at the IRF event, and **4** the IRF trustees gather for a group photo. **5** Questex Hospitality + Travel's Marilyn McHugh, CHA, with Julia Funt, the keynote speaker at the 17th annual HSMIA's MEET West event, held at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront, which brought **6** meeting planners together with suppliers. The next HSMIA's MEET West event will be held May 5-6, 2015. **7** Visit Phoenix and friends were in Los Angeles recently promoting their summer values and the WNBA All-Star game. (L to r) Sarah Moran, Arizona Biltmore; Ann Meyers Drysdale, Phoenix Suns and Phoenix Mercury; Doug MacKenzie, VisitPhoenix; Katie Brashear, Sheraton and Westin Phoenix Downtown Hotels; Wendy Nuchols, Wigwam Resort; and Stephanie Sanstead, Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort.

Credits: 1-4 IRF, 5, 6 HSMIA, 7 Visit Phoenix

By Stephen Barth

Mutually Beneficial Meeting Contract Clauses

Many hoteliers have likely had the experience of receiving a proposed meeting/event contract that is so one-sided they want to throw it in the trash. Then they are faced with having to spend hours negotiating the same clauses that have been negotiated for decades by parties involved in similar agreements. Ultimately, we spend far too much time and effort getting back to square one: mutual, fair contract clauses.

Today, we will not do business with a company that tries to seek an advantage via contract. Like Mr. Isadore Sharp of Four Seasons fame, we believe in doing business with people whom we trust, and if someone tries to negotiate a contract

that gives them leverage or couches us as adversaries, that does not bode well for our future relationship. Contracts should center on allocating obligations and risks fairly among the parties involved, and be structured in such a way that both parties are fairly incentivized to fulfill their obligations under the contract.

At *HospitalityLawyer.com*, we've worked hard to develop mutual meeting contract clauses so hosts and planners can spend less time renegotiating the same clauses and more time executing meetings, conferences and events. Here are three clauses that illustrate our effort to make meeting contracts more mutual:

INDEMNIFICATION

This clause shifts the risk of loss from one party to another, placing the risk on the party that causes the loss via their negligence. We often review contracts with one-sided indemnification clauses, but we believe in that old adage: If it's good for the goose, it's good for the gander! If one party asks the other party to indemnify it; then it's only fair that the asking party be prepared to indemnify as well. Beware a party that won't reciprocate the same things it requests of you.

1. Indemnification

Each party agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the other party and its employees, members, landlord, successors and assigns, from any claims, liabilities, losses, damages and expenses (including, without limitation, reasonable attorney's fees) asserted against the other party and arising out of the indemnifying party's negligence, willful misconduct and negligent performance of, or negligent failure to perform, any of its duties or obligations under this Agreement. The provisions of this indemnification are solely for the benefit of the parties hereto and not intended to create or grant any rights, contractual or otherwise, to any other person or entity.

A word of caution about indemnification clauses: They're only as good as the money behind them, so ensure the indemnitor has sufficient financial assets and/or insurance in place to support the indemnification obligation.

FORCE MAJEURE

This clause is very complex, which makes it difficult to achieve true mutuality here. It excuses performance by the parties involved when that performance cannot occur due to no fault of the parties. The clause below likely favors the planner, but we believe it is fairer and more comprehensive than other clauses that place the advantage with the host. I advise hospitality clients to review this clause regularly, as unforeseen issues that interfere with performance can arise. Terrorist attacks, cyber warfare and pandemics are just a few examples of how this clause has evolved.

2. Force Majeure

Neither party shall be considered in default in performance of its obligations should its performance thereof be delayed or prevented by force majeure. Force majeure shall include hostilities, civil commotion or riots; strike or lockout; epidemic, pandemic, norovirus, accident, fire, flood, earthquake, windstorm or explosion; lack of or failure of transportation facilities; lack of or failure of power facilities, electronic viruses and/or worms, failure of website hosting servers; regulation, ordinance, or requirement by any government or governmental agency having or claiming to have jurisdiction over the subject matter of this Agreement or over the parties; or any act of God or of Government; or any cause, existing or future, which is beyond the reasonable control and without the fault or negligence of the parties.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

This clause needs to be included so each party understands its respective obligations under this law. Once included, this clause becomes a simple matter of execution. Too often, however, parties fail to include this clause in a contract, and one or both parties violate the law while assuming the other party will handle compliance.

3. Americans with Disabilities Act

1. Hotel's Responsibilities: *The Hotel shall be fully responsible for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as it may be amended, and all the rules and regulations promulgated under it (the "ADA") with respect to:*

- a. the Hotel's policies, practices, procedures and eligibility requirements;*
- b. the provision of auxiliary aids and services in the Hotel, except; architectural, communications and transportation barriers in the Hotel, except barriers created by or within the control of the Group; and architectural, communications and transportation barriers in the Hotel, except barriers created by or within the control of the Group; and*
 - i. in areas designated for the exclusive use or within the control of the Group or other third parties exclusively using areas of the Hotel including, without limitation, tenants, licensees and other groups (collectively "Third Party Users"); and*
 - ii. aids and services required for the specific activities of the Group or other Third Party Users;*
- c. architectural, communications and transportation barriers in the Hotel, except barriers created by or within the control of the Group; and*
- d. the availability of wheelchair seating spaces in assembly areas, except to the extent that the Group exercises control or direction over the arrangement of seating in an assembly area.*

2. Group's Responsibilities: *The Group shall be fully responsible for compliance with the ADA with respect to:*

- a. the policies, practices, procedures and eligibility criteria employed by:*
 - i. the Group; and*
 - ii. any person(s) other than the Hotel providing goods or services in connection with the Group's use of or activities at the Hotel;*
- b. the provision of auxiliary aids and services: architectural, communication and transportation barriers created by or within the control of the Group; and architectural, communication and transportation barriers created by or within the control of the Group; and*
 - i. in areas designated for the exclusive use or within the control of the Group; and*
 - ii. required for the specific activities of the Group (as distinct from the activities of non-Group guests of the Hotel);*
- c. architectural, communication and transportation barriers created by or within the control of the Group; and*
- d. any wheelchair seating requirements, to the extent that the Group exercises control or direction over the arrangement of seating in an assembly area.*

In today's uncertain legal climate, clear mutual clauses that fairly allocate risk will go a long way towards avoiding litigation in the future. This will, in turn, create an environment that fosters a long-term relationship between the parties involved. **C&IT**

“Contracts should...be structured in such a way that **both parties are fairly incentivized** to fulfill their obligations under the contract.”



Stephen Barth

is an attorney, the founder of *HospitalityLawyer.com*, the annual Hospitality Law Conference series, and the Global Congress on Travel Risk Management. He is author of *Hospitality Law* and coauthor of *Restaurant Law Basics*. As a professor at the Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management at the University of Houston, he teaches courses in hospitality law and leadership. He has more than 20 years of experience in hospitality operations, including line positions, management and ownership. Stephen is a founding member of the Hospitality Industry Bar Association and member of the State Bar of Texas. He is also a mediator and a strong proponent for alternative dispute resolution.

Perspective

By Melanie McCann

From Renderings to Reality: The Importance of the Visual Mock-Up

Today, renderings are used to give us a proposed feel for everything from kitchen redesigns to custom running shoes. But did you know they are also being used in the early planning process for events to help clients visualize their attendee experience? From artist drawings to computer-aided designs, renderings enable event planners to communicate their ideas through rendered photorealistic images. Not only does a rendering give clients a preview of their event with realistic images, but it also can help pinpoint challenges early on, allowing for cost-effective adjustments and refinements before the actual event experience is developed.

What is a rendering?

A rendering is a life-like visual representation of a conceptualized item or idea, or a prospective alteration of an existing item or space. Typically created using software programs such as AutoCAD, SketchUp, Photoshop or Illustrator, renderings provide 2-D or 3-D realistic images that illustrate proposed attributes of a design.

Tip: To accurately communicate the proposed idea, all items and displays in the renderings should be made to scale.

What's the point?

In the meeting and event planning industry, a rendering is developed so that all involved in the planning process can visualize the intended outcome. From showing off the visuals of an event to conceptualizing seating arrangements (see related story on page 46), renderings not only leave the guesswork out of event planning, but they also are used to manage expectations and clarify direction.

Tip: Often to accomplish this goal, several renderings are required from different viewpoints.

When should it be created?

Once a theme or concept has been initially decided and the location or area size is known, a rendering should be created. In many cases, the rendering is created when the event idea is being “pitched” or is still in the planning stage. Perfecting the concept on paper gives the entire team confidence and clear direction on how to execute the concept in reality. Most renderings are edited multiple times before an image is created so that it satisfies the entire team.

Tip: It's much easier to scale something up or down in a software program than in the actual workshop.

Who is responsible for creating it?

Ideally, a design professional who can work closely with the entire creative team to understand the vision should be in charge of the rendering creation. It's essential that the rendering designer has a solid plan to execute the concept on paper into the finished product. When a company works with a design house to produce a rendering without engaging the team who will actually build or produce the final product there often is a disconnect when it comes time to construct the concept.

Tip: Working with a team that has both design and execution capabilities allows for the rendering to be realistic in terms of what can be executed and keeping within a set budget.

What should be included in the rendering?

Professional event renderings should include how the seating will work, aisle space, stage viewpoints and decorations. The rendering also should outline and depict real-life elements such as colors, materials, lighting and shadows. It should be true to scale and represent the accurate dimensions of the items rendered and the setting around it. Most important, it should be as accurate as possible as to what will be created in reality with as much detail as possible and comply with the laws of physics.

Tip: Detailed renderings not only help in setup, but they can help build excitement for the big event.

How else are renderings used?

Renderings also are a good way to identify preferences that may not be identified in a traditional planning process. For example, a client may not express a preference related to colors or design styles for a room or backdrop until they see the visual. Seeing a visual representation of the event plan often triggers the client to address brand standard compliance and overall designs before it's too late or too costly to make edits. In such cases, renderings can assist planners in making informed decisions and edits before the program and in some cases it allows them to really hone in on a certain concept or theme that would have been an afterthought until they see it in the rendering and then they decide to highlight that piece.

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screens on the floor and background, but after the rendering was complete, the team discovered the TV screens might get stepped on resulting in the team changing the configuration of the booth. The rendering process as shown in figure 1 proved extremely useful for this project.

As shown in figure 2, another example is a stage rendering created for the FMP Shifting Gears Conference. The meeting team was struggling with finding the right visual representation for the implied movement of the conference theme tag line, and they didn't want it to appear too literal. The rendering process enabled metroConnections to narrow the scope of the theme and allowed the team to experiment with arrows and chevrons. The solution was the literal gears. The client loved it after they saw the rendering and took the rendering to reality.

Should a rendering be used for all events?

Not necessarily. Since the rendering is a communication tool, it may or may not be a necessary step. Sometimes you can paint the portrait with words alone, however a picture typically proves helpful in ensuring clarity and identifying expectations.

What information should be provided to the person creating the rendering to ensure they can create a solid representation?

Providing precise sizing and scale information as well as direction for the general theme, look and feel is essential for building a good rendering. Other helpful elements include brand standards and desired materials. Budget parameters also should be provided.

An example of how a rendering really helped the creative process.

MetroConnections was tasked with building a trade show booth for Capital Safety to model their new Nano-Lok edge equipment (fall prevention). The initial idea was to put TV

struggling with finding the right visual representation for the implied movement of the conference theme tag line, and they didn't want it to appear too literal. The rendering process enabled metroConnections to narrow the scope of the theme and allowed the team to experiment with arrows and chevrons. The solution was the literal gears. The client loved it after they saw the rendering and took the rendering to reality.

More tips for success.

There is a delicate balance from rendering to reality. Although renderings have proven extremely useful in many cases, if expectations aren't managed accurately, concepts and details can get lost in the translation from 2-D to the real world. Understanding that a rendering is a visual proposal, not a finished product, will prevent disappointment in clients who took the concept too literally. On the other hand, a client who forces the event design team to stick to a stringent set of details can block creative progress.

C&IT

FIGURE 2



“Renderings enable event planners to **communicate** their ideas through rendered photorealistic images.”



Melanie McCann

is the in-house event graphic designer from metroConnections. In more than eight years with metroConnections, Melanie has developed and created renderings of trade show booths and displays, production stage sets, props and event décor elements. Responsible for many aspects of the creative process at metroConnections, Melanie also designs conference logos, branded elements, directional signage and print materials as well as Prezi and PowerPoint Presentations. She graduated with a BS degree from the University of Minnesota and completed an Advanced Graphic Design program through Sessions College for Professional Design. www.metroconnections.com

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Strategic Meetings Management

A Melting Pot Approach to Meetings

The Art of Building Enterprise-wide Buy-in

By Patrick Simms

The execution of every corporate meeting affects the organization's overall budget and involves the company in legal obligations via supplier contracts. In those respects, every meeting has company-wide stakeholders, well beyond the department that "owns" the meeting. A strategic meetings management program (SMMP) acknowledges the stake that the entire company has in meetings. An SMMP's mission, defined by the Global Business Travel Association, is enterprise-wide management of meeting-related processes, spend, volumes, standards and suppliers to achieve quantitative cost-savings, risk mitigation and superior service.

Not only does an SMMP acknowledge that there is a spectrum of stakeholders for each meeting, it also creates a "melting pot" of stakeholders in the sense that all departments become involved in establishing and upholding the program.

The SMMP "touches a lot of people," in the words of Melissa Nahama, director, SMM solutions, business analytics and program management, Carlson Wagonlit Travel Meetings & Events. And they all have their own perspectives on the SMMP's value, based on their individual values and priorities. "What is valuable or important about an SMMP can be defined differently depending on what role you play in the organization and the role that you play in meetings," she maintains. "Whether procurement, finance, sales, R&D or the C-suite, whether the meeting planner, meeting attendee or the meeting owner, a person will look at the value through the prism from which they come."

C-Suite Support

Naturally, senior leaders' perspective on the program is of primary importance; one wants to understand the value they see in SMM in order to deliver that value. "The things we find most critical to the success of an SMMP is that you have senior leadership approval and support, and even a named champion at that level, whether it's the CFO or the CPO or COO," Nahama notes.

According to Nancy Teresa, travel and event planning manager for Nestlé's North America Procurement organization,

the C-suite finds SMM especially valuable in terms of data collection for the "meetings that are taking place as well as it provides visibility to risk management. Nestlé Event Planning works closely with the legal team to ensure that all Nestlé's contractual requirements are incorporated into the contract prior to signature."

Nahama concurs, "The great value for the C-suite is they have some assurance that meetings are being managed holistically. It is critical to them that they are mitigating risk and that there is oversight."

Meetings Spend

The most obvious form of oversight and control that SMM provides is in terms of meetings-related spend, and some planners cite that aspect as being top-of-mind for C-level executives. Two years ago, Susan Dupart, senior director, global travel, corporate card and meetings at Santa Clara, California-based McAfee, began to research ways to centralize



Nancy Teresa Travel and Event Planning Manager, North America
Nestlé, Littleton, CO

meeting spend for the company. "We had a situation where I was asked what our spend was for meetings," she recalls. "I now have the ability to give executives data that we didn't have before."

Lee Ann Adams Mikeman, director, conference planning and special events at Reston, Virginia-based Leidos, a national security, health and engineering company, adds that the spend data improves the ROI assessment for meetings. "Because of our SMM, we've been able to assist in demonstrating return on investment through our event technology survey-



"The things we find most critical to the success of an SMMP is that you have senior leadership approval and support, and even a named champion at that level."

Melissa Nahama

Director, SMM Solutions, Business Analytics and Program Management
Carlson Wagonlit Travel Meetings & Events
Philadelphia, PA

ing capability. We can measure attendee experiences and satisfaction through technology reporting and compare that information to our spend data," Mikeman explains. "If you can quantify attendee satisfaction to senior leadership, that's a huge value add for your SMMP."

Procurement

In general, procurement tends to see the same value in SMM as C-level executives do, namely risk management and spend control, but their perspective on the program is based on more hands-on

"By engaging the SMM team early in the process, we are better able to influence the decisions and promote use of our preferred suppliers, leverage our spend and provide logistical guidance when needed."

involvement with supplier relations, including payment and contracting. "The discussion with procurement centered around managing the contracting process to mitigate risk and facilitating supplier payments," Mikeman relates, "Efficient supplier payments on the front end resulted in rebates from the bank on the back end that offset SMMP costs. Those rebates along with the savings the program generated through leveraged spend with preferred suppliers and favorable contract terms were top priorities for procurement. Prior to the creation of

An SMMP Success Story

An SMMP has been in place at Leidos, formerly known as Science Applications International Corporation, since 2004. According to Lee Ann Adams Mikeman, director, conference planning and special events at the Reston, Virginia-based national security, health and engineering company, the program today is considered “mature” according to the GBTA SMM Maturity Index (www.gbta.org/foundation/benchmarkingtool) and has implemented all SMM components. As the program’s

“I was passionate about our mission and convinced that we could make a difference in helping the company be more efficient.”



Lee Ann Adams Mikeman

Director, Conference Planning and Special Events
Leidos, Reston, VA

principal architect, she was responsible for the “creation, socialization, training, technology implementation, change management communication, policy and compliance tracking across the enterprise.” The early collaborative process involved numerous SMM stakeholders, resulting in a rich melting pot of various perspectives.

“There were challenges during the initial phase of our SMM, but the engagement of key functional stakeholders early on coupled with strong support from mid-level and upper management led to our success,” Mikeman explains. “Agility and adaptability to changing business environments was, and continues to be, extremely important

in maintaining the strength of our SMMP. I was passionate about our mission and convinced that we could make a difference in helping the company be more efficient. I worked closely with our collaborative partners from facilities, procurement, legal, communications, marketing and travel to ensure they understood our SMM goals and how the program could benefit them through increased efficiency, reduced costs, mitigated risk and standardized event delivery. I shared examples of problems that had been encountered in their respective organizations and offered solutions through our proposed SMM. Our holistic approach for managing meetings and events across the enterprise resonated with them, and they wanted to contribute to making the program successful.”

Melissa Koskovich, vice president/director of communications, recalls how her department was among those departments that received annual education and training on the new procedures for meetings. “Once employees understood the benefits of a holistic approach for managing meetings across the enterprise and how their jobs would be simplified, they embraced the change,” she says. As for her department, the SMMP “has made a significant impact in the suppliers we do business with for our corporate meetings and events. Preferred suppliers are carefully vetted on a number of different aspects, from ability to execute our requirements along with their financial viability and willingness to accept contract terms. Leidos’ SMMP engagement process includes executing well-negotiated contracts aimed to mitigate risk wherever possible, and also includes preferred pricing terms and conditions that are mutually agreeable to both parties. The team maintains a list of preferred providers whom the company can easily work with to efficiently support a wide array of Leidos meeting and event requirements.”

— PS

our SMMP in 2004, procurement had witnessed unauthorized staff signing supplier contracts that included less than favorable terms surrounding cancellation, indemnification, attrition and insurance. Our SMMP managed that risk and provided visibility to meeting owners so they could make informed decisions. We also developed contract addenda with outside counsel for hotels, special event suppliers and sponsorships to ensure we had the best possible terms in place for our meetings and events.”

Sales and Marketing

Mikeman also had discussions about

SMM with communications and marketing, and those representatives saw its potential to uphold and promote the company image through events that were properly conducted in terms of supplier sourcing, contract negotiation and branding. “It has really helped having a program in place that assures professionalism across all of the meetings and events the company executes; that’s a big one for our communications and marketing team, as well as our branding and community outreach efforts”

And assuming that an SMMP ultimately saves money on meetings, more funds are (theoretically) available to create a

meeting with a stronger message to attendees, a benefit that appeals to marketing reps. “I think that very often, people in sales and marketing view (an SMMP as being about) cost cutting, and that’s why they tend to shy away from it. But you can demonstrate to them that you can save them money through a very well-organized approach to sourcing, negotiation and contracting,” Nahama explains.

“And by saving dollars in that respect, you can funnel money back into the system for them to use in other ways that hopefully will better support their customers. That can mean having a longer meeting, or one that has more money to

spend on content production or potentially guest speakers that can drive a more impactful message. To (marketing reps), the value really is in producing the best meeting possible, and so the trick is to get them to understand that the SMMP as a whole will enable them to do that.”

Bringing All Stakeholders to the Table

The meeting planner is often the catalyst for an SMMP and thus involved in making a case for it to the various stakeholders. But an argument for the program will stand a better chance of success if it is predicated on an understanding of what each stakeholder would find most appealing about enterprise-wide oversight of meetings. The job of the planner (or whoever is in fact the program’s catalyst) “is to make sure they take all the views, objectives, and desires of all the different stakeholders and try to bring them together and have them work cohesively,” says Nahama. The idea is “to make sure everybody has a seat at the table. It’s not that everybody gets their way or that you can please everybody all of the time, but you can make sure people have a clear understanding of what the program’s goals are and what needs to be accomplished. They have a sense that they’re being included in the process, and therefore you can move things forward much more easily.”

It’s also important to stress that an SMMP’s goal is not to take away each department’s control of its own meetings, such that individual departments will no longer make decisions about strategy, objective and content. As Dupart clarified to stakeholders toward establishing McAfee’s SMMP, “ultimately you’re still the meeting owner. The only things we’re taking out of your hands are the sourcing and the contractual piece. And because we’re doing that, it protects you as a meeting owner because you then can be assured that the correct terms and conditions have been agreed upon.”

Enlisting Input

The “melting pot” approach not only applies to the establishment of an SMMP; it also can be taken with regard to the

planning of an individual meeting that is of particular significance to the company. Provided they have the time and interest, stakeholders apart from the meeting owner often can helpfully weigh in on the event’s conceptualization and design.

“We try to get people to be more collaborative around the objectives of the meeting and whether they are in line with the business objectives of the organization,” says Nahama. “So if, for example, an organization is in a growth year, then you may choose to do a meeting in a very different way. It may be more celebratory and upbeat. However, if you’re in a cost-cutting year, you want to make sure that the design of your meeting (sends that message).”

Meetings About Meetings

Some organizations achieve this collaboration through “meetings about meetings” or planning committees.

The planning committees for Leidos’ major meetings “usually involve a big cross-section of the company, representatives from many of our functional areas, and that helps us make sure we’re engaging properly and covering all of our bases,” Mikeman says. The various representatives typically include “our communications organization, a senior leader, our security team, somebody who’s representing the technology component and procurement at times, depending on how much supplier spend (the meeting entails). It’s usually a good approach because we see things from multiple perspectives, which strengthens the program overall. We have to stay organized during every planning meeting to be effective (maintain task time lines, action items and agendas).”

Adds Teresa, “Our host looks to us to be the experts in sourcing and negotiating their meeting for them and ensure our policies and procedures are incorporated. By engaging the SMM team early in the process, we are better able to influence the decisions and promote use of our preferred suppliers, leverage our spend and provide logistical guidance when needed. By working together in this manner, we can save the hosts both time and effort in securing a contract.”

Attendees as Stakeholders

The melting pot can, and arguably should also include attendees themselves; after all, they are stakeholders in the meeting insofar as they are investing their time. “It’s really important to engage the attendees around your business and meeting objectives, and that doesn’t necessarily have to take place after a meeting, which is the traditional way that planners survey their attendees,” says Nahama.

“If you want a return on your objective, not just your investment, you should really be engaging with your attendees before, during and after, and there are multiple ways to do that, including surveys, focus groups and so



“I now have the ability to give executives data that we didn’t have before.”

Susan Dupart

Senior Director, Global Travel, Corporate Card & Meetings
McAfee, Santa Clara, CA

cial media. Focus groups could target attendees from different generations, levels of experience or vertical markets, and you would want to make sure that you have a broad-based understanding of the people who attend your meeting and what are the ways that they seek to get information and what helps them retain it.”

Feedback from attendees might reveal, for example, the best means to deliver information about the company’s financials or future direction at the annual meeting: who should make these presentations, and what kind of presentation would the audience find most compelling? When attendee feedback suggests answers to such questions, attendees effectively gain a seat on the planning committee. To put it more colorfully, they become yet another vital ingredient in the melting pot. **C&IT**

Planners' Favorite Travel Apps



Take the Stress Out of Getting There, Save Time and Manage Life 'Out of Office'

Planners and attendees function as full-fledged business travelers as they make their way to offsite group meetings and events. And anything that helps to relieve the stresses of getting there and back, as well as navigating the unfamiliar, will help the meeting start out on the right foot. To the rescue come a number of apps created both specifically for frequent corporate travel and for general leisure travelers that smooth the way.

Pocket Concierge

We've come a long way from the days when syncing your calendar or email to your phone was a headache requiring several rounds of back and forth with tech support. Both meeting planners and meeting attendees now constantly use their phones as mobile offices while they're in sessions or on the road, review-

ing documents, responding to emails and doing research on the Web.

Nicole Campana, global event specialist for Redwood City, California-based Oracle ex-
By Gabi Logan plains, "I run marketing events. In the marketing cloud, when we talk to venues about our bandwidth needs, we make it clear that we want them to assume that everyone is always on three devices: phone, iPad and laptop. Most of all, though, I see people using their phones."

This is not just because phones are the smallest and easiest to hop on of the three main devices Campana mentioned, but also due to the increasingly wide range of ways to use what was once a simple device just for placing calls. Business travel apps available today turn your phone into a travel concierge and a personal assistant.

"I usually add an app if it's going to help me personally or professionally save time," explains Tanya Zuckerman, CMP, CMM, manager of meetings and events for Urbandale, Iowa-based Bayer CropScience. "I am just really getting into the apps, but most have quicker access than their sites and the information is more accurate, so if I hear of anything new I am quick to download and try."

Part of what is so powerful about integrating travel apps into your routine is that they help you at each key leg of your trip, from getting the traffic when you head to the airport, to tracking your flight delays; and from keeping the pulse of what's going on on social media during your event, to helping you file your receipts and expenses each day.

"I use all of the airline apps, and even

specific airport apps if I am tracking flights," says Zuckerman. "I can stay ahead of what's being posted, and as soon as I land, I can access without having to wait on the Internet."

Mobile Office

She adds, "I also use **Concur** to track and upload my receipts, **BCD TripSource** and **Passbook**." This trio of powerful business travel apps — Concur for photographing, filing and approving expenses; BCD TripSource for itinerary management and Passbook to store usable images of loyalty cards, boarding passes, and other travel and attraction tickets — can substantially reduce the paper weight you lug around during events.

Jessica Gioglio, social media strategist for Canton, Massachusetts-based Dunkin' Donuts, also relies on the receipt photographing function of Concur, which has made preparing expense reports finally cease to be a time-consuming chore for many business travelers, both to plan travel and file expense reports. "Expense reports are far easier via the app than the desktop experience, plus you can upload photos of receipts from a smartphone, making the tedious task of filing an expense report much easier," she says. "During events, I use **Evernote** as an easy way to take notes and send seamlessly to yourself while traveling, and **DropBox** for storing and sending large files and presentations."



"I usually add an app if it's going to help me personally or professionally save time. ...I use Concur to track and upload my receipts, BCD TripSource and Passbook."

Tanya Zuckerman, CMP, CMM, Manager, Meetings and Events
Bayer CropScience, Triangle Park, NC

Location Tracking

Campana and her team at Oracle have found ways to adapt relatively common travel apps to help connect while they travel for their events. "I use **TripIt** myself, to keep my team and family apprised of where I am." Like BCD TripSource, TripIt is an itinerary management app, but the extended version automatically updates you on flight delays and rebooking options, as well as allowing you to share your travel plans with other users. "A lot of people on our team use it, so it's a good way to see who is where. You can share it

so others can just see your current or next trip, which is what I do with most of my coworkers. It's a good way to look quickly and see is he here? Can he do that?"

"As a team we also use **Foursquare** a lot in the same way," she says. This ubiquitous location-based app is widely used in non-travel and non-corporate settings to alert others in your network when you have arrived at or are leaving restaurants and hotels as well as many other listed public locations such as airports and parks. Did they check in at the airport? Did they land? Did they check in yet at the hotel or the meeting venue? During

the event, it helps if you have an event you're running in multiple locations. That's when we check in more. For this event we have coming up, we're all on the same floor, so we may only use it Sunday and Monday when people are getting in."

Planner Wish List

A large percentage of planners surveyed for this story do not use any apps yet for their business or personal travel. Some do not have smartphones, while others do and only use them for email and surfing the Web. In some cases, even if a

planner has his or her own smartphone, it is not a standard company issue, so it's hard to ensure that they can connect with other planners in their department or attendees through the same apps.

One concern, particularly in higher security industries such as legal services and pharmaceuticals, data security is a concern. Many planners are not sure what apps they can use for their company information and event-related data in particular.

Alternatively, while many planners who use apps prize them for having the most updated information, oth-

Dossiers On the Go

Refresh. In-depth profiles before important meetings may have once only been available to people with extensive support staffs, but Refresh makes them for the masses. Input an individual you need to connect with, and Refresh scans publicly available data and social networks to create a dossier so you can congratulate someone on their new house or baby, or bond over attending the same alma mater.

Cardmunch. This new app from LinkedIn allows you to photograph business cards as you receive them and automatically enter them into your contacts while

pulling info from the LinkedIn database to create a more complete profile of the individual's background for your reference.

Mynd Calendar. As efficient if not more than having a secretary in your pocket, Mynd Calendar keeps an eye on traffic for you, letting you know how much time you need to get from one appointment to the next. Then it imports data from LinkedIn on the individual you're next meeting with to review before you arrive. If you're running late, one click alerts attendees of the next appointment. The premium version tracks mileage for expensing as well as giving you reports on your work-life balance and internal-vendor/client-meeting ratio.

— GL

ers don't find this to be the case. "One of the most frustrating app issues is outdated information," says Jeriana Strother, conference, meetings and travel assistant for Dallas, Texas-based GameStop. "Why do they still have the information available for a restaurant or hotel that is no longer in business? I don't get it. Current information makes or breaks my travel app experience."

Even avid app users such as Zuckerman wish there were more apps to specifically meet the needs of road warriors. "I am on the hunt for an app that can help me find quick and healthy meals or recipes on the run whether food trucks, take out or delivery," she says. "Also something for getting a quicker more effective workout. I just downloaded **7 Minute Workout** so that I have something I can do in my room. I'd love to see something on safe places to walk or run or even a police app on where there are crime issues so that I can avoid those places and hotels that are in high crime areas. I'm sure these are all out there, but I haven't heard of them yet."

While there are some apps, particularly in the health market, that meet some of these needs, nothing has yet bubbled up to provide a comprehensive solution for these business travel issues,

"CO Everywhere...allows you to circle the area you're around and pull in all the conversation and info from Yelp, Twitter, Instagram, Eventbrite and more. It's a quick and easy way to see what people at the event are buzzing about and help meeting planners get a feel for an area."

Jessica Gioglio, Media Strategist
Dunkin Donuts, Canton, MA

though the market keeps putting out apps with a finely tuned focus on meeting many of the business-related needs of the business traveler.

International Travel Apps

Many travel apps, while useful domestically, really shine when you go abroad. What you may lose in terms of access to destination-specific information, you gain in apps that provide a real value add by allowing you to get around and communicate like you would at home — without racking up a monumental data bill.

As hotels are increasingly catching up with and building out to accommodate planners' heavy bandwidth needs, many apps allow planners and attendees to keep in touch with their team at home and onsite, and even conduct lengthy calls for free while on the road.

WhatsApp is great for international travel when you need to be able to text messages on Wi-Fi versus data," says Gioglio. WhatsApp, a popular, free messaging service, allows users to message anyone in their phone contacts who also has a WhatsApp account. There's no need to add people to the app; it automatically senses who you are able to contact from your phone book. "**Groupme** is an awesome app that allows you to create groups to chat, and is great for events," she continues. "We used this extensively at SXSW to share exciting events and tips, and to schedule meet-ups for coffee or drinks."

While many people are familiar with **Skype**, an app similar to Apple's **FaceTime** widely used for video calls from camera-equipped computers, not as many are familiar with its powerful capabilities for travel. When you install

Popular Picks

FlightAware. This was one of the first apps of its ilk on the market and continues to be the top pick for planners. The highly detailed flight tracker allows you to watch your airplane as it arrives from the prior flight, check weather radar to keep an eye on potential delays and automatically alerts you to any gate changes for your flights.

Triplt. Much more than a basic itinerary management tool, Triplt allows you to forward all types of confirmation emails to the app — including flight, hotel, restaurants, rental car confirmations — which automatically formats, imports and adds to your itinerary; it also allows you to automatically share the itinerary with others. Before you leave, it tracks your loyalty accounts and lets you know if you are eligible for a fare-based refund, and as you travel, it tracks and automatically alerts you to any delays and cancellations, while offering you other flight options if you need to rebook. There's a group option that allows you to coordinate and track the travel and whereabouts of your attendees.

DropBox. You've no doubt heard of the DropBox website if you haven't used it yourself. While DropBox is a great way to have speakers and presenters share their PowerPoints and other files with you in a way that you can easily get them on any computer or device you need at your event, you also can view the files on your phone to double-check that you've got everything you need for the day.

Fitbit. Though it's not exactly a travel- or business-specific app, FitBit has captured many corporate cultures by storm as companies offer heavily discounted memberships to promote employee health. Using a bracelet that tracks the amount of steps you take each day and user input data, FitBit lets you see just how much exercise you can get running around a conference — or whether you might be better off with just a few nibbles of the chocolate soufflé at the gala. Tanya Zuckerman, manager, meetings and events of Bayer CropScience says, "I use my fitbit app a lot! Fitbit keeps me moving and motivated and aware. It's also really fun. That app is changing my life."

— GL

the app on your phone, as long as you have wireless Internet, you can make and receive calls as if you're on your home network. No need to use minutes as you would with Wi-Fi calling. Calls are free if between another Skype user or incur very low rates to call other cellphones or landlines. Similarly, **Viber**, one of the top new apps in the last year, allows you to call any other Viber user over Wi-Fi for free.

One of the most compelling ways apps can enhance your travel experience abroad is negotiating language barriers. Whether you need to learn a few key phrases to get around during site visits or you prefer to have a pocket-sized translator to instantly do everything for you, apps have come a long way to make international travel far less of a headache.

With **Triplingo**, you can set preferences for formal or colloquial phrasing; whether you are on a trip of a business nature; and specific questions or topics that come up often, and the app will design a custom language program to teach you the phrases you need.

Talk to Me offers real-time translation in 15 languages, ideal for times when you have a layover in a country that you're not well versed in and can't find anyone to help you who speaks English. Similarly, **Word Lens** allows you to snap a picture of a sign or product description, and quickly translates the content for you.

An even more specific translation app, **mPassport**, is your key to negotiating tricky medical situations abroad. The app comes with translations of common symptoms, conditions and medications in 12 languages, and it has a vetted list of doctors and clinics in 30 destinations who can treat you or anyone on your team who needs help in English.

Both at home and abroad, one of the simplest but most frequent things planners and attendees need is reliable insider information about their destination. **UrbanDaddy**, a website and newsletter focused on unearthing the most interesting dining and activities in cities around the country and globe, has released an app that allows you to choose restaurants based on your group

and needs. Taking out a group of male colleagues? Choose the "guys" option for a casual but classy place for a drink. Need to recommend a place for a client meeting to an attendee or exhibitor? There's a setting for that, too.

"When I travel, I use **UrbanSpoon**, **Trip Advisor** and occasionally **Yelp**," says Strother. "I am able to find unique restaurants, attractions and hotels that meet my standards. I also use Trip Advisor when making hotel reservations for others. Trip Advisor and UrbanSpoon were recommended to me, and I haven't been disappointed with the results." While UrbanSpoon and Yelp are primarily used for restaurant recommendations, the TripAdvisor app also includes city guides for many locations that provide an extra resource: downloadable maps to help you navigate foreign cities without



"I use TripIt myself, to keep my team and family apprised of where I am. ...As a team we also use Foursquare a lot in the same way."

Nicole Campana, Global Event Specialist
Oracle, Cambridge, MA

data. The city guides also feature picks for what to do in each city depending on your needs, family activities, top attractions, off-the-beaten path sights and more.

"I would like to try **Hotel Tonight**, but I always forget about it, mainly because I make my hotel reservation days, sometimes weeks, in advance," she continues. Though this app is less relevant for planners for the reason Strother mentions, if someone on the team needs to come a day earlier or stay a day late at the last minute, this app, which has been revolutionizing the business travel space, can come in handy. It collates a list not only of cities with availability for the evening in question, but also that meet Hotel Tonight's criteria and are set to offer users a special deal.

Another new app to hit the scene, **MyCityWay** is ideal to set up right before you leave for your meeting destination. It creates a dashboard for your new location incorporating everything from weather

to local news to traffic cameras to restaurants and service recommendations.

To get a bird's-eye view of what is going on in your destination on social media — particularly to see what attendees are buzzing about and how to steer the conversation — try the new app **CO Everywhere**. "CO Everywhere is a local Boston startup that allows you to circle the area you're around and pull in all the conversation and info from Yelp, Twitter, Instagram, Eventbrite and more," says Gioglio. "It's a quick and easy way to see what people at the event are buzzing about and help meeting planners get a feel for an area."

Final Thoughts

Beyond the event app, there are many apps that can be used to help planners and attendees get the most out of the

destination, and make the process of getting to and from it seamless.

If you have a few extra minutes, try surfing the www.meetingapps.com online portal for more useful mobile apps.

Many are easy to set up and use, though if you have concerns about the security of corporate data, it's always best to check in with your technical team first. But if you have both a corporate and personal smartphone, many planners have found it easiest to keep their apps on their own phone, so they can use them for personal travel as well.

While apps today do many things that seemed impossible years ago — calling for free while traveling in a foreign country or instantly finding new flight options for you when your flight is cancelled — new ones appear every day to further hone and enhance the business travel experience. You never know what you'll find. As Campana says, "I download every app I hear about and try it at least once." **C&IT**

Incentive Programs

The Hot Ticket



A Planner's Game Plan for Once-in-a-Lifetime Sports Incentives

By John Buchanan

Although not as well-known as the classic incentive trip to Mexico or Hawaii, programs built around a major sporting event such as The Super Bowl, the Masters golf tournament, the U.S. Open golf tournament or the NCAA Final Four basketball games have a powerful appeal and generate exceptional results for the companies that do them.

And no matter the sports event, there is a common denominator in terms of its motivational appeal, says Robert Tuchman, president of New York-based Goviva!, one of the specialized compa-



Credits: Goviva!



Goviva! helps planners deliver memorable sports experiences. (Top) an autographed souvenir from a Super Bowl trip; (above left) baseball signing with MLB stars Mookie Wilson and Dwight Gooden; (above right) meet-and-greet with NFL legends (l to r) Goviva guest, Roger Craig, guest, Warren Moon, guest, Ed McCaffrey.

nies that helps planners deliver phenomenal sports-related experiences.

“The main thing sports incentives do is play on people’s passions,” says Tuchman, who has been thrilling planners and their attendees since 1996. “There’s nothing bigger than sports and how people follow their teams. Sports is the biggest hobby most people have. So that means they

work very well as incentives, because incentive programs have to promise something your target audience really wants. And major sports events are also unique enough that for most people they represent a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

Goviva! creates programs for both internal and external employees, as well as vendors and customers. “But most of the

“At the Masters, you feel like you are a private invited guest of the PGA. It’s that exclusive. You literally feel like a celebrity.”

ISRAEL PAGAN JR., Independent Business Consultant
Fort Lauderdale, FL

time, these programs are for independent contractors and customers,” Tuchman says. The reason? “The performance and loyalty of those kinds of people goes directly to a company’s bottom line.”

Although Tuchman and his major competitors have all done sports incentive programs for large groups, he says the optimal group size is 20–40 participants. “That’s because it’s going to be a more intimate experience, and with a group that size, there are just more things you can do as part of the overall experience before, during and after the sports event.”

The competitive cost of a sports program versus a luxury program to an A-list destination such as Mexico or Hawaii often surprises planners, says Patrick Glass, president of Knoxville, Tennessee-based Glass Entertainment Management, another leading provider of sports event planning services.



Danny E Hooks / Shutterstock.com

Only the most prestigious events, such as the Masters, can inspire true excitement from high-level incentive winners who have, for the most part, “been there, done that.”

In terms of cost, the Super Bowl and the Masters are the top-of-the-line events, with the former typically costing about \$5,300 per person and the latter costing about \$3,900–4,500 per person for the weekend tournament round. A practice round at the Masters costs about \$1,800–2,200 per person, Glass says. Planners on smaller budgets can take a group to a NASCAR event in Las Vegas for as little as \$300–600 per person, he says. Those prices include hotel rooms, food, entertainment and event tickets. They do not include airfare.

The Super Bowl Is King

Although there is an almost endless list of sports events in the U.S. and around the world that can serve as the

basis for a major incentive program, the Super Bowl has always been and will always be the gold standard.

“The Super Bowl is the most watched sporting event in the world,” says Adria Manente, event and trade show manager at Stamford, Connecticut-based Icon International Inc., a major corporate barter company that has been taking groups of 35–40 C-suite level customer executives to the big game since 2006. “And the experience of going to the Super Bowl is just not accessible to the average person,” she says.

Late last year, she notes, media reports exposed the fact that a shockingly tiny percentage of tickets is available to the general public, with virtually all of them controlled by the NFL, teams and corporate sponsors.

Icon International uses the Super Bowl experience as a way of saying “thank you” to its best clients, Manente says. Qualification is based on the volume of business done with the company during the incentive program.

Israel Pagan Jr., a business consul-

Sports event planning pro Patrick Glass (right), attends the Kentucky Derby with client Gary Joffe, CPA.



Credit: Gary Joffe, CPA

“You always need a plan A, plan B and plan C, because anything is possible.”

PATRICK GLASS, President
Glass Entertainment Management

tant and independent meeting and event planner based in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, has worked with Goviva! for years to use sports incentives on behalf of his technology clients, including Citrix Systems, Star Computer Group and Riverbed.

He agrees with Manente that the Super Bowl and more intimate but equally prestigious events such as the Masters have a unique appeal. "It's a matter of the energy at events like the Super Bowl and Masters," Pagan says. "No matter what you do for a typical incentive program to a place like Mexico, you're just not going to get that kind of energy. It's unique to events like the Super Bowl."

In the software industry, where most of Pagan's clients have been, at

"I love to watch their faces. ...They're just blown away. I've had CEOs tell me, 'I never ever thought I'd be on the field after a Super Bowl.'"

ADRIA MANENTE, Event and Trade Show Manager
Icon International Inc., Stamford, CT

senior levels — whether that means an internal employee or an external vendor such as an IT reseller — "people are pretty wealthy," he says. "And if it's just a matter of a nice trip to Mexico or Hawaii, that's something they can easily buy on their own and do alone. So they're not going to be very excited about that. So it's not much of an incentive. But giving them a unique experience like going to the Super Bowl or the Masters is something they dream about — and that they can't do on their

own, no matter how much money they have. They don't have the contacts and connections to pull off something like that. And that means they know going to a major sporting event will give them something they can't get on their own. And that's a powerful motivator."

The most important thing to keep in mind, Pagan says, is that the ticket to the game is not the prize. "To do this well, you don't say to people, 'You're going to win a ticket to the Super Bowl,'" he says. "You have to create an all-inclusive package, a totally immersive experience. For example, I've done private dinner events the night before the game with members of the

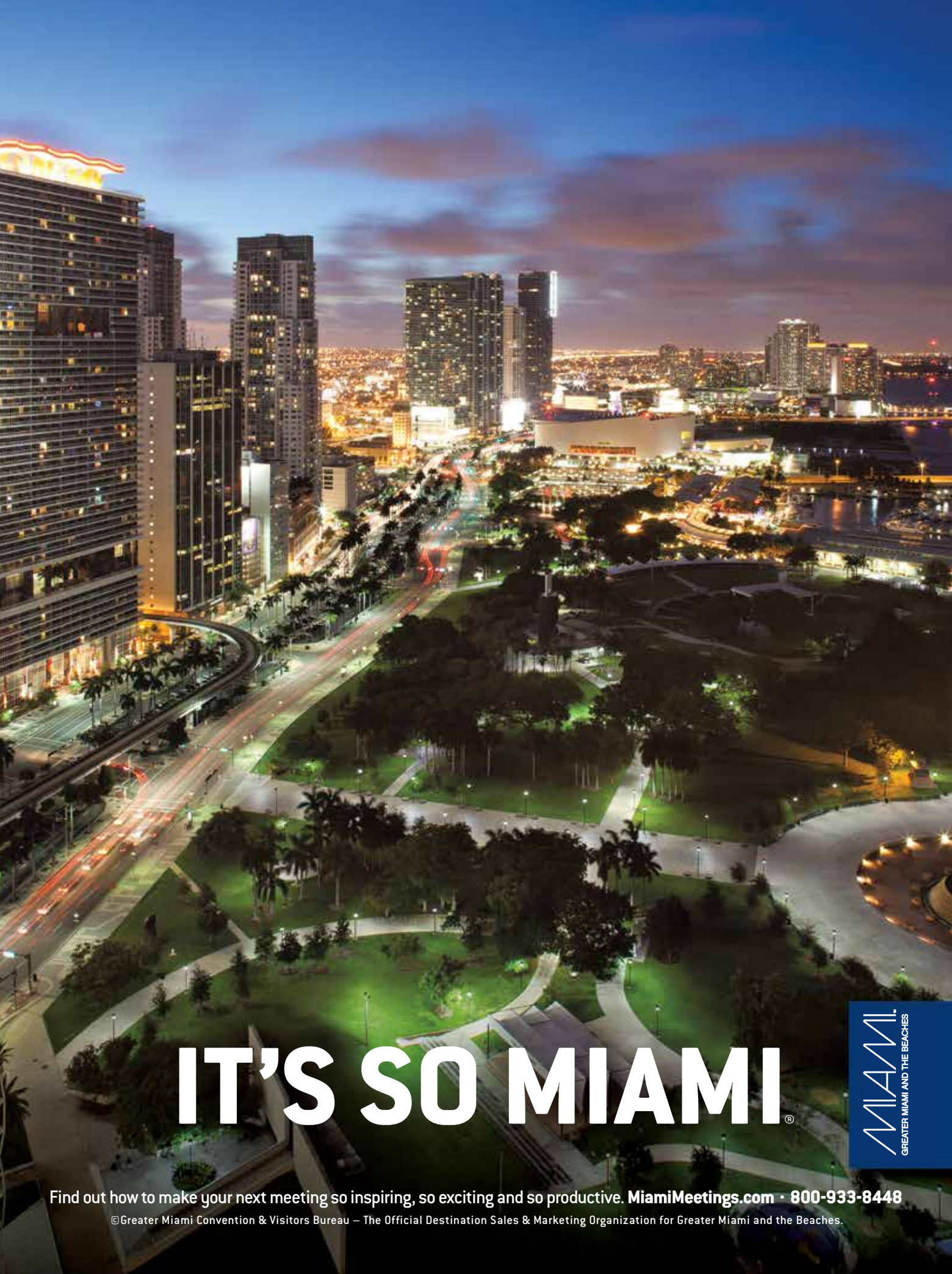
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Last year's Super Bowl between the Denver Broncos and Seattle Seahawks was held at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

Credits: MetLife Stadium

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Over the last decade, Miami – a time-honored, century-old tropical hideaway for tourists and celebrities – has evolved into one of the most successful and spectacular meeting and convention destinations in the world.

By John Buchanan

The "Miami" brand is built on a multifaceted foundation, from its rich architectural history to its ever-expanding multicultural influences from food to fashion and music. Today, the city's sprawling metropolitan area — which includes distinctive enclaves such as the downtown arts district, Brickell financial district, Coconut Grove, Coral Gables and Miami Beach — combines ultra-modern urban chic with a laidback, old-school resort charm. Despite the striking modernity of the city's hotel product, meeting venues and other infrastructure, it's still the fabulous beaches and subtropical climate, framed by an energetic Latin vibe, that warm planners to meetings Miami-style.

Much of its success, in terms of resurgent awareness and curiosity, grew out of the South Beach phenomenon that erupted in the late 1990s and drew the likes of the late, legendary fashion designer Gianni Versace, and in his wake models from all over the world, which led to a thriving fashion, movie and TV scene that picked up where "Miami Vice" had left off in terms of style and energy.

Next came the rapid evolution of the Brickell financial district, which is now the international banking capital of Latin America, and the downtown arts and entertainment district that is now home to some of the most acclaimed performing arts facilities in the world.

The Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, designed by global superstar architect Cesar Pelli, hosts a world-class season of theatre, symphony concerts and performances by Miami City Ballet, headed by iconic former dancer Edward Villella.

The New World Center, designed by legendary architect Frank Gehry and home base of the world-renowned New World Symphony headed by maestro Michael Tilson Thomas, is located in Miami Beach. The complex features SoundScape Park, where visitors can watch performances or films projected onto a 7,000 sq. ft. wall.

Another Miami landmark — one with a much longer history — is Bicentennial Park, located on a prime 30+ acre parcel of city-owned



The Pérez Art Museum Miami



Patricia and Phillip Frost Museum of Science

Biscayne Bay waterfront, near American Airlines Arena. It includes the 2,600-foot Biscayne Baywalk. Now, however, the location is in the process of completing a major new attraction, Museum Park. Its cultural cornerstones are the new Pérez Art Museum Miami, which made its debut last year, and the Patricia and Phillip Frost Museum of Science, a \$275 million, 250,000 sq. ft. facility that will open next year. Other venues and attractions popular with groups include Miami Seaquarium, Zoo Miami, Jungle Island and NASCAR's Homestead-Miami Motor Speedway.

MEETING INFRASTRUCTURE

While Miami boasts cultural sizzle aplenty, it's the city's vast and diverse meeting infrastructure that gets the attention of planners. The Greater Miami area now has nearly 50,000 hotel rooms, from unique and charming boutique hotels famous all over the world to major-brand meeting-and-convention properties. In recent years, billions of dollars have been invested to make Miami competitive with any other destination in the country when it comes to top-quality accommodations and modern amenities.

One thing that further contributes to Miami's appeal is that virtually all of its hotels offer outdoor function spaces that showcase spectacular views of Biscayne Bay, from downtown or the Atlantic Ocean from Miami Beach. And Miami's subtropical climate means warm weather that allows for comfortable outdoor events throughout the year.

The ability to exploit local color includes rooftop pool decks, lushly landscaped tropical patios and gardens, expansive lawns overlooking world-renowned golf courses, and palm-lined courtyards and terraces with breathtaking views.

Meanwhile, Miami offers world-class convention and conference facilities. For decades, the Miami Beach Convention Center has been one of the most popular facilities in the world. Located at the heart of the Art Deco Historic District, the complex is within easy walking distance of all of South Beach's best known restaurants, bars and nightclubs. Opened in 1957, the center quickly earned iconic status when it served as the site where Cassius Clay (later known as Muhammad Ali) defeated

Sonny Liston for his first world heavyweight championship in 1964.

The facility's highest-profile user is the prestigious Art Basel, a critically acclaimed art fair that comes every year. To keep pace with its competition across the country, the Convention Center will begin a \$500 million renovation and expansion project after next year's Art Basel. And the art fair recently announced that it would stay in Miami for another five years, even through the renovation.

Another facility highly popular for smaller conventions and conferences is the Miami Convention & Conference Center, located between downtown and the edge of the Brickell financial district. It's a foundational element of the James L. Knight International Center/Hyatt Regency complex and features a 444-seat auditorium, a 117-seat tiered acoustically balanced lecture hall and 20 meeting rooms.

For serious business conferences and educational or training seminars, another good option is the Biltmore, a National Historic Landmark property built in 1926. The AAA Four Diamond hotel features 273 guest rooms and 70,537 sq. ft. of indoor/outdoor meeting and function space located within the hotel and the adjacent Conference Center of the Americas at the Biltmore. The hotel has 14,000 sq. ft. of indoor space and 24,000 sq. ft. of outdoor space; and the Conference Center of the Americas has 14,797 sq. ft. of indoor space and 17,740 sq. ft. of outdoor event space. Individual facilities include three ballrooms surrounded by expansive terraces, breakout rooms, two state-of-the-art amphitheaters, and executive boardrooms.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Although to the uninitiated Miami might appear to be a homogenous megatropolis, it is in fact a patchwork of distinct neighborhoods, each of which can claim its own charm and appropriateness for a particular group.

Over the last decade, downtown Miami — the part of the city located along the famous Biscayne Boulevard corridor — has been



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Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts

re-engineered into one of the country's top arts-and-entertainment districts as a result of the development of the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, which served as a powerful catalyst for an explosion of art galleries, and an eclectic collection of excellent local restaurants and shops.

At the heart of the neighborhood is the Miami Design District, a neighborhood conceived and developed by local entrepreneur Craig Robins, a pioneer of the early South Beach scene two decades earlier. The easily walkable Design District is dedicated specifically to innovative fashion, design, architecture and dining experiences.

Located south of downtown Miami is Coconut Grove, established as a famous brand decades before developers started resuscitating the Miami Beach neighborhood that would become known worldwide as South Beach. Once an arts colony, Coconut Grove is now a shopping and dining mecca known for its quaint boutiques, art galleries, restaurants and cafes. It's also home to the landmark Vizcaya Museum & Gardens on Biscayne Bay. Built in 1916, Vizcaya — one of Miami's most celebrated attractions — is an Italian Renaissance-style mansion that can host indoor functions or deliver an unforgettable experience in its famous outdoor gardens.

Another one-of-a-kind venue in Coconut Grove is the Cruz Building, a glamorous three-story venue highlighted by coral stone outside terraces. Its stunning interiors are brimming with extraordinary features and amenities that include soaring ceilings, monumental stained-glass windows, European antiques and sculptures, massive hand-carved mahogany bars, a dramatic brass and marble staircase, wrought ironwork and sculptures, and more — all lit by interior gas flame lanterns and museum-quality antique chandeliers.

Southwest of downtown Miami is Coral Gables, the area's oldest and most iconic community, famous for its lavish Mediterranean Revival architecture and home to the University of Miami. Developed during the 1920s during the Florida land boom that led to the creation of the entire metropolitan area, Coral Gables was one of the country's first planned communities and is still highly regarded for its strict zoning regulations. In fact, Coral Gables was designed to be only four blocks wide and just over two miles long, with Ponce de Leon Boulevard bisecting it. Its developers sold the fact that every business in town was within easy walking distance, a trait that makes Coral Gables even more popular in the 21st

century. And like Miami's other neighborhoods, Coral Gables offers a range of restaurants and shops. One of its most distinctive and popular offsite meeting venues is Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, which features the only indoor rainforest in the U.S. Another coveted venue in Coral Gables is the Venetian Pool: a spring-fed lagoon carved out of coral rock, this historic landmark and swimming pool features cave-like grottos, stone bridges and waterfalls.

Despite the longstanding appeal of places such as Coconut Grove or Coral Gables, there's no doubt that in recent years Miami has been best known for the South Beach district of Miami Beach. Just 21 blocks long and a few blocks wide — from the Atlantic Ocean to Biscayne Bay — South Beach is home to one of the world's most acclaimed collections of architectural gems in its Art Deco District, a number of them designed by fabled architect Morris Lapidus.

Along Collins Avenue, Lincoln Road and Ocean Drive, its three main streets, South Beach now features the most famous restaurants, bars, retail shops and nightclubs in all of Miami. As a result, celebrities from movie stars to rock stars to supermodels frequent the destination, which constantly reinforces its reputation as one of the hippest places on earth. So, while South Beach is popular with small groups with a taste for adventure, it is more popular for incentive programs.

GETTING THERE

No destination has invested more money in recent years on state-of-the-art transportation infrastructure than Miami. Miami International Airport, which delivers formidable airlift from across the U.S. and around the world, offers new and renovated terminals and a recently installed high-speed train that whisks arriving passengers from plane to baggage claim and then on to a new Intermodal Center that connects attendees with private and public transportation, car rentals, limousine services and taxis in one convenient location. A new Metrorail service transports arriving passengers to downtown Miami. ■



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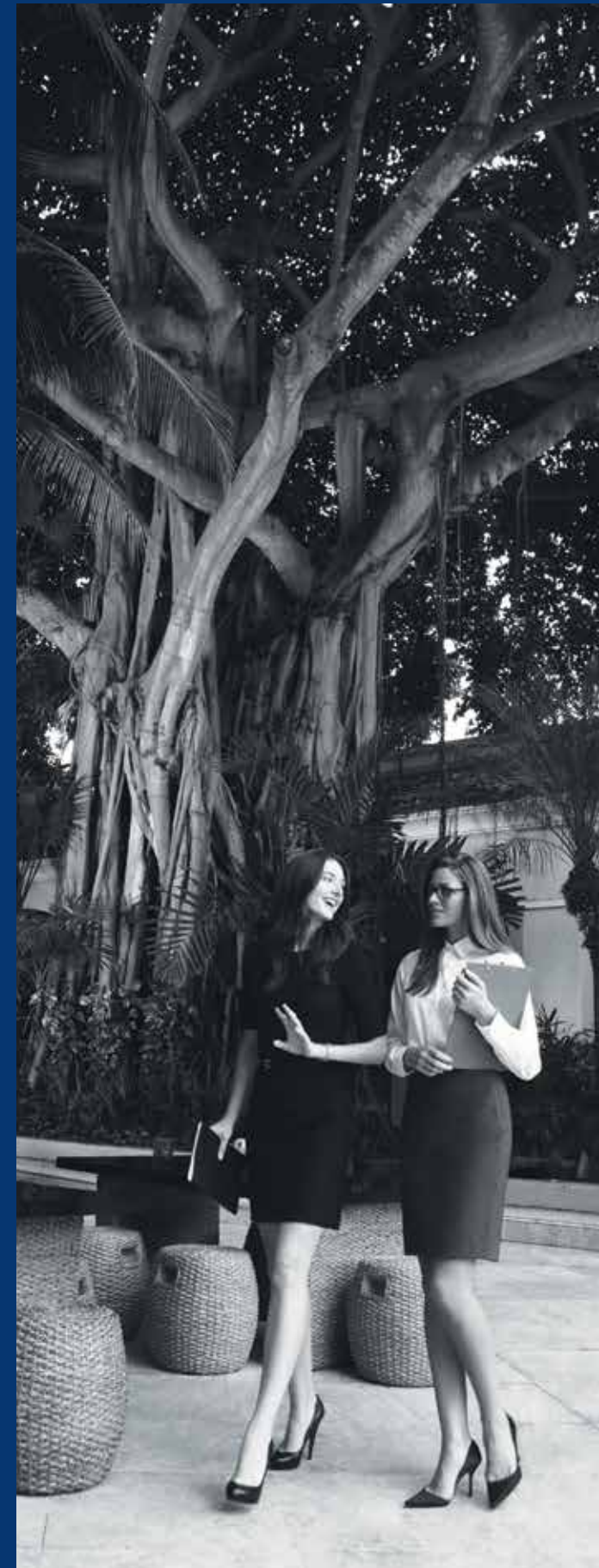
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The NCAA college men's basketball Final Four is one of the most coveted tickets in sports.

Continued from page 26

NFL Hall of Fame. That's something people will remember forever."

For another Super Bowl, Pagan's attendees were the only outside group that had access to a huge private party hosted by *Maxim* magazine. "We literally walked the red carpet at the event and actually made it into the magazine as VIP attendees," he says. "And for all of that, we were elbow-to-elbow with a whole bunch of famous actors, actresses and sports stars. It was one of the most fabulous VIP experiences I've ever had in my life. People were still talking about it several years later."

Hiring a Pro

Precisely because a trip to the Super Bowl, the Masters or the U.S. Open is indeed a unique experience very few people — or meeting planners — could arrange on their own, it's vitally important to work with an expert vendor with the connections to pull it off.

Says Pagan, "Bob Tuchman and his team make me look like a rock star. They do whatever it takes to make your event special and successful. They always go above and beyond the call of duty."

Manente has a long-standing relationship with Charlotte, North Carolina-based QuintEvents.

"We work with Quint to make the experience as good as it can possibly be," Manente says. "For example, they

always get us the best seats. When we were at the last (Super Bowl) held in the Super Dome in New Orleans, we were five rows up from the sidelines. So our clients always feel like they are getting real VIP treatment, and they have a great time."

The overall experience created by QuintEvents includes hospitality activities hosted before the game and an on-field experience after the game for the awarding of the trophies.

"So it really is a chance of a lifetime experience, even for C-suite executives," Manente says. "I love doing it just because I love to watch their faces as they have the experience. They're just blown away. I've had CEOs tell me, 'I never ever thought I'd be on the field after a Super Bowl.'"

QuintEvents secures "On Field Experience" badges for all Icon International attendees, who are given access

to a special section of the field after the game along with other VIP attendees.

Before the game, QuintEvents hosts a special event for its group of corporate clients at the game. It includes an open bar and food that is usually local specialties such as gumbo and jambalaya in New Orleans. Former NFL stars join the group for the pre-game festivities, sign autographs and pose for photographs. "It's just a really nice event that builds excitement for the game," Manente says.

And because attendees from various corporate groups all mingle together, it makes the experience even more special because it is shared with others, she says.

Many Options

Even though the Super Bowl and super-exclusive events such as the Masters are the big names among sports incentive practitioners, there is a vast list of options, including the Wimbledon tennis tournament in England, the Australian Open golf and tennis tournaments, the French Open tennis tournament and a host of lesser known events.

And in the U.S., depending on the core demographics of a group, the Indianapolis 500 or NASCAR events have huge appeal. The NCAA college men's basketball Final Four is one of the most coveted tickets in all of sports.

Aside from the Super Bowl, Pagan is particularly fond of the Masters. Like the Super Bowl, he says, its appeal is the chance-of-a-lifetime experience and the ticket an ordinary person could almost never get. Masters tickets are allocated by a lottery system each year, and demand exponentially outweighs supply.

"The main thing sports incentives do is play on people's passions. ... And major sports events are unique enough that for most people they represent a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

**ROBERT TUCHMAN, PRESIDENT
GOVIVA!, NEW YORK, NY**



“At the Masters, you feel like you are a private invited guest of the PGA, which in a way you are,” Pagan says. “It’s that exclusive. You literally feel like a celebrity.”

Highlights of the Masters excursions Pagan has planned with Goviva! have featured exclusive dinners and private parties that included famous professional golfers.

Although not appealing to everyone, NASCAR events are also powerful motivators, Pagan says. “They’re not for everybody. But if you have an audience that NASCAR appeals to, they’ll sell

payout, the reward, should come within a month or two of the end of the program.” That means that for a Super Bowl program, the competition should end by December or early January. For a U.S. Open golf trip, the contest has to conclude in late March or early April.

The other big rule is to know your audience, Tuchman says. “Are they primarily male? Female? Younger? Older? Those are the demographic considerations that go into making a good choice. And is the program going to allow qualifiers to bring their spouse? Or is the group going to be all men?”

And it’s also better to do one big event rather than two events where you have limited budgets. Take all of that money and spend it on one big event.”

For Manente, the most important rule is to find a partner like QuintEvents and build a relationship over time. “QuintEvents is very consistent in the things they do for us,” Manente says. “So in dealing with them, I know exactly what I’m going to get. And I also have the kind of relationship with them where if I say, ‘Well, I was thinking about this...’ but they don’t think my group would like that, they’ll say, ‘We’re not sure that’s the best way to go. Why don’t you try this instead?’”

A fully collaborative process is critical to success, Manente says. And that includes being prepared for anything that might happen, Glass says. For example, at this year’s Masters, the Monday morning practice round was rained out. “So I had attendees who had tickets and were leaving the next day,” he says. He had a backup plan for at least giving his group a private tour of fabled Augusta National Golf Course, even if it was raining. So even though their experience was diminished, it was not a disaster. “You always need a plan A, plan B and plan C,” Glass says. “Because anything is possible.”

And a question that is not always asked, but is vitally important, Glass says, is “What do you want to gain from doing this? What is your goal?”

Answers range from generating sales and enhancing morale to rewarding key people and generating bottom-line profits. And each of those objectives requires nuanced planning of the experience, he says.

But no matter the goal, Tuchman says, planners and companies that want to extract the maximum benefit from a sports incentive program must think big. “That’s because in today’s world, literally anything is possible,” he says. “You just have to be creative enough to want to do it.” **C&IT**



Credits: Jason Myers



Professional golfer Rory McIlroy tees off at the Honda Classic, held every spring at PGA National Resort & Spa, where corporate event tents overlook the 18th.

whatever they have to sell, do whatever they have to do, to get to an event like that and have a VIP experience.”

Practical Advice

Just like any other meeting or incentive program, sports incentive programs have their own unique rules and practical considerations.

“The first issue is time frame,” Tuchman says. “When a company says, ‘We want to do an incentive program, and we have to do it within this particular time frame,’ I always tell them that the

For example, almost by definition, a Super Bowl program is for alpha males, with few if any spouses in attendance.

The final essential consideration is budget and whether the company is willing to spend what is required to create a multifaceted experience that is immersive. “I tell prospective clients, ‘If you don’t have the budget to do an event right, don’t do it. Unless you do it right, it’s not going to get you much in terms of really making people feel special.’ So I always say make sure you choose an event that will allow you to do it right.



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Best Practices

Take A Seat Unique Seating Options Offer Many Benefits for Attendees



Credits: metroConnections

There are countless articles written about fun corporate environments — those offices with pool tables, beanbag chairs and popcorn machines. The benefits include improved employee morale and even increased productivity. While this trend continues to rise in the corporate setting, there is also a movement to infuse some fun into the conference or meeting working environment as well. Many meeting and event planners have successfully experimented with the use of innovative room setup and furniture options to create unique and effective meeting environments that differ from the traditional conference-style seating that can leave attendees yawning. Key considerations for determining seating include understanding the objective and tone of the meeting as well as space requirements.

Planning for Success

No different than any other element

of a conference or meeting, planning is key to successfully determining seating arrangements. In most cases, sessions are outlined and the venue is chosen before any thought is given to the seating arrangements. If you want to do something unique with seating, it is recommended that you think about your seating plan in advance so that you can select a space that will accommodate your preferred seating style. When venues are chosen before seating arrangements are considered, planners are restricted with the types of seating and space layout they can incorporate into their meeting.

Evaluate space requirements for your ideal seating plan, consider the tone of your meeting and the needs of your attendees — will they need to take notes, refer to material in binders or work on a computer (No. 3)?

A meeting that focuses on educating attendees, for example, may work best

By Andrea Hansen

with traditional banquet tables to provide ample space for taking notes and accommodating food service. In contrast, a meeting more casual in nature could use a traditional seating plan with contemporary lounge chairs, sofas and small tables (No. 5).

Once you have selected a seating style that complements your meeting or event, you will need to choose your venue location.

Comfort is key, but be mindful of budget and space restrictions. You will need to understand the space requirements so you can determine if the room will accommodate your preferred seating plan. If at all possible, select a venue that offers a variety of seating options. Don't be afraid to mix it up and try different arrangements in various areas of the space.

Case in point is a corporate entity that sought to offer a unique experience for a leadership meeting in a hotel ball-



room. Seating for 100 participants was required for the main session, and the meeting planner sought a professional, yet casual, environment. Attendees needed comfortable seats for the long meetings with good sightlines to the stage and screens, which were required to remain at the front of the space. To meet these needs, sofas were placed in the first two rows in front of the stage with coffee tables accessible for functionality. Groupings of armchairs with coffee tables and standard banquet rounds were used in the next few rows to accommodate additional casual seating and traditional options. Finally, bar-height tables and bar stools lined the back of the room, allowing guests to choose their location based on their comfort level (*Nos. 1 and 2*).

In addition to considering the actual space where the meeting will take place, identify potential networking or lounge spaces. For example, modern and patio lounge furniture is a great way to generate interest and comfort. This type of furniture can be incorporated into exhibit space, near registration, or even in the conference hall in order to keep attendees engaged outside the meeting room.

A New Twist on Traditional

Events that are best suited to stay in a traditional framework offer several options and variety, such as banquet rounds with eight to 10 chairs, high cocktail tables for a reception-style gathering, or café/low cocktail tables with four to five chairs at each table. In order to be successful with these types of environments, offer diverse seating options and gathering spots throughout the event to vary the experience. For instance, you can use lounge seating in a variety of arrangements and incorporate different colors, shapes and sizes. And remember,

position lounge furniture closest to the stage, placing your standard-height tables and chairs, followed by higher tables and stools farthest from the stage. Not only will this give attendees plenty of options and add a fun element to their experience, but it will allow for the best sightlines for all guests.

In some cases, you may opt for a more traditional theater or classroom arrangement with rows of chairs and/or tables. However, even this traditional scenario has room for creativity. To improve the ambience, consider incorporating lounge furniture such as sofas, armchairs, coffee tables and side tables at the side of the room. Be sure to include room in the aisles for attendees to move around. Bar- or counter-height tables and stools also can provide a comfortable seating option, and you can add this to a tiered seating plan to vary the height and line of sight for attendees.

Another twist on the old standard is to arrange your banquet tables as crescent rounds with the chairs positioned around most of the tables, leaving the front open (*No. 4*). Or, consider renting 60-inch square tables or rectangle banquet tables and vary the shape and size of each table to alter the atmosphere of the event. Square tables can seat two chairs per side and a total of eight chairs per table, while rectangular tables can sit six to eight guests per table. Bar tables also can accommodate larger groups in a comfortable style of seating. Intersperse bar stools and high-back chairs around each table to maximize the available options, or allow guests to stand around tables if they choose. Keep in mind that the visual sightlines to the stage and screens always should be considered for meetings. It is important to consider the experience of each attendee in every seat, from every angle.

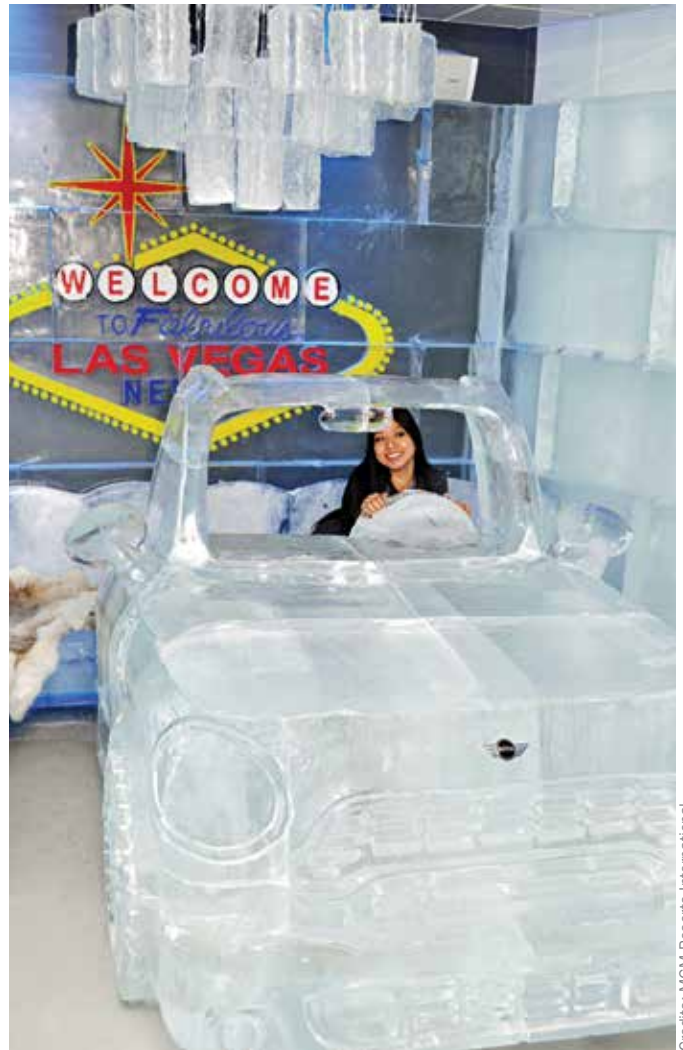
Even planning a seated dinner for a large group can lend the opportunity for a unique environment. Consider a recent annual corporate sales meeting with 600 attendees, comprised of regional/district teams of 12–16 individuals each. The meeting planner wanted to emphasize the importance of the team sitting together during the dinner and awards presentation. Because traditional round banquet tables accommodating 10 people each would not be enough to keep the teams seated together, a combination of rectangular six- and eight-foot banquet tables were used in long rows. Although the seating arrangement required more space, the chosen venue provided ample space and allowed groups to sit together as cohesive units, while enhancing the spirit of the evening event.

Take a Seat

With your objectives outlined and ideas generated in terms of how you want attendees to interact with each other as well as engage in the meeting or event, the next step is to meet with an event management company and/or hotel staff to brainstorm ideas. Working with experienced professionals will be of benefit as they can share what has worked and not worked for other similar meetings. These best practices also help minimize any issues with a room design that may look amazing, yet not function well in terms of attendee needs and comfort. Giving thought to the seating early in the planning process will result in greater success.

Andrea Hansen is director of event services for metroConnections. With offices in Minnesota and Florida, metroConnections translates business goals and key messages into informative and memorable events that engage, inspire and move attendees. www.metroconnections.com **C&IT**

Destination



Las Vegas

Mixing Successful Business With Indulgent Pleasure

By Christine Loomis

It's no secret that Las Vegas has a reputation for indulgence and excess. Yet as one of the most popular U.S. destinations for meetings and corporate events, Las Vegas also solidly, even ingeniously, supports business. How these two seemingly mutually exclusive aspects of the city come together is not just another confounding Las Vegas illusion. It's reality.

"Las Vegas is the world's premier meetings and events destination with an energy and excitement no other city can match," says Rossi Ralenkotter, president and CEO of the Las



MGM's Minus5 Ice Lounges creatively showcase corporate brands in ice: (clockwise from top left photo) Logo ice sculptures such as Cisco and AARP are perfect for branding and photo memories; Mini Cooper enjoyed an actual size ice Mini Cooper for excellent photo opportunities; Olympus froze their cameras to demonstrate how tough they are under extreme conditions, and Dell demonstrated the durability of their new notebook computers alongside their logo ice sculpture.

Credits: MGM Resorts International

“Aside from the...great air lift, low room rates and...meeting space, the overall draw of Las Vegas and the city’s status as a mecca for amazing food and top-class entertainment make choosing Las Vegas an easy decision.”

Kim Campbell
Executive Director, Owner
Drive Production
San Mateo, CA

Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. “We host more than 22,000 meetings, trade shows and conventions a year, and the attendance of countless top executives and key decision-makers from around the world demonstrates that Las Vegas is a place where decisions are made and business happens.”

Kim Campbell, executive director and owner of Drive Production, a California-based event management company that oversees four to six events annually in Las Vegas for major corporations including Levi Strauss and Co., also points to the city’s multiple pro-business assets.

“Aside from the standard search criteria such as great air lift, low room rates, and convention and meeting space, the overall draw of Las Vegas and the city’s status as a mecca for amazing food and top-class entertainment make choosing Las Vegas an easy decision. There’s no shortage of amazing venues in Las Vegas,” Campbell notes, “but it is the diversity of venues that draws Drive Production to promote Las Vegas as the destination for venue vetting. From large-scale options such as the Wynn and Bellagio to the outstanding service and boutique feel of the Forbes Four Star M Resort, you can offer your clients a plethora of options in one city.”

Planners certainly agree. For example, a meeting planner

for a publisher in Florida recently described the benefits that made Las Vegas a good choice for his company’s conference and expo. He says that Las Vegas is a place where people want to go. Among the attributes he cites are the convenience of getting to the destination, the huge variety of stunning hotels and more than sufficient meeting spaces. Also, he specifically points out how professional the convention staff is in Las Vegas. He notes how the staff can anticipate a meeting planner’s needs even before the planner may realize it himself — a big plus when staging huge, complex meetings and events.

The 4,004-room Aria Resort & Casino fit the bill for this planner who was more than pleased with the results as were his attendees. Even though this was their first time at Aria, he says the participants were charmed by the hotel, its staff and the meeting spaces, which resulted in greater attendance at the expo.

In fact, the hotel conference staff worked closely to provide the most efficient way to use the space. The planner especially liked Aria’s natural light from its three-story wall of windows, which he says brought a dynamic and vigorous vibe to his event. He says their faces brightened at the prospect of meeting in a sunny space instead of a dark and dreary ballroom.

Teaming Up to Deliver Extraordinary Events

Campbell depends on strong relationships with hotels to create extraordinary events for her clients, and M Resort has been an excellent business partner for her.

“While working with Levi Strauss and Co.,” she says, “we were searching for the right venue to excite and rejuvenate the retail staff, managers and regional managers. The M Resort offered the perfect combination of an upscale resort nestled a few miles away from The Strip. It was paramount to our client to create a first-class event for attendees while staying within the confines of an internal event budget, meaning no outside registration fees or revenue coming in to offset cost.”

When Intacct Advantage, a cloud financial management users conference, brought 1,200 attendees to M Resort last October, the hotel helped Campbell transform the pool deck into a Moroccan Bazaar ablaze with oranges and reds against the turquoise water, to say nothing of a live elephant on hand as an unusual photo op. Executive chef Michael Demers even created a custom Moroccan menu. That same pool deck became a full-on fashion show, complete with a catwalk, when Levi Strauss attendees gathered there.

When Levi Strauss’ Field Leadership Conference comes to Las Vegas this fall, it will be Drive Production’s fifth event at M Resort, a hotel Campbell recommends to planners without hesitation. Well, almost. “It’s such a special place, I want to



Rossi Ralenkoter, president and CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.



Adjacent to The Pools at Aria, Liquid is an exciting playground.



Credit: MGM Resorts International

The Convention Center at Mandalay Bay.

keep it all for myself,” she says, “but of course I would recommend it. The main reason the M stands out really comes down to outstanding customer service.”

She offers an example: “During a recent event at the M Resort we had a C-level attendee with severe food allergies,” Campbell says. “The hotel briefed one of its senior banquet servers, and he shadowed this VIP for the entire event — breakfast, lunch and dinner for three days — personally serving him each meal to ensure utmost caution. During another event we had BEOs for a four-hour open bar. However, the client had a presentation that kept attendees in their seats for 90 minutes of that time. The M proactively adjusted our bar tab based on the program and our attendees’ inability to have drinks during the event presentations. This, you can imagine, saved the client a great deal of money and is a great example of outstanding customer service.”

For Tami Hance, senior vice president of Destinations by Design, a Las Vegas destination management and event services company, partnering with a great team is critical to success. She has a long relationship with Caesars, for example, where she set the “unexpected” pharmaceutical event. “This isn’t your parents’ Caesars Palace anymore,” she says. “It’s relevant, hip and a ‘must do’ on any visit.” And she says that because the convention team is empowered to make decisions, things happen.

“Caesars Palace has long been associated with making dreams come true. Need a pool party at the Garden of the Gods for several thousand with 90 minutes of setup time? They do it every day. One of my favorite events to execute,” she says, “is the Taste of Caesars event where their catering team works with the hotel’s restaurants and celebrity chefs to create a restaurant-style event. Using the Mesa Grill, Gordon Ramsay and Nobu brands, the catering team creates a unique menu, and Destinations by Design creates themed food-station décor and signage to match the menu. Where else can you enjoy three celebrity chefs all in one venue at a corporate event?”

Hance praises Caesars Palace as a hotel that understands a meeting and its needs. “The meeting space is bright and easy to get to, and some hotel towers have elevator access right into the convention area so guests can go from their room to their meeting in a few minutes.”

Leveraging a Destination ‘Where Anything Can Happen’

For Hance, the city’s reputation as the epicenter of high-energy entertainment where absolutely anything can happen helps make meetings here successful — and easier to market.

“Las Vegas is a brand that evokes emotion, excitement and the thrill of something unexpected,” Hance says. “When corporate executives select Las Vegas as their meeting destination, the majority of the marketing and brand awareness is already created for them. Participants are immediately intrigued, whether it’s their first time or their 10th time. Every Las Vegas experience is a different one because the city continues to evolve — there is always something new to do.”

And the city’s Vegas Means Business campaign is more than a few well-chosen words. It’s backed by action and infrastructure. “The city’s first-class service, state-of-the-art meeting space and ‘whatever it takes’ attitude create a recipe for a successful meeting over and over again,” Hance says. “We get things done, and we do them efficiently and professionally.”

“When corporate executives select Las Vegas...the majority of the marketing and brand awareness is already created for them. Participants are immediately intrigued, whether it’s their first time or their 10th time.”

Tami Hance
Senior Vice President
Destinations by Design
Las Vegas, NV



Precisely because anything can and does happen in Las Vegas, not all of it is conducive to business, says Tom Hillmer, senior vice president and account executive with Creative Group Inc., a Buffalo Grove, Illinois, firm, which manages 500-plus programs per year for more than 90 corporate clients. Yet meeting professionals know how to downplay that and how to take the anything-goes vibe and tweak it into something that works brilliantly for corporate and incentive clients.

“That’s the beauty of Las Vegas,” Hillmer says. “You can play off the decadence of the destination or completely downplay it, especially within the professional environment of most hotel meeting facilities. In fact, while convention space in the hotels might be finished to reflect a property’s individual architectural themes, function space throughout the city is

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generally quite conservative. This makes these facilities the perfect backdrop for getting down to business.”

For those who want to take it up a few notches, there are unlimited opportunities to do that, too. Hillmer points to such only-in-Las-Vegas experiences as the new High Roller, the 550-foot tall observation wheel — the world’s largest — that gives business and incentive groups a thrill and a place to hold a catered reception for 40 high above the city.

Playing on Las Vegas’ anything-can-happen reputation, Hance and her team created a deceptively simple theme around “expect the unexpected” for a pharmaceutical event at Caesars. “We started the evening with dessert first. During cocktails, the guests enjoyed passed chocolate-covered strawberries, truffles and other sweet treats. They then moved to their sit-down dinner of salad, a surf-and-turf entrée and a fruit-and-cheese plate as the last course. That fun detail didn’t cost anything extra, and it was the talk of the conference.

“Décor also matched the theme with rectangular dining tables with cloud graphics and ceiling décor consisting of wheat grass chandeliers and hanging floral. Entertainment was a female, electric violist quartet positioned around the room on wireless in-ear monitors. Throughout the evening they would move from their locations, playing their unique strings to track music from Elton John to Aerosmith; these girls were certainly unexpected!”

One easy way to downplay the city’s racy vibe, Hillmer says, is to meet off The Strip. “Properties such as Red Rock Resort, M Resort and Green Valley Ranch provide outstanding settings for successful business meetings, especially for that client who wants to take advantage of what the destination offers but prefers a more secluded, intimate, upscale resort setting. All three hotels have excellent meeting space and accommodations, and clients

whose programs are in the 100- to 500-person range can be the primary focus of these resorts vs. the larger convention settings of many Strip hotels where numerous groups may be happening at one time.”

Little tweaking is needed for incentive programs, something Las Vegas is especially suited for. “Incentives are a reward and need to reflect a sense of being worth the effort it took to



The second-floor courtroom at the Mob Museum, the site of one of 14 national hearings in the 1950s to expose organized crime.

Credit: The Mob Museum

earn them,” Hillmer says. “The goal is to design a program that gives participants an opportunity to experience a destination in a way they could never experience it on their own. For instance, we picked up one group at their Strip hotel and took them off-Strip to a beautiful location for dinner with the Red Rock formations as backdrop. After dinner, we had the group come to the top of the parking garage where one by one, helicopters landed, picked up six participants at a

time and took them back to The Strip via a nighttime helicopter tour of the city. It was an experience many of those folks are still talking about a number of years later.”

Hillmer adds, “Las Vegas is a place most people enjoy visiting, largely because of the dynamic, always-changing atmosphere of the city. When your destination can be a significant factor in driving your attendance, it follows that you will be even more successful in achieving your business objectives by having a meeting there.”

Spectacular and Inventive Branding

At first glance it might seem that incorporating branding into a Las Vegas meeting would be challenging given the city’s propensity for excess, an anathema to corporate bottom lines. But there are many who say it’s precisely this wild side of Las Vegas that makes it easy for convention and catering teams to be so creative. Seriously, they’ll try anything.

At Mandalay Bay, part of the MGM collection of properties, the beach is a super popular venue accommodating up to 6,000 attendees. The resort’s team came up with a “shoe check” at the beach as a way to put an unusual stamp on branding. As corporate guests arrive, they check their shoes and receive a pair of flip-flops with their company’s logo set into the sole. With each step, they boldly imprint that logo into the sand.

The team has also placed logo slicks on the bottom of the wave pool, and covered the pool with a floating Plexiglas dance floor on which logo and brand colors are emblazoned via a state-of-the-art lighting system. That same lighting can be used to project a logo onto the venue’s waterfalls, and on mist walls that guests actually walk through. Additionally, the beach area supports laser shows and fireworks, which can incorporate logos and brand colors to dramatic effect. Items such as beach towels, fans and drinks created to showcase brand colors all can be utilized to extend logo and branding elements.

Minus5 Ice Lounge, another MGM venue, has two locations, one at Monte Carlo and the other at The Shoppes at Mandalay Palace. Both feature ice couches, an ice bar, ice sculptures and other icy architectural elements, all in an environment at a constant minus five degrees Celsius (23 degrees Fahrenheit). How



Ventriloquist and entertainer Terry Fator and Winston The Impersonating Turtle appear regularly at the Mirage.

Credit: Mirage Las Vegas



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can ice showcase branding? There's no end of cool ways. Mattel froze its 2015 Hot Wheels and Barbie Camper, not yet out in stores. Cisco had logo ice sculptures, as did Dell Computers, which placed its notebook alongside ice sculptures to convey durability. Mini Cooper created a life-size ice Mini in which parka-clad attendees could pose for photos, and Olympus froze its cameras to demonstrate just how tough they are.

Campbell praises M Resort for its willingness to go all out on branding. "They allowed us to take over the entire confer-



More creative branding ideas during the iHeartRadio Music Festival at MGM Grand Las Vegas (above) and at Mandalay Bay.

ence level and incorporate branding in a way no other property has in my 20 years in events," she says. "From the front entry welcome vinyl on the large glass doors above the main doors to the hotel to branded cocktail napkins in all the outlets and custom-made chocolate displays incorporating sponsor logos, we washed the M with every branding idea we could think of."

M Resort has plenty of creative branding experience. When Cisco held an event with 8,500 attendees at the Villaggio del Sole pool, each arriving guest was given a sequined hat with a round Cisco emblem attached. As darkness descended, the group was asked to pull the tab on their hats. Instantaneously, thousands of Cisco emblems blinked throughout the pool area, lighting up the sequined hats to incredible effect. The emblems continued to sparkle as the band Train took to the pool stage, and senior management and VIP guests saw it all from high above in Ravello Lounge, the group's VIP viewing area.



Credits: MGM Resorts International

Custom App Engagement

To get a competitive edge, many businesses also utilize apps, social media and other aspects of technology to drive engagement among attendees and clients before, during and after meetings.

At Mandalay Bay, companies can integrate technology into real-time events with such spectacular elements as Twitter feeds appearing on huge balloons above the stage. Some companies engage attendees by giving them input into a conference, for example asking them to log into an app and vote for what will be served at the reception. Or they can log in after to vote on the elements of the conference they liked best. When attendees use apps, companies can easily push through schedule changes before or during the conference as well as make announcements about sales initiatives or other business.

In October, a large computer company will bring 12,000 attendees to Mandalay Bay, and the hotel is already working on its part of the app experience, which will come down to a beer vs. wine vote. The hotel's sommelier and beer Cicerone (certified beer expert) are creating pairings for the reception. Stay tuned to see which libation wins.

Unique Entertainment

Groups meeting in Las Vegas appreciate the endless options for recreation and unique entertainment available on The Strip and beyond. A full-service incentive company based in the South plans several meetings a year in Las Vegas, especially for large groups. Recently, they arranged for a three-day meeting at The Venetian/The Palazzo. The long list of unique entertainment options in Las Vegas was, as usual, a big attraction for the group of nearly 1,000 participants.

As an aside, the planner notes that other destinations require a great deal more planning of activities, especially with large groups that need to be moved from one activity to another. One valuable benefit of meeting in Las Vegas is that attendees can find hundreds of entertainment options to experience on their own. These options usually don't require special transportation allowing companies to save on those hefty costs.

The plentiful meeting space and entertainment options at the The Venetian/The Palazzo also were a plus. Attendees were wowed by a special performance of The Blue Man Group during their opening session, which prompted many meeting-goers to attend the group's extraordinary performance during their own time. The group also held a welcome reception at the property's Lagasse Stadium, a 24,000-sf restaurant and sports bar featuring Chef Emeril Lagasse's cuisine, more than 100 HDTVs, plush stadium-style seats and luxury boxes.

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The Beatles LOVE by Cirque du Soleil is still going strong at Mirage Las Vegas as is Terry Fator, one of the most successful headliners on The Strip, who captures the hearts and funny bones of audiences from around the world with Terry Fator: The Voice of Entertainment live at The Mirage. Backed by a live band, Fator wows audiences nightly with singing, comedy and unparalleled celebrity impressions.

Caesars Entertainment's The Linq, an open-air shopping, dining and entertainment district, offers something new for attendees who regularly meet in Las Vegas. Home to the Las Vegas High Roller observation wheel, the Linq features more than 30 unique retail, dining and entertainment venues and plays host to a variety of special events, festivals and more.

Unique Venues Galore

The Keep Memory Alive event center is located in downtown Las Vegas at the Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health. The venue was designed by famed architect Frank Geary and fea-



tures a dramatic, undulating exterior made of stainless steel. The venue can accommodate 400 for a sit-down event or up to 700 guests for a reception.

The Mob Museum, which is located in the old courthouse, is an interactive museum dedicated to the history of organized crime and law enforcement, and offers a variety of spaces for private events. The entire museum also is available for a buyout.

The Rio All-Suite Hotel and Casino, a Caesars Entertainment property, features Palazzo suites which are suitable for hospitality events. The Palazzo suites are located in their own tower at the Rio and range from 3,900 to 13,950 sf.

The Penn & Teller Theater at the Rio is also an option for a general session, which can be a welcome change from a hotel ballroom. Many of the theater space in Las Vegas would work for this type of event as they are not used during the day and a few nights as well.

The Linq also sports a new 80,000-sf concert and event venue called the Brooklyn Bowl, which includes a rooftop area.

Still fairly new on the nightlife scene is MGM Grand Hotel

& Casino's Hakkasan, a five-level space that offers a variety of environments, including the restaurant, private dining room, Ling Ling level, main nightclub, pavilion and mezzanine.

Hakkasan Group acquired Pure Nightclub inside Caesars Palace. The nightclub will undergo a total remodel that will be completed in early 2015.

Making a splash last June was the debut of the Seascape Ballroom within Shark Reef Aquarium at Mandalay Bay. Planners can hold intimate receptions, sit-down dinners and board meetings here, with an animated backdrop of swimming sharks and other marine life in the 1.3-million-gallon exhibit.

The newly renovated Tropicana Las Vegas – a DoubleTree by Hilton added two new event venues: the Havana Room and the outdoor Beach Club.

The very hip 634-room Downtown Grand hotel, which opened its doors in December in a location convenient to the Freemont Street Experience, features a rooftop venue called Picnic, which can host private events for up to 1,500 guests.

Something Old, Something New

In Las Vegas, constant change is the new status quo.

Silk Road at Vdara reopened in October as a reimagined 6,500-sf meeting and event space for cocktail receptions, board meetings, corporate banquets and other intimate gatherings. And Delano Las Vegas, a non-smoking, 1,100-suite boutique hotel, soon opens at the Mandalay Bay Resort complex in the space previously occupied by THEhotel. Reservations are now accepted for Sept. 1 and beyond.

The VooDoo Zip Line is open at Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino, allowing non-acrophobic revelers to zip at 33 mph from the patio of VooDoo Steakhouse on the 50th floor of the Masquerade Tower to the adjoining 20-story Ipanema Tower. And channeling the nostalgia of a 1950s-era pool oasis, Picnic at Downtown Grand Las Vegas Hotel & Casino is now open, providing a setting for live entertainment and film screenings, among other events.

Green Valley Ranch Resort in Henderson, Nevada, will receive \$20 million in upgrades over the next year, including four new restaurant and bar concepts.

When SLS Las Vegas Hotel & Casino finally opens Labor Day weekend, it will include Foxtail, a lounge-nightclub-pool concept fusing elements of music, art and fashion.

The three-level Mandalay Bay Convention Center currently offers 1.7 million sf of event space, and it recently unveiled plans to expand the facility to more than 2 million sf. Plans call for the addition of more than 350,000 sf of exhibit space, as well as underground parking and additional carpeted ballroom space. Construction on the \$66 million project is scheduled to begin in the fall, and the new exhibit space is expected to be available in late summer 2015.

The new 20,000-seat indoor sports and entertainment arena, which is a joint venture between AEG and MGM Resorts International will be located between the New York-New York Hotel & Casino and Monte Carlo Resort and Casino on the Las Vegas Strip, is expected to open in 2016. It will be part of

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an eight-acre dining and entertainment district called The Park, a landscaped area that is being designed to create an interactive neighborhood environment. The project also is scheduled to open in 2016.

Both resorts are undergoing significant transformations of their Strip-facing experiences into plaza environments featuring casual eateries, bars, restaurants and retail destinations that will ultimately lead to The Park. Restaurants

at Monte Carlo's new entryway include the Double Barrel, a 12,000-sf roadhouse restaurant; Yusho, with authentic Japanese street food by celebrated chef Matthias Merges; and 800 Degrees Neapolitan Pizzeria.

In response to guests' growing interest in health and wellness, MGM Grand Hotel & Casino recently expanded its Stay Well collection. Encompassing the hotel's entire 14th floor, the collection now includes 171 rooms and suites, all offering health and wellness features such as a vitamin C-infused shower, air purifier, dawn-simulating alarm clock and healthy menu options. Guests also have access to the Stay Well lounge, an exclusive area for registration and relaxation.

The Sands Expo and Convention Center, which offers 2.25 million sf of exhibit and meeting space, as well as direct connections to more than 7,000 suites at The Venetian and The Palazzo, recently completed a \$37 million renovation that included remodeling the lobby and adding escalators, new carpeting, Wi-Fi hotspots and food outlets. And, the "Panda!" show has made its world premiere at The Venetian and The Palazzo. It features a combination of acrobatics, martial arts, music and dance from the China National Acrobatic Troupe.

Caesars Entertainment announced The Linq Hotel & Casino as the latest addition to its portfolio of Las Vegas resorts. Located at the heart of The Strip at on Las Vegas



Fans revel at Lagasse's Stadium at The Palazzo.

Credit: Las Vegas Sands Corp.

Boulevard, the Linq Hotel & Casino is a complete re-imagining of the current Quad Resort & Casino. The hotel will feature 2,256 brand new rooms and suites, a completely renovated welcome experience built around a signature lobby bar, all new retail and spa amenities and a dynamic new pool deck. The hotel is scheduled to open October 2014.

The Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC) has launched *RideTheStrip.com*, a website geared specifically to tourists visiting or planning to travel to Las Vegas.

The easy-to-use site provides a one-stop online resource for accessing information on the RTC's transit routes along The Strip and transit services to and from McCarran International Airport and the Las Vegas Convention Center.

A popular tourist attraction for its double-decker views of the Las Vegas Strip, the Deuce on the Strip makes frequent stops along the Resort Corridor, minimizing walking distances. Carrying more than 28,000 passengers each weekday, it travels between the Mandalay Bay to the south and downtown Las Vegas at Fremont Street to the north.

Always a Great Value

Undoubtedly, Las Vegas will continue to transform itself in its inimitable style, but a gifted ability to successfully mix business and pleasure will always be part of its story.

And the city's bottom line value will, too.

"Given its extensive inventory of hotel and meeting accommodations, from a cost perspective, Las Vegas is always one of the greatest financial values there is," asserts Hillmer. "The high quality of the hotels, room product, food-and-beverage experiences and meeting venues, all at the competitive prices at which one can access them, make Las Vegas an outstanding destination choice for ensuring maximum return on investment of hosting a meeting."

C&IT



Credit: Denise Tuscello

Caesars Entertainment's High Roller was officially recognized by the Guinness World Records as the World's Tallest Observation Wheel.



Credit: Las Vegas News Bureau

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New Orleans

Beckons Planners With Culinary and Cultural Charms That Can't Be Beat

By Gabi Logan

There's hospitality. Then there's Southern hospitality. Then there's New Orleans hospitality. Often called the most European city in America, New Orleans combines gracious hosting and raucous partying in a way you could never find anywhere else.

Visitors are spoiled for choice among dining establishments, with renowned locations in the French Quarter luring you in with both their reputations and alluring aromas. And for a night out, New Orleans is the place to be no matter what night of the week it is, but it also has much more to offer visiting groups than many realize.

"Some people have reservations about New Orleans given that the only thing they know about the city is Bourbon Street, and a slow night out on Bourbon Street is a busy night out anywhere else," says Michael Maloney, director of marketing for Beaumont, Texas-based Coburn Supply Company Inc., who has held multiple meetings per year in New Orleans for more than 20 years. "We have some customers come from the Bible Belt, and they don't know what to expect, but you can show them there's so many other things to offer, with the National World War II museum and uptown."

The National World War II Museum, ranked as the No. 1 attraction in New Orleans by TripAdvisor, had meetings and events in mind as it was originally designed to accommodate small meetings, large receptions, seated dinners, as well as corporate events. The museum's capital campaign, *The Road to Victory: A Vision for Future Generations*, will tell the en-

tire story of the American Experience in World War II. When completed in 2017, this \$320 million expansion project will quadruple the size of the original museum, adding state-of-the-art programs and exhibit space, libraries and archives, and collections and conservation space, making it an even greater attraction.

Going the Extra Mile

Planners who have tried the Big Easy rave about many of the city's charms, but one rises leagues above the rest: the people.

"My dealings with the staff at the Omni Royal Orleans were flawless!" says Geriann Taylor, outbound marketing supervisor for Cincinnati, Ohio-based Milacron LLC. "From the initial encounter to our multiple requests for changes, additions and even a recommendation for an overflow hotel, they did not miss a beat. New Orleans as a destination won out for its history, culinary offerings and diverse culture, and the Omni Royal Orleans gave us the central location to multiple options for group events.

"To be 100 percent honest, we originally ended up choosing the Omni Royal Orleans because they were the only hotel that could accommodate the size of our group," she explains. "And we were lucky, to say the least. The Omni gave us 110 percent of their attention for our 135-person America's sales meeting. We had individuals tell us that this was the best sales meeting we had hosted in 20 years. That is a huge compliment."

"Daniel Brockhoeft, David Belmonte and Terrence Jackson



Nathan and the Zydeco Cha Chas perform at a Cajun Zydeco Festival in the French Quarter.

Credit: Cheryll Gerber

handled every single request I threw at them. The staff was professional and highly responsive throughout the entire planning process. I can guarantee this article is not long enough for me to mention every single instance they went above and beyond for us. We changed the menu, the layout, the AV requirements; the layout for the second time; the AV requirements for the second time — they even accommodated my crazy birthday request for a new staff member that was away from his family.

“David was available for every single change our management team made on the fly to improve the impact of our meetings. Terrence literally changed out our AV needs at a moment’s notice when we realized our layout was not ideal for our breakout sessions. Lila at the front desk contacted me each and every evening to be sure I was aware of any guest that was at risk of being a no-show. She worked with me while we waded through flight delays, arrival and departure changes. Daniel went as far as to personally drive me to a store 20 minutes away in a hail storm to pick up something our division president needed. Who does that in this day and age? They truly should be the flagship location for customer service training for all of the Omni properties.”

After completing a \$15 million renovation to its public spaces and 345 guest rooms last year, the Omni Royal Orleans has focused on upgrading technology for its meeting places, adding high performance 802.11n smart Wi-Fi access points throughout, customizable LED lighting in all conference spac-

es, 60-inch high-definition smart TVs and front- and rear-projecting 4,000-lumen projectors.

While Taylor ended up enjoying the hospitality at the Omni through a bit of the luck, Maloney has been faithfully returning to the Royal Sonesta Hotel in New Orleans for more than 20 years for his three annual meetings: a 400- to 450-person incentive for managers, a customer event for the Coburn dealer network, and a training and award meeting for sales staff.

“The main reason we keep going back is the staff,” he explains. “Because we come back every year and our program is repetitive, they know what they’re getting into, and everyone from the bell staff up to the top know what we’re looking for. Even our customers have relationships with the staff as well and know everyone on a first-name basis. It’s fun to see, because it’s like coming home. They’re coming to a place they’re familiar with, and the staff doesn’t turn over as much as other places.

“Wherever we have a challenge either from a customer or guest regarding an expectation that may have not been met, everyone has met it head on and tried to deal with it right away,” Maloney continues. “If not right then, we make plans to meet afterwards to rectify the situation. Sometimes someone didn’t get a room they wanted or there was a meal that wasn’t correct, but one year we had a big issue with our Saturday night banquet. We try to do 20-minute turns on courses in the banquet to keep the room moving so we can start and end at a decent time, and that plays quite a bit into the pressure they have in the kitchen. When you have 450 people for 20-minute turns,



The National World War II Museum, ranked as the No. 1 attraction in New Orleans by TripAdvisor, features “Beyond All Boundaries,” a 4-D journey through the war and (inset) a D-Day jeep-in-a-glider exhibit.

Credit: National World War II Museum



wanted you to or demanded you buy food. We were in such a great location in terms of restaurants, and they understood that, so they were willing to work with us. I would just suggest the Warehouse District, where we stayed, to planners looking to save a little bit of money. It is a little cheaper than being in the French Quarter, across the street from the convention center and the Warehouse District, and we could walk to the French Quarter easily.”

John Showalter, MD, chief health information officer at the Jackson, Mississippi-based, University of Mississippi Medical Center, and a partner in Propel Health IT, had a similar experience. “We did a seminar for health IT professionals, and we were looking for a small, three-day event of 15 to 25 executives at a hotel-based venue,” he says. “Living in Jackson, it’s an easy destination for those of us that were presenting, and I had gone to another event in New Orleans three years ago, so I knew it was a great location for restaurants and high-quality activities.

“We used an online RFP service, and found that the Hyatt

you have to be on. We know they had to bring in extra people to make that work.

“One year, we chose a beef tenderloin and people could pick their temperatures. It was a disaster, because not everyone’s idea of rare was the same as the kitchen’s and people sent plates back,” he explains. “Then we just lost the room, because once people started sending plates back it threw everything off. We immediately regrouped, and after the meal we talked about what worked and didn’t work, as we always do with Colleen Page, the head of catering. We go over the finer points of the meal and the service, and we said, what do we both need to do to make this a better decision. It’s collaborative. And I feel like this with everyone in the sales department. Anyone will do a great job. They really do work hard.”

While New Orleans hotels’ superior demonstrations of hospitality are often practiced onsite, locals are willing to go above and beyond in the negotiation process as well. When it was Thomas Ridgley’s turn to host the Amarillo Gear Company’s national sales meeting, the central Gulf Coast representative for the Texas company had an unusual request for his meeting venue: no meals.

“It was a total of four days, and we had no meals in the venue,” he explains. “But it went very smoothly in the end. I had gotten a couple of other quotes from hotels in the immediate area that were willing to work with us on different things. Our final contract wasn’t as stringent as other hotels, where they



“I had gone to another event in New Orleans, so I knew it was a great location for restaurants and high-quality activities.”

**John Showalter, MD, Partner
Propel Health IT, Madison, MS**

Place had the best value balanced between cost and service, and they were a good partnership for us helping us walk through this since we were new to the area. They really worked with us on the room block, because we weren’t sure. There are so many hotels in the area around the convention center, and everyone seemed to have their favorite hotel with their favorite restau-

rant, so we had to change the numbers a lot. We initially had some trouble sorting out the catering menu as well, but they called us back and said, 'You guys are silly, just do this and this. You don't need to have the same sandwiches every day, even though that's listed as the package.' On the last day, they even gave us boxed lunches so people could take them to their airport if they had to leave right away."

More Fun for Your Money

For a city with charms as many and varied as New Orleans, it's hard to show your group all the city's best attractions in one meeting, especially a short one. A resounding piece of advice from planners who've brought groups to New Orleans is to give your group free time to experience their own version of the city.

"I've been to a lot of destinations and there are some cities, like here and Orlando, where you need to give attendees the evening off," says Showalter. "Everyone came back really happy to have done their own thing. Generally the response about the event was that all of our attendees really enjoyed that it was in New Orleans. Some went to the Quarter, some went to the casino, but everyone was happy."

Maloney explains, "For us as a company, it's a great spot because it's easy to entertain people and not have to pay for it. You can turn people loose, and they can just wander around. You don't have to load people up on a bus and take them here and there. For New Orleans, the zoo is in the streets. You don't have to go to it. It's very easy to walk around the Quarter with a dime in your pocket and not spend it, because you're fascinated by what you see, the music that spills out through the streets, the architecture and the people.

"I've been on other trips and incentives where you go to a destination and you have to plan all these different things for people to do," he continues. "I've been on trips to Mexico where you have all these different options for activities you want people to do, and there's certainly options for that. You can spend an afternoon going up and down Royal Street looking at antique stores or take the streetcar uptown. But it's better to give people a free afternoon to explore the city. Don't get in the way of what they want to do. Some people want to go bar-hopping, some want to go to the museums, some want a leisurely afternoon or to try the restaurants. There's so much good food, that you really should leave people time to try the restaurants. The Sonesta is great, but you've also got really good restaurants like the Bayona and Galatoire's Restaurant right there."

To help his guests dive into the vibrant street life of New Orleans — at whatever level they're comfortable with — while encouraging bonding among attendees, Maloney tries to book everyone on the same floor along the front of the Sonesta so they have all the adjacent balconies. "Most of the customers use this time frame to catch up, and this way people can hang out on the floor, and it allows people to meet and talk to each other in a relaxed way."

Some balcony suites are used as hospitality suites, set up with refreshments and the game — when events take place during football season. "It provides a place for people to be

able to talk and hang out if they want," Maloney says. "They can see the action on the street and go out. People come and go all afternoon and evening. On Friday afternoon, we try to wrap up by 5 p.m. for hospitality time, and we do an open bar and serve light hors d'oeuvres of all the New Orleans favorites like gumbo and muffuletta sandwiches. On Saturday, we try to wrap sessions by 11 a.m. so people can lunch on their own and then have free time or enjoy hospitality."

For many, the restaurant scene is one of New Orleans' key draws, so planners find it important to either schedule some meals outside the hotel or let attendees discover their favorites on their own. For Showalter's event, "We did a couple of small intimate dinners. We went to Emeril's, Cochon, Mr. B's Bistro and Muriel's Jackson Square Restaurant. We chose to have dinner events not reception events. We even planned the evening events kind of on late notice, but we got reservations and tables."

Ridgley says, "There is just a list of restaurants pages long that I would suggest. The local fare is a big draw. I took my group to K-Paul's Kitchen, and walked around the Quarter and saw some of the traditional bars, like Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop, one of the oldest continuously occupied bars in the country.

"Also, during the spring and early fall, there's a lot of local



Enthusiastic spectators clamor for colorful beads from one of the floats during a Mardi Gras parade.

festivals in the city, and New Orleans is so compact that you don't have to get into a car if you don't want to, everything is very close," he continues. "It's worth going outside the city to go fishing, though. We went about 45 minutes out and got a charter and went out for the day. Along with seeing the French Quarter, it was one of the most memorable parts of the event for attendees."

"My family is from New Orleans, so I know quite a bit more about it, and it has so much more than people know with the diversity of the culture," Maloney agrees. "Yes, there's great food, but there's so much more outside the French Quarter. A lot of times people who come for the first time don't realize how diverse the city is, and then they really end up enjoying it."

New and Noteworthy

The Roosevelt New Orleans, a Waldorf Astoria Hotel is celebrating its 120th anniversary. Last fall, the hotel recaptured its classic past by reopening its Fountain Lounge, which features a raw bar, live entertainment, creative cocktails and a wide selection of wines. The hotel has reopened its spa as the Waldorf Astoria Spa, complete with rooftop pool with sweeping views of New Orleans. The updated spa area includes 10 private treatment rooms as well as a couples suite and VIP treatment room, and a 2,300-sf fitness center. The property offers 504 guest rooms, including 125 suites, and more than 60,000 sf of event space including three grand ballrooms and 23 meeting rooms.

Last year, the **Sheraton New Orleans** completed a \$50 million revitalization of its 1,100 guest rooms and public spaces that continues this year with a second stage of renovations focused on updating the function spaces and meeting floors. During the initial phase, the hotel took a high-tech turn, installing custom ergonomic chairs, docking stations and high-speed Internet in all guest rooms and setting up a Microsoft Link experience in the lobby. Once the second stage is complete, the 100,000 sf of meeting space will receive similar updating.

After its own \$275 million redesign and revitalization, the **Hyatt Regency New Orleans** continues to open new spaces, most notably its Bywater Pool Deck & Bar. The salt-water pool features plush outdoor seating as well as private cabanas to relax in while sampling the new menu, which

“I suggest the Warehouse District to planners looking to save a little bit of money. It is a little cheaper than being in the French Quarter.”

Thomas Ridgley, Central Gulf Coast Rep
Amarillo Gear Co., Amarillo, TX



combines updates on local favorites such as Cajun chicken as well as build-your-own burgers. On the pool deck and in their rooms, guest also can now take advantage of private spa treatments from the Hyatt Regency’s new partnership with Le Jardin for in-room massages, manicures and pedicures, which are available for group bookings. In addition, the lobby now features four new computers that guests can use for 15 minutes for free. The property offers 1,193 guest rooms and 200,000 sf of flexible meeting space including 70 meeting and banquet rooms.

Loews New Orleans Hotel celebrated its 10-year anniversary earlier this year and, as part of a new service by all Loews properties, began offering free wireless in public spaces and guest rooms. The hotel, located just outside the French Quarter, offers 285 oversized guest rooms and 17,000 sf of function space with floor-to-ceiling windows.



Credit: New Orleans CVB

The home at Bocage Plantation has been thoughtfully restored. It is open for tours and as a bed and breakfast.

The 346-room AAA Four Diamond **Omni Royal Orleans Hotel** has completed a \$15 million renovation, which includes revitalized meeting rooms with new carpeting, furniture and window treatments. The project also included refreshing the guest rooms and public spaces, which now feature custom furniture, improved lighting and 24 wrought-iron balconies. The hotel, which is located in the heart of the French Quarter, boasts 14,000 sf of flexible function space including the 5,284-sf Grand Salon and 17 meeting rooms.

Hotel Monteone, a four-star luxury property, was named one of the Best Hotels in the USA for 2013 by *U.S. News & World Report*. The property, located in the French Quarter, offers 600 guest rooms including 55 luxury suites and literary author suites, and 24,000 sf of meeting space including the 6,236-sf La Nouvelle Orleans Ballroom.

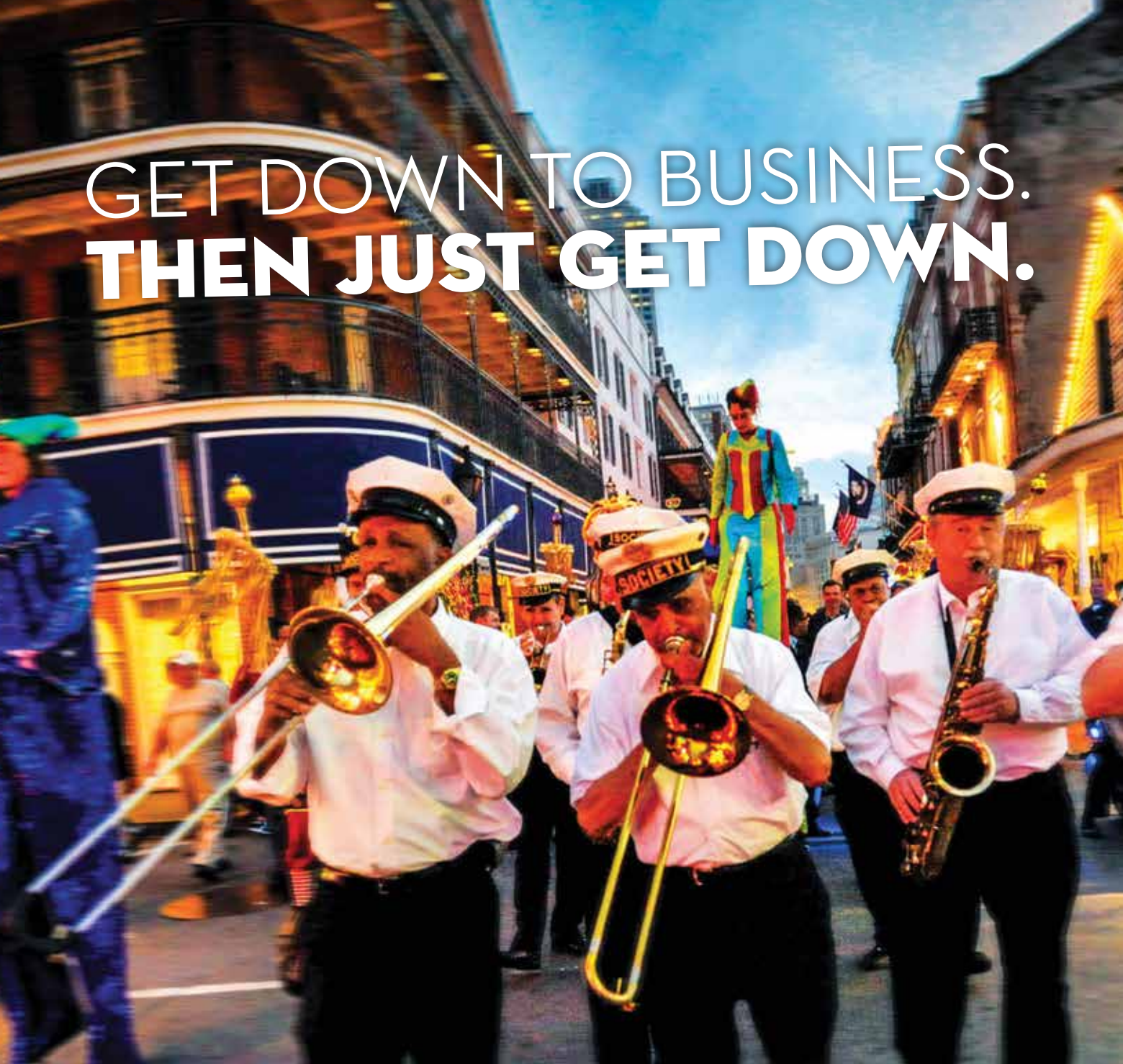
The Hilton New Orleans Riverside, located in the central business district, has 1,622 guest rooms and 130,000 sf of meeting space with French-influenced designs. Guests can enjoy a 90,000-sf, full-service health and fitness spa.

The New Orleans Marriott, located in the French Quarter, has 1,329 guest rooms and 80,000 sf of meeting space including 49 meeting rooms. The 41-story hotel features views of the Mississippi River and the city’s skyline along with the award-winning 5 Fifty 5 Restaurant.

The Hyatt Place New Orleans/Convention Center in the Arts District near the French Quarter, offers 170 guest rooms, three meeting spaces and complimentary wireless Internet in public spaces and guest rooms

New Orleans is undertaking major development projects over the next five years that will make the city even more attractive to planners: The Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport will undergo an \$826 million expansion; a new Convention Center District Development Project — which includes a new headquarters hotel, park, entertainment, cultural venues and more — will launch along the city’s riverfront; and the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center will continue with improvements. **C&IT**

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ON THE MOVE



EVANS



HEYDT



MARASCO



SMITH



SPRENGER

The Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront in Jacksonville, Florida, has promoted **Matt Evans** to assistant director of sales. He previously served as one of the hotel's senior sales managers and has been with Hyatt since September 2012.

Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa, Palm Beach, Florida, has named **Sandra Heydt** as vice president of sales. Prior to joining Eau Palm Beach, she

founded and ran Panetiere Marketing Advisors, a hotel sales and marketing consulting firm.

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

MGM Resorts International has named **Tina Smith** and **Robyn Sprenger** as directors of global sales for the company. They will manage the Northeast region for all MGM Resorts destinations in Las Vegas, Biloxi and Tunica, Mississippi, and Detroit. Smith was executive director of national accounts for the Loews Hotels national sales office in New York. Sprenger was director of group sales, Americas, for Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces. **C&IT**

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8	Tropicana Casino & Resort	609-340-4398	www.tropicana.biz	Group Sales	plavegl@tropicana.net
5	Tulalip Resort Casino	360-716-6500	www.tulalipresort.com	Group Sales	sales@tulalipresort.com
59	The Venetian/The Palazzo	702-414-4202	www.venetianpalazzomeetings.com	Chandra Allison	chandra.allison@venetianpalazzo.com
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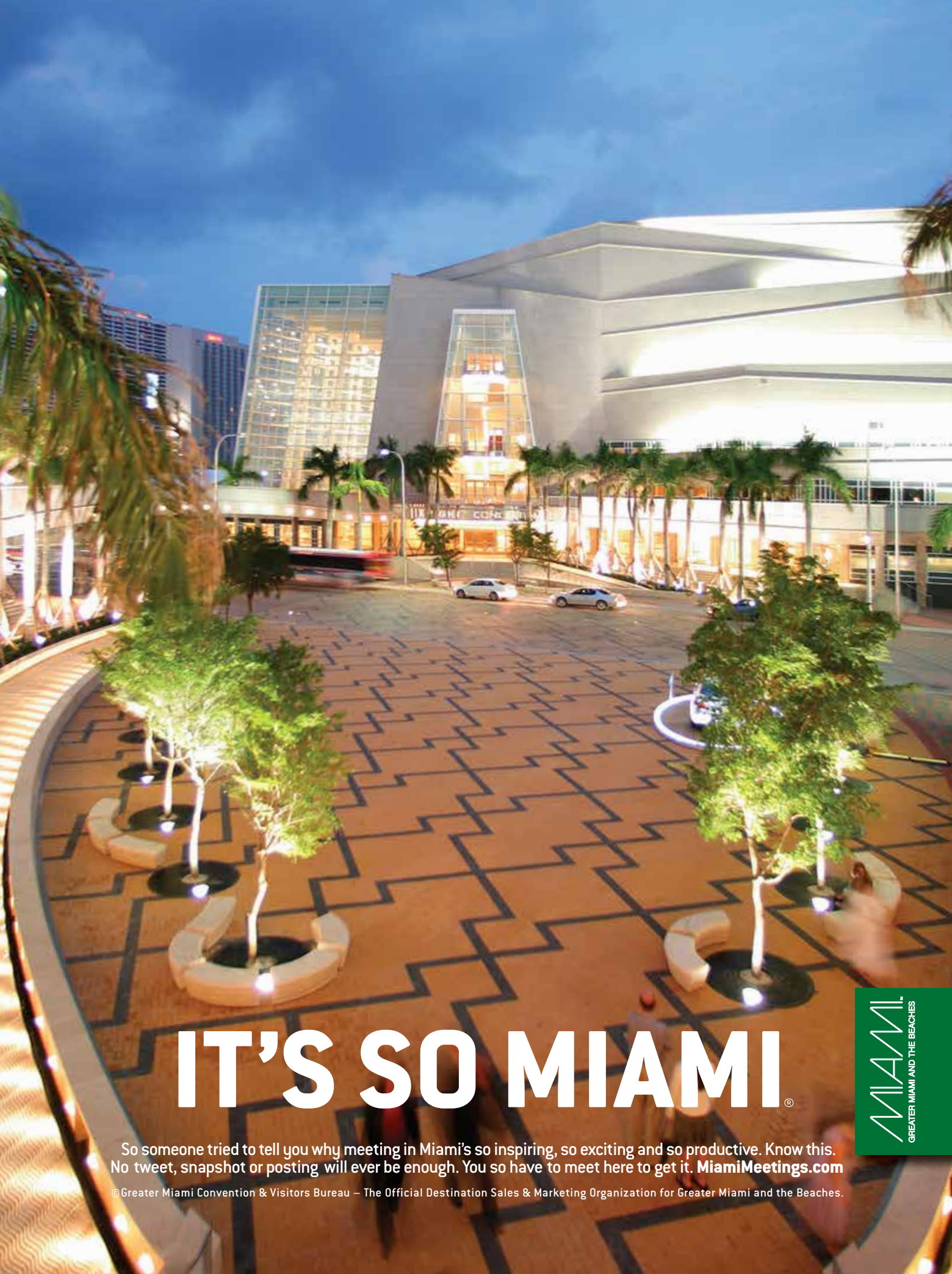


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